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Escape from Reality: A Comparative Study of Bleak House and Little Dorrit

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ESCAPE FROM REALITY;

A Comparative Study of Bleak House and Little Dorrit
(TITLE)

BY

Julie L. McMillen

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

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ESCAPE FROM REALITY:
A Comparative Study of Bleak House and Little Dorrit

By
Julie L. McMillen

Abstract of Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

During the later period of his career, Charles Dickens wrote Bleak House (1853) and Little Dorrit (1857). Both of these novels share a common theme: those who face life squarely, though scarred, survive while those who try to escape do not.

In developing this theme Dickens uses parallel types of major characters. The motherly concern for others exhibited by Esther Summerson is repeated in Amy Dorrit. The irresponsibility of Richard Carstone reappears in William Dorrit. Finally, the protective concern of John Jarndyce reoccurs in Arthur Clennam.

Dickens develops these characters in five basic ways: the narrator, either omniscient or first-person, often describes the character's past, background, and appearance; what the character chooses to say or do contributes to the reader's perception of the character; other characters reveal their judgments of a character through their remarks; and finally, Dickens contrasts the behavior or attitudes of one character against another.

With the exception of Arthur Clennam, Dickens is more successful with the characters of Bleak House than with those of Little Dorrit. Esther Summerson is more fully developed than Amy Dorrit. While Dickens develops Esther as good and dutiful, he avoids creating a flat character by showing Esther's frailties, her vanity and her potential for emotion, and by revealing her growing self-

awareness. Amy Dorrit, however, remains too dutiful and passive throughout the novel, making her a one-dimensional character. Dickens's characterization of Richard Carstone allows the reader to see him as a victim of society whereas the reader more readily condemns William Dorrit for his own weakness. Richard's immaturity can be traced to Chancery and his education, making him less culpable. William, however, though his early imprisonment wins him some sympathy from the reader, remains foolish even after his release from prison, causing his own destruction. Likewise, though Arthur Clennam and John Jarndyce are both guardian/protector figures, Arthur is a more fully realized character than Jarndyce. Jarndyce is characterized almost exclusively in light of his role as a benevolent guardian. Though his slight eccentricity lends him some human quality, he remains a flat character. Arthur, on the other hand, also embodies benevolence and virtue, but along with those qualities, the reader also sees him mature during the novel and becomes involved in his development.

The success of Bleak House and Little Dorrit does not depend entirely upon the success of these characters. However, their development combines with the plot, imagery, and other elements to make Dickens's novels classics.

ESCAPE FROM REALITY:

A Comparative Study of Bleak House and Little Dorrit

During the later period of his career, Charles Dickens wrote Bleak House (1853) and Little Dorrit (1857). Both of these novels are less autobiographical than the earlier novels, such as David Copperfield and Oliver Twist; instead, they deal with the social issues of Chancery and the Circumlocution Office which Dickens felt needed reforms. In addition, Dickens repeats a major theme: those who face the duties and responsibilities of life squarely, though scarred, survive, while those who assume pretenses to escape do not.

In illustrating this theme, Dickens used parallel types of characters in both novels. The motherly concern Esther Summerson shows for others recurs in Amy, "Little Dorrit." The irresponsibility of Richard Carstone is repeated in William Dorrit, the "Father of Marshalsea." The protective concern of John Jarndyce reappears in Arthur Clennam.

Successful characters are imitations of life and mirror the many facets of the human personality. They are active, struggling decision-makers who may change during the novels as a result of experiences, decisions or realizations. Less successful characters usually play a minor

role as foils or contrasts. They do not undergo any basic changes in attitudes or beliefs. Instead, they are often used to represent virtue, greed, selfishness, or any other idea. These "flat" characters, terminology first used by E. M. Forster, often reflect or contrast the "round," or more developed, characters.

The success of any character depends upon the reader's ability to understand and relate to that character on the basis of the evidence the novelist provides. As Percy Lubbock pointed out, the novelist develops a character by showing the character in a variety of situations and by telling about the character in terms of background, appearance, and dress. The omniscient narrator and other characters, who may or may not be reliable, comment about a character, giving the reader added insight. The combination of this evidence results in the essential nature of a character.

Dickens develops his characters through many ways. Dickens's choice of names often implies something about the character. There are Nicholas Nickleby, who is driven by money; the Cheerybles, who are cheerful benefactors; Mr. Gradgrind, who grinds the facts out of his students; and many others. Often Dickens provides a tag-line for his flat characters which makes them more memorable, for instance, the "'umbleness" of Uriah Heep. Dickens's round characters, which include David Copperfield and Pip, resemble Dickens

himself. They are introduced as helpless children who develop their own values and, through a variety of experiences, mature.

With the exception of Arthur Clennam, Dickens is less successful with the characters of Little Dorrit than with those of Bleak House. In Little Dorrit, Amy remains passive, revealing few real emotions; while things happen to her, she does very little. Privately she sheds tears, but publicly she hides her true feelings from everyone. William takes advantage of his daughter and dies as he has lived, pretending to be something he is not. Only Arthur changes, developing internally; at first having no will, he soon takes hold of situations, acts, though burnt by his Merdle investment, and takes responsibility for those actions. Dickens is more successful, however, in Bleak House. Through Esther's first-person narration, he reveals more than her innocent goodness and concern; Esther's inner struggles, though weakly developed, and glimpses of anger give her credibility. Dickens develops Richard's indecision and immaturity, making him an easy target for the Court of Chancery; Richard recognizes his failures too late. Jarndyce appeals to the reader through his eccentric behavior and his concern for his wards, but he remains the same guardian/protector throughout the novel, making him a less successful character.

Dickens develops each of the six characters to be discussed in five basic ways. Through a character's past,

Dickens establishes motives and sympathy. A character's actions or lack thereof, as in the case of Amy Dorrit, also reveals that character's personality. Dickens's presentation of physical appearance also adds to the character. Finally, the remarks of the character or of other characters lend insights into Dickens's characters. On the basis of these methods, Esther, Amy, Richard, William, Jarndyce, and Arthur will be analyzed in terms of Dickens's success.

To reflect Victorian values, Dickens needed to create noble, virtuous heroines in Esther and Amy and to maintain their credibility. If these women were too innocent and good, they would seem inhuman. However, if they were not virtuous, the Victorians would not have admired and respected them as characters. Dickens's success in maintaining this balance is greater with his characterization of Esther than with that of Amy.

Dickens creates sympathy for Esther Summerson through her unhappy childhood. Esther in her first-person narrative expresses the loneliness experienced as an orphan with no friends. Her "godmother" drilled unworthiness into her, expressing that it would have been better had Esther "never been born."¹ At an early age she knew she "had brought no joy, at any time, to anybody's heart" (BH 13). Unable to

¹Charles Dickens, Bleak House (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), p. 13. All subsequent references to this text shall be taken from this edition.

express the love within her to anyone but her doll, she "felt guilty yet innocent" (BH 13) and blamed herself for the love her aunt fails to display for her. As a child she had resolved to try "to be industrious, contented and kind-hearted, and to do some good to some one, and win some love to myself if I could" (BH 14), while deep in her heart she doubts if this can or will ever happen. Dickens condenses her past into three pages which, though it does not allow a reader to see Esther learning from her mistakes or struggling to form her own values as one experiences with David Copperfield, it does allow a glimpse of her personality and establishes sympathy for her.

Dickens establishes Esther's virtues through her humility, her concern for others, and her sense of duty and through the comments of the other characters. Esther asserts, "I know I am not clever. I always knew that" (BH 11). This seeming lack of confidence in herself is an attempt by Dickens to present her as humble. He does not present her as proud, "umble" Uriah Heep, but as a good, innocent narrator, embarrassed to boast. Esther minimizes rather than expands her virtues: "They said I was so gentle; but I am sure they were!" (BH 19). This repeated humility is an attempt to reinforce Esther's reliability as narrator, implying she will not exaggerate. However, her humility is somewhat overemphasized, causing Esther to seem a little

too good and to be unreliable in terms of herself though she does report about other characters accurately.

While Esther humbly denies her cleverness, Dickens demonstrates through her actions that she is an intelligent woman who cares for others. Esther's cleverness is exemplified by her rescue of Peepy:

As I found (after pacifying him), that he was a little boy, with a naturally large head, I thought that, perhaps, where his head could go, his body could follow, and mentioned that the best mode of extrication might be to push him forward (BH 27).

This rescue is not performed in private; a milkman and beadle have been trying to compress his skull. Luckily for Peepy, her idea works. This cleverness arises from her true desire to help others. Jarndyce, a mature and experienced man, finds Esther "clever enough to be the good little woman of our lives here" (BH 74) and admits her "woman's wit hit the mark" (BH 60) in her suggestion that Richard be consulted about his own career. When confronted with Skimpole's arrest, Richard turns not to Ada but to Esther for assistance. Her kind concern for Jenny and her dead baby, her attempt to aid Jo when he was ill, and other acts of kindness exhibit Esther's real concern not for herself, but for others.

Through her actions, Dickens presents Esther as a representative of duty and responsibility. At Bleak House, Esther, "quite lost in the magnitude of my trust" (BH 52), accepts the housekeeping keys and presides over the teapot.

She takes these duties seriously, for she is anxious about them when she is ill and unable to fulfill them. Esther's duty goes beyond what is expected. She wishes to learn backgammon to be "of the very small use of being able to play when he [Jarndyce] had no better adversary" (BH 59). Esther's sense of duty plays a crucial role in her reaction to Lady Dedlock as her mother. No bitter or harsh words were spoken; instead, Esther's "heart overflowed with love for her . . . natural love, which nothing in the past changed or could change" (BH 386). No blame, no accusations were even thought; it was Esther's "duty to bless her and receive her, though the whole world turned from her" (BH 386). These selfless responses demonstrate Esther's virtues.

Dickens reinforces Esther's goodness through the comments of the other characters. As Esther hates to dwell upon her successes, other characters exalt her as "a quiet, dear, good creature" (BH 32). To many, and especially to Jarndyce, she is "beloved, useful, and happy" (BH 181). Caddy believes Esther does her good when she is just near. Even the lame gardener at Greenleaf told her she "had been the light of his eyes" (BH 21). Esther remains totally unaware "how many hearts she touches and awakens, what sacred admiration and what love she wins" (BH 630). Her nicknames--Old Woman, Little Old Woman, Cobweb, Mrs. Shipton, Mother Hubbard, Dame Durden (BH 74)--reflect the affection and admiration which her Bleak House family returns. As her

real name implies, she is the summer sun: "a bright, sustaining force for those around her."² These comments help to focus attention on virtues which the reader, misled by Esther's humility, might too easily dismiss.

Dickens's development of Esther includes more than her unhappy past and her virtues; he develops in Esther some very human qualities of vanity, emotion, and self-awareness, qualities which make her more well-rounded, and thus more credible than she might be otherwise. Esther's plea to keep Ada out of her room reflects more than concern that Ada might catch smallpox; Esther does not want Ada to see her scarred face: "If you Charley let her in but once, only to look upon me for one moment as I lie here, I shall die" (BH 336). Esther, missing the looking-glasses in her room, is aware of the changes in her appearance and states, "I hope I can do without my old face very well" (BH 372). This vanity for her appearance adds a very human touch to Esther's character. Though she retreats to Chesney Wold, she faces the change in herself for "I knew this to be a weakness which must be overcome" (BH 382). Bravely she faces her changed appearance:

I had never been a beauty, and had never thought myself one; but I had been very different from this. It was all gone now. Heaven was so good to me, that I could let it go with a few not bitter

²Mark Spilka, "Religious Folly," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Bleak House," ed. Jacob Korg (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1968), p. 65.

tears, and could stand there arranging my hair for the night quite thankfully (BH 382).

Esther's fight with smallpox and her brave acceptance of its effects gains the reader's sympathy and respect for her as a character.

In addition to showing that Esther does suffer from some human frailties, Dickens also implies that beneath her calm exterior lies the capacity for strong human emotion. Upon meeting Mrs. Jellyby for the first time, Esther is appalled by her "telescopic philanthropy" (BH 26), telling Jarndyce "it is right to begin with the obligations of home" (BH 49). These feelings are reaffirmed and intensified by her encounter with Mrs. Pardiggle. Her anger is fully aroused only once. Richard's indignity towards Jarndyce, not Richard's foolish behavior, prompts her anger although "it only lasted a moment" (BH 471). Esther's potential for emotion, though weakly developed, makes her more human and a more fully realized character.

Dickens, through Esther's first-person narrative, provides glimpses of her growing self-awareness. She struggles with action when Guppy's attentions begin to unnerve her. Though she does nothing for fear he will lose his job or there could be a fight, Esther does question and reveal her inner thoughts. A more significant struggle occurs when she learns that Lady Dedlock is her mother:

I then became heavily sorrowful to think I had ever been reared. That I felt as if I knew it would have been better and happier for many people, if indeed I had never breathed. That I had a

terror of myself, as the danger and the possible disgrace of my own mother, and of a proud family name. That I was so confused and shaken, as to be possessed by a belief that it was right, and had been intended, that I should die in my birth; that it was wrong, and not intended, that I should be then alive (BH 389).

But Esther finally comes to the realization that her life has had a purpose. She cannot bury her past any longer as she buried her doll; she must accept being the daughter of Lady Dedlock and Captain Hawdon, for only then can she accept full responsibility for her life. Ian Ousby states, "At the end of the book, the inner and outer disorder of the world still remains, but Esther herself has become a testament to the power of the individual to achieve a clear-sightedness which is at once literal and metaphorical."³ As Esther struggles with awareness, Dickens brings the reader closer to her, revealing Esther's inner thoughts and doubts.

Dickens repeats many of Esther's qualities in Amy Dorrit and uses many of the same techniques to attempt to control the reader's response to her. Dickens develops sympathy for Amy through her past and her small stature. While Dickens condenses her childhood into three pages as he did Esther's, his use of the omniscient narrator permits only a report of her birth and a sketchy, external glimpse of her formative years. Her birth in Marshalsea and her

³Ian Ousby, "The Broken Glass," in Bleak House, eds. George Ford and Sylvere Monod (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1977), p. 981.

life "in narrow yards surrounded by high walls with spikes at the top"⁴ elicit sympathy from a reader. This sympathy is less poignant than for Esther since no personal feelings or comments are revealed.

Likewise, Amy's small stature, which Dickens emphasizes, evokes the reader's sympathy. Her "little figure" (LD 67) implies a child-like innocence; in fact, Amy is known in the prison as the "Child of Marshalsea" (LD 60) and is actually mistaken for a child. This "brave little creature" (LD 65) serves another function, one which Dickens probably did not intend: her small size also reflects her ineffectiveness as a character. Amy remains a child not only in size, but also in mind; her innocence and goodness never allow her to recognize her father's foolishness or her sister's cruelty.

Dickens develops Amy's virtues, self-reliance and a sense of duty, in such a way that they, too, win the reader's approval. Unlike Esther, who as a child confides in her doll, Amy faces the world alone. Though she has a brother and a sister, Amy is unable to confide in them. Instead, "she took the place of the eldest of the three, in all things but precedence; was the head of the fallen family; and bore, in her own heart, its anxieties and shame" (LD 61).

⁴Charles Dickens, Little Dorrit (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), p. 58. All subsequent references to this text shall be taken from this edition.

At the age of thirteen Amy takes care of not only herself, but also the entire family; she becomes their "little mother" (LD 144) and bravely walks the streets of London alone. Amy's self-reliance enables a reader to respect her and increases the reader's sympathy because she faces life alone.

Amy's sense of duty is developed by her actions and especially by how she acts when she experiences a change in her environment. Amy embodies the Victorian concept of duty: the child who stands by her father though he disregards her needs and her desire to be loved. To provide her father with food, she brings home what her employers meant for her. Her sacrifices go unnoticed. Whenever criticized or berated, she "asked him for his forgiveness if she had been, or seemed to have been, undutiful" (LD 196). Repeated time and again is "she does her duty" (LD 80). Though taken for granted, Amy proudly serves her father. She attempts to protect him, not recognizing his lack of concern for her well-being. Blindly, she fosters her father's "ceremony and pretence" (LD 64) by hiding her employment from him and by hiding her worn shoes, mending her shabby dress, and hiding herself in shadowy corners to avoid any blame for her father. Amy's deep desire to be dutiful blinds her to the truth about her family. During the Marshalsea years, "it was the family custom to lay down as family law, that she was a plain domestic little creature,

without the great and sage experience of the rest. This family fiction was the family assertion of itself against her services" (LD 201). Amy's innocent duty in the face of her family's criticism seems too ideal. It is hard to imagine how Amy could achieve such goodness when the rest of her family is tainted by life in Marshalsea.

Dickens reinforces Amy's sense of duty by changing her environment through the Dorrit family's release from Marshalsea. While Fanny, Tip, and William seem to adjust easily to their inheritance and subsequent release from prison, Amy has difficulties. Unable to express her misgivings, she faints when told the news and before their release. Her travels abroad seem like a dream, and she becomes more silent and musing. She is lost. "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" (LD 397). Dutifully, Amy does try to change; she does not even consider refusing. However, Mrs. General's lessons of "Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prism" (LD 408) make Amy anxious and ill at ease:

But she submitted herself to the family want in its greatness as she had submitted herself to the family want in its littleness, and yielded to her own inclinations in this thing no more than she had yielded to her hunger itself, in the days when she had saved her dinner that her father might have his supper (LD 431).

As William Burgan states, Amy "accepts the same role that she had in prison, allowing herself to be patronized and admonished, acknowledging the justice of this treatment, and trying to bring some cheer into the life of her father."⁵ Her closest stand against the cruelties she faces comes with her remark to Fanny: "But you have cut me to the soul" (LD 318). Her most frequent reaction is to shed some private tears and either to ask forgiveness or say nothing. Though she seems too good to be true, Amy remains dutiful. As her last name suggests, Amy is "Miss Do-Right." Dickens avoids showing any true feelings with the exception of some private tears. Therefore, she is less fully developed than Esther.

Dickens does develop one human trait in this rather one-dimensional character: Amy displays a growing love for Arthur. At first his concern for her startles her. However, after her visit to thank Arthur for Tip's position, Amy imagines the two of them "dancing to delightful music, and all as gay and light-hearted as ever we could be! I wonder--" (LD 150). Often Amy thinks of him--"too faithfully, ah, too faithfully!--in the shadow of the Marshalsea wall" (LD 226). Her dreams are shattered when Flora confides in her, and she avoids Arthur, feigning illness. From abroad she writes to him but does not reveal her feelings. Her thoughts are

⁵William Burgan, "Little Dorrit in Italy," Nineteenth Century Fiction 29 (March 1975): 403.

not revealed so that the reader is unsure of her feelings for Arthur. She must continue to love him, for when she learns of Arthur's imprisonment, she travels to Marshalsea "to devote her utmost love and care to him" (LD 693). Only at the end of the novel does she express her true feelings for Arthur:

I was never rich before, I never was proud before, I never was happy before, 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, as I should be happy in coming back to it with you, if it should be the will of God, and comforting and serving you with all my love and truth. . . . I would rather pass my life here with you, and go out daily, working for our bread, than I would have the greatest fortune that ever was told, and be the greatest lady that ever was honoured" (LD 704).

This expression of love does not reflect, however, any growth in self-understanding, for Amy merely transfers the devotion she had for her father to Arthur. This one human quality is not enough to offset the flatness of her character, though it does add a spark of life.

In comparison with Esther's development, Dickens's development of Amy fails to actively involve her in relationships with others. Amy remains passive. Events happen to her, but, besides sewing, Amy does very little. She prefers to go unnoticed: "To pass in and out of the prison unnoticed, and elsewhere to be overlooked and forgotten, were, for herself, her chief desires" (LD 250). When with other characters, she contributes little, if anything, to

the conversation and often can be found in a corner. Amy's passivity contributes to her lack of development, making her less realized than Esther.

While Esther and Amy are both dutiful, Dickens more fully develops Esther than Amy. Esther exhibits some very human qualities in addition to her goodness and sense of duty. Her vanity, her inner struggles, and her potential for emotion make Esther more credible. She becomes more than mere virtue. Amy's only human quality is displayed by her love for Arthur. This trait, however, is not enough to offset the passivity and dutifulness which dominate her character. Amy seems to be duty in the flesh.

Through his use of first-person narrative, Dickens creates a more human character in Esther than by his use of the omniscient narrator of Amy. This is best demonstrated, perhaps, by the presentation of their pasts. Both of their pasts are more condensed than those of David Copperfield and Pip, for example; David and Pip's childhoods are presented through their first-person narratives, beginning with their births and progressing over major events in their formative years. While Esther, also in first-person narrative, presents a few emotional instances from her childhood, she fails to relate a period long enough to show any sequential development of her values. Amy's birth is merely reported and even fewer instances of her childhood are given, revealing few, if any, emotional responses. Because the reader views Amy

externally, for the most part she remains aloof and unfamiliar. Esther's narrative allows the reader a glimpse into her true essence, making her seem more familiar.

In developing the characters of Richard and William, Dickens needed to maintain a delicate balance between victim and villain. If they were too much at fault, they would not be victims of society. Instead, they would become villains, and their destruction would be what they deserved. Therefore, Dickens needed to present Richard and William as just foolish and helpless enough to be destroyed by society.

Richard is introduced by Dickens as possessing one very endearing trait--his humor. Esther describes Richard as "a handsome youth, with an ingenuous face, and a most engaging laugh" (BH 23). His humor brings life to his character and lightens the mood of the beginning of the novel. While touring Krook's shop, Richard whispers that "yonder bones in a corner, piled together and picked very clean, were the bones of clients" (BH 39). He also transforms the smoldering fire into "a drowsy old Chancery lion" (BH 23). His high spirits and hearty laughs charm Esther, Ada, and the reader. This very human quality captures attention, but also it disguises an underlying weakness in his character.

Dickens develops Richard's weakness, his immaturity, through many ways--through his actions and his comments and through the observations of the other characters. Esther as

narrator cleverly discovers one symptom of immaturity in this "light-hearted boy" (BH 23): "a carelessness in his character" (BH 86). In money matters, Richard is "generous, profuse, wildly careless, but fully persuaded that he was rather calculating and prudent" (BH 184). When persuaded from a purchase, "he took credit for what it would have cost, and made out that to spend anything less on something else was to save the difference" (BH 185). Another symptom is his inability to decide upon a career. Though "ready for anything" (BH 127), Richard has indefinite ideas about a career: "I should like a little variety. . . . I mean a good range of experience" (BH 130). Medicine, law, even the army soon become monotonous; Richard is unable to apply himself to anything but the Chancery suit. These rather careless actions are the first step in Dickens's development of his foolishness.

Dickens reinforces Richard's foolish actions by having him express his indecision and restlessness which, according to Edgar Johnson, make him "prey to the infection of an acquisitive society."⁶ Though Richard says he knows "better than to trust it [a settlement]" (BH 139), he believes "the longer it [the Chancery suit] goes on the nearer it must be to a settlement one way or another" (BH 139). Foolishly,

⁶Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, 2 vols. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), 2: 778.

Richard proceeds to dream about the wealth he will share with Ada. Though on the surface his inclination towards law seems harmless, perhaps even hopeful, Richard plans "to study it, and master it, and to satisfy [himself] that it was not neglected, and was being properly conducted" (BH 177) and believes his efforts can make the difference. His explanations of his failures vary--"I couldn't tell till I tried" (BH 177); "I was born into this unfinished contention with all its chances and changes . . . and it has gone on unsettling me ever since" (BH 245). Each, however, is an attempt to lay aside all guilt and to blame anything but himself.

Dickens expands this immaturity through the observations of other characters. Jarndyce recognizes Richard's "indecision of character" (BH 127). Mrs. Bayham Badger, whose husband superintended Richard's medical career, states, "He is of such a very easy disposition, that probably he would never think it worth while to mention how he really feels languid about the profession. He has not that positive interest in it [medicine] which make it his vocation" (BH 174). Also George Rouncewell, Richard's rifle instructor, observes, "If Mr. Carstone was to give up his full mind to it, he would come out very good" (BH 260). Richard's immaturity is recognized by each of these characters; he has a potential to be successful but foolishly lets his chances slip by.

Dickens maintains the victim/villain balance in Richard by presenting him sympathetically through a contrast with Harold Skimpole, through other characters, and through his dramatic recognition of his faults. Dickens offsets Richard's foolishness with that of Harold Skimpole. Skimpole's own spontaneity and "captivating gaiety" (BH 52) mask his deficiencies; he has no idea of time or money. Like Richard, he also refuses to accept responsibility "by refusing to choose a project and carry it out by voluntary action through time."⁷ He, however, thoughtlessly takes advantage of anyone and everyone, accepting their kindnesses and their money matter-of-factly. Alexander Welsh notes Skimpole's weaknesses when he says, "So that the reader may see what a knave he is, Dickens makes Skimpole neglect his family, tolerate slavery in America, toady to Sir Leicester and betray Jo for a five-pound note."⁸ Richard can in no way match this callousness.

Dickens lends additional sympathy to Richard's predicament through Jarndyce and Esther. Jarndyce, bitter from his own dealings with Chancery, blames at least part of Richard's indecision on

⁷J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 183.

⁸Alexander Welsh, The City of Dickens (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 98.

that incomprehensible heap of uncertainty and procrastination on which he has been thrown from his birth. . . . It has engendered or confirmed in him a habit of putting off--and trusting to this, that, and the other chance, without knowing what chance--and dismissing everything as unsettled, uncertain, and confused (BH 127).

Esther, though agreeing, also suspects "that Richard's education had not counteracted those influences or directed his character" (BH 127). Little guidance has left Richard unaware of his abilities, desires, or shortcomings. Because Dickens through these characters places some of the blame for Richard's immaturity on Chancery and his schooling, Richard has not been in full control of his life but has been a victim of society.

To maintain sympathy for Richard, Dickens dramatically brings him to a recognition of his faults after the Chancery suit is settled. Richard, before his death, confesses to Jarndyce, "'O sir, you are a good man, you are a good man!' and burst into tears for the first time" (BH 658). These tears, more than his words, indicate a true recognition of his failures. Having "learned a lesson now" (BH 658), Richard admits to Ada,

I have done you wrong my own. I have fallen like a poor stray shadow on your way, I have married you to poverty and trouble, I have scattered your means to the winds. You will forgive me all this, my Ada, before I begin the world? (BH 659).

No second chance can be given in this world; Richard has ignored too long his responsibilities, foolishly dreaming of what might but cannot be. Because of this recognition

and because he is seen as a victim of society, there is a sense of sorrow at his death, a longing to give Richard a second chance. This feeling would not be evoked if Richard had been developed as totally at fault in his delusions.

Richard's irresponsibility is repeated by Dickens in William Dorrit. Dickens, however, does not maintain sympathy for William throughout the novel as he did for Richard. Instead, William seems much more at fault for his own destruction, more a villain than a victim.

Dickens introduces William's weakness and insecurity, not endearing qualities like Richard's humor, through the omniscient narrator and through his own actions. In a revealing passage, Dickens, through the omniscient narrator, describes William as

a shy, retiring man; well-looking, though in an effeminate style; with a mild voice, curling hair, and irresolute hands--rings upon the fingers in those days--which nervously wandered to his trembling lip a hundred times, in the first half-hour of his acquaintance with the jail (LD 49).

William is concerned with appearance; the rings on his fingers suggest an underlying vanity to which he clings even in debtor's prison. His nervousness and "trembling lip" demonstrate not only agitation from being imprisoned, but also insecurity. Since this vain insecurity is revealed as soon as the character is introduced, it creates much less sympathy than does the vanity Esther shows for her appearance, which occurs after she has revealed more of her personality.

William's weakness is reinforced through his actions in other situations. Trying to get help for his expectant wife, William faces the turnkey "trembling from head to foot, and constantly crying under his breath . . . while his irresolute fingers bedabbled the tears upon his face" (LD 51). After becoming the "Father of Marshalsea," William publicly appears "courtly, condescending, and benevolently conscious of a position" (LD 189). Foolish pride based on this title masks his vulnerability. In private he uses his insecurity to bring pity from Amy and to avoid any shame or reproach, often shedding "tears of maudlin pity for himself" (LD 196). Imprisonment does not destroy William as it might other men. Instead, William finds "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" (LD 54). Therefore, William adjusts easily to the quiet refuge he is provided. These weaknesses William displays are established early and continue throughout the novel, coloring the reader's perception of him.

Dickens attempts to elicit sympathy for William by having him put in prison through others' misdeeds, not his own, and later by describing his discomfort with wealth. William is imprisoned due to an involvement in "a partnership, of which he knew no more than that he had invested money in it" (LD 50). Unable to answer questions concerning missing property and business practices, William is sent to

Marshalsea. Having a daughter born soon afterwards and his wife dying eight years later, William gains the reader's pity. The turnkey remarks, "The Marshalsea wouldn't be like the Marshalsea now, without you and your family" (LD 54). And through the eyes of Little Dorrit, William remains untarnished: "I know him better than any one does, and love him, and am proud of him" (LD 148). Amy's undying devotion and William's lack of control help establish William as a victim of society rather than as being responsible for his own decline.

Dickens reinforces this sympathy by showing William's discomfort with his wealth. Though he reproaches Amy for having difficulty adjusting to their new life, William himself has problems. Monroe Engel states, "None of his new wealth and grandeur sits naturally on him."⁹ William is uncomfortable with his new status and fears the discovery of his past: "His life was made an agony by the number of fine scalpels that he felt to be incessantly engaged in dissecting his dignity" (LD 394). He distances himself from Amy for appearance's sake but experiences "a pang" (LD 549) of jealousy upon finding her with her brother. By putting Marshalsea aside, William has lost the closeness they shared; he does not know the depth of Amy's abiding love for him.

⁹ Monroe Engel, The Maturity of Dickens (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 128.

William's pretences in prison were attempts to be part of gentility. Once his dream of wealth is realized, William cannot enjoy it; instead, he worries about his past. It is difficult to really feel sorry for William as a wealthy individual. Though his pang of jealousy could be a slight recognition of his cruelty to Amy, William's thoughts are not developed enough for the reader to be certain.

Dickens does not maintain sympathy for William throughout his presentation. Instead, Dickens undercuts it by William's own language, by his foolish actions, and by his death. The use of first-person "I" and "me" dominates William's communication and displays egocentrism. He is aware only of his own views and is unable to express himself in any other way. Because his thoughts are focused on himself, William has no qualms, says Edgar Johnson,

pretending not to know that his favorite daughter, Amy, "Little Dorrit," works as a seamstress to provide him with small comforts and luxuries, affecting unawareness of his brother's playing the clarinet in a cheap theater and his daughter Fanny's dancing there as a chorus girl, superbly accepting the homage of his fellow prisoners as the "Father of Marshalsea," unashamedly hinting for donations, and all the time maintaining his shabby pretense of genteel superiority.¹⁰

William's self-centered language and thoughts increase his foolishness, and the reader holds him responsible for many of his actions.

¹⁰Johnson, p. 899.

William's foolish actions continue to undercut the view of him as a victim of society. William wants the past and the "Father of Marshalsea" to be forgotten so that he can become "William Dorrit, Esquire" (LD 383). William keeps a close eye on family servants, fearing he will find something "prejudicial to the family dignity" (LD 408). A harmless visit by John Chivery, who brings him a bundle of cigars, becomes "an affront, an impertinence, an audacity" (LD 543). The slightest pause of his valet causes William to see "the whole Marshalsea and all its Testimonials" (LD 516). When William acquires his wealth, he puts aside Arthur and his other collegian friends. He becomes cruel and callous, rather than sympathetic, for a man should not turn his back on his friends upon acquiring a fortune.

Dickens resolves William's fate with a final twist. According to George Holoch, "At the very moment when [William] is about to complete the obliteration of his past by consummating his marriage to society in his grotesque courtship of Mrs. General the internal contradictions of his project lead to his breakdown."¹¹ With a stroke at Mrs. Merdle's dinner party, the Marshalsea life he so desperately wanted to forget reasserts itself. The loss the reader feels at Richard's death he does not feel for William. William's own insecurities and foolish delusions have destroyed him.

¹¹ George Holoch, "Consciousness and Society in Little Dorrit," Victorian Studies 21 (Spring 1978): 347.

Though Richard and William are both foolish, Dickens's presentation of Richard is more sympathetic than that of William. Richard's immaturity can be blamed on Chancery and his schooling; therefore, it seems not to be entirely controllable. When he is introduced, Richard has already been infected by association with the Chancery suit. Though he is destroyed, his acknowledgement of his failures makes him a more sympathetic and credible character. William, on the other hand, lacks an excuse for his behavior. His weakness and insecurity, perhaps understandable in prison, could have been overcome once he was released. Instead, William foolishly tries to forget his past and ignores his friends. He comes to no lasting recognition of the pain and anguish to which he has subjected Amy. He himself, not society, causes his death.

While the balance of victim/villain needed to be maintained in the development of Richard and William, Dickens faced a similar task with Jarndyce and Arthur. To present Jarndyce and Arthur as guardian/protectors, Dickens needed to present them as reliable and stable and also to maintain them as human beings. If only reliability were developed, they would remain one-dimensional characters. Therefore, to be successful characters, Jarndyce and Arthur need to reveal their inner emotions in addition to their actions. In achieving this revelation of the inner self, Dickens is more successful with Arthur than he is with Jarndyce.

Dickens portrays Jarndyce's benevolence through his appearance and his motivating past, the suicide of his great-uncle Tom Jarndyce. Upon meeting him, Esther observes:

It was a handsome, lively, quick face, full of change and motion; his hair was a silvered iron-gray. I took him to be nearer sixty than fifty, but he was upright, hearty, and robust (BH 48).

This visual image is reminiscent of Dickens's other benefactors; however, there is a subtle difference between Jarndyce and, for instance, Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Brownlow, and the Cheerybles. According to Grahame Smith, "Their generosity is a given, an integral, part of their personality, while Jarndyce has, we feel, been formed in a harsh school of suffering."¹² Jarndyce's wise appearance establishes his reliability for Esther and for the reader.

Dickens also provides Jarndyce with a past which has determined his character. John inherits Bleak House from his great-uncle Tom Jarndyce who "in despair blew his brains out at a coffee-house in Chancery Lane" (BH 3). Due to this untimely suicide, the reader must presume that Jarndyce resolved that the only way to save himself from a similar fate is to keep himself "outside the circle" (BH 398). Jarndyce feels a need to compensate for the destruction caused by the Chancery suit, explaining his assumption of guardianship of three orphans, two of whom are cousins.

¹²Grahame Smith, Dickens, Money and Society (Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 132-133.

Dickens establishes Jarndyce's generosity through the comments of other characters and through his own actions. Other characters in the novel recognize his "genuine freshness and faithfulness of manner" (BH 461) so readily apparent to Esther. Gridley, who is unable to escape Chancery's grasp, recognizes Jarndyce as "a good man, superior to injustice" (BH 268). Self-centered Skimpole acknowledges that Jarndyce, like Esther, is "ready at all times to go anywhere, and do anything" (BH 331). Because of "the tenderness of his heart and his earnest desire to do all the good in his power" (BH 155), Jarndyce is besieged with letters from persons "who wanted to do anything with anybody else's money" (BH 76). The trust these characters display for Jarndyce prompts the reader to trust as well.

Dickens supplies Jarndyce with "a deep fountain of affection and generosity" (BH 372) which he manifests in action. The charitable kindness he shows to Jo, the Coavinses and to his wards makes Jarndyce, in Esther's words, "an uncommon character" (BH 398). Jarndyce also takes great pains to guide Richard in his career, and advises: "Trust in nothing but in Providence and your own efforts. . . . Constancy in love is a good thing; but it means nothing, and is nothing, without constancy in every kind of effort" (BH 137). Though Richard cannot follow this advice, Jarndyce's concern for him never wavers. His "fatherly care and kindness" (BH 521) is extended to Ada

and her son upon Richard's death. This same concern prompts his proposal to Esther. However, when he recognizes she "will sacrifice her love to a sense of duty and affection" (BH 650), Jarndyce surrenders her to Allan Woodcourt and builds a replica of Bleak House for them. Jarndyce's generosity strengthens his representation as a guardian. Dickens stresses this generosity to an extreme, however. By maintaining Jarndyce as stable, Dickens also presents him as static. Jarndyce's inner feelings and emotions are seldom expressed, making him too reserved. The reader cannot easily relate to him as a character.

Jarndyce's one human trait, his eccentricity, is developed through his actions and what others say. His cousins are aware that "Jarndyce could never bear acknowledgements for any kindness he performed, and that, sooner than receive any, he would resort to the most singular expedients and evasions, or would even run away" (BH 47). Jarndyce provides himself a room he calls the Growlery to which he goes "when the wind is in the east" (BH 49). Esther recognizes the wind as being a "pretense to account for any disappointment he could not conceal rather than he would blame the real cause of it, or disparage or depreciate any one" (BH 61). This one human quality cannot offset the generosity which pervades Jarndyce's character. His character can easily be summed up: "John Jarndyce is a

noble-hearted eccentric who protects every sufferer from misfortune and saves those who will let themselves be saved."¹³

The protective concern Jarndyce shows for his wards is repeated in Arthur Clennam. Though Esther's narrative does not reveal Jarndyce's thoughts, the omniscient narrator in Little Dorrit does present Arthur's thoughts through suppositions. While Jarndyce remains constant, Arthur changes during the course of the novel. At the age of forty, when the novel begins, Arthur admits, "I have no will. That is to say next to none that I can put in action now" (LD 18). But during the novel Arthur matures, taking charge of his life and helping others in the process.

Dickens establishes Arthur's goodness, as he does with Jarndyce, through the comments of other characters and through his own actions. Mr. Meagles admires Arthur's "common sense" (LD 228) and gladly recommends him for a position with Doyce. His business partner, Doyce, comments, "I am sure of you, Clennam, and I know what an upright man you are, and how much to be respected" (LD 265). He is so sure of Arthur that he turns all of the business over to him: "You will continue in all such matters to act for both of us, as you have done hitherto, and to lighten my mind of a load it is much relieved from" (LD 529). Even jealous John Chivery admires Arthur's "straightforwardness"

¹³Johnson, p. 767..

(LD 625). Since these characters praise Arthur's honesty and reliability, the reader is persuaded to attribute these qualities to him as well.

Dickens involves Arthur in helping others, rather than simply giving advice as Jarndyce does, and displays Arthur's sense of responsibility through his actions. Upon encountering an injured foreigner, Arthur acts as interpreter for him and remains "until everything possible to be done had been done skillfully and promptly" (LD 140). Though he is unable to free William Dorrit through the Circumlocution Office, he provides a job for Tip. He searches with Mr. Meagles for Tattycoram and pursues Blandois in an attempt to help his mother. Arthur tackles the Circumlocution Office a second time "to get public justice" (LD 443) for Doyce and his invention. In the midst of this activity, Arthur provides himself an active and promising career by bringing Doyce and Clennam "into sound trim" (LD 441) and "pouring over his books and letters" (LD 496). Because Arthur has a life of his own, apart from the lives of the Dorrit family, the Meagles family, and Doyce, he is a more realistic character. He becomes more than just a guardian/protector of others; he establishes himself as an interesting character in his own right.

Arthur, like Jarndyce, cannot escape the scars which come from facing life squarely. His attempt to invest wisely brings him to financial ruin. His prime concern is

not for himself, but for his partner; Arthur expresses his concern in the following excerpt:

The honest, self-helpful, indefatigable old man, who has worked his way all through his life; the man who has contended against so much disappointment, and who has brought out of it such a good and hopeful nature; the man I have felt so much for, and meant to be so true and useful to; I have ruined him--brought him to shame and disgrace--ruined him, ruined him! (LD 613)

He willingly accepts the consequences of his poor investment and chooses to be taken to Marshalsea. As George Holoch observes, "Only the process of acting out his fantasy of guilt by going to prison toward the end of the novel and the intervention of Little Dorrit makes it possible to develop an adequate sense of his own identity."¹⁴ At first Arthur's willingness to go to prison is surprising; yet, he does remain true to his character. The reader admires Arthur's bravery in facing the consequences of his poor investments and sees him as a more fully realized character.

Dickens also develops Arthur internally by presenting his doubts concerning his father and his self-doubts and by showing him not to be impervious to the humiliation of imprisonment. Arthur worries that "some one may have been grievously deceived, injured, ruined" (LD 42). Arthur's honest love and his general wish to do right" (LD 172) move him to make reparations. Money means little to him:

¹⁴Holoch, p. 342.

I have seen so little happiness come of money; it has brought within my knowledge so little peace to this house, or to any one belonging to it; that it is worth less to me than to another. It can buy me nothing that will not be a reproach and misery to me, if I am haunted by a suspicion that it darkened my father's last hours with remorse, and that it is not honestly and justly mine (LD 42).

The kindnesses he shows Amy are attempts to ease his own doubts: "What if his mother had an old reason she well knew for softening to this poor girl! . . . What if the prisoner now sleeping quietly . . . should trace back his fall to her?" (LD 76) These inner struggles give Arthur more life. If Dickens had presented these emotions in Jarndyce as he changed before the novel began, Jarndyce would have been a more developed character.

Through the omniscient narrator, Dickens presents Arthur's inner doubts which were fostered by the past and which cause him to question his ability to love anyone. The dreams of his love for Flora are "shivered and broke to pieces" (LD 128) when they are reunited. Still the love which he has been unable to express needs an outlet. As he tries to justify loving Pet Meagles, Arthur reveals real self-doubts and concludes "what a weakness it would be" (LD 172). His lack of confidence causes him to assert, "It was not his weakness that he had imagined. It was nobody's, nobody's within his knowledge, why should it trouble him?" (LD 172) His despair when "nobody's" rival appears elicits the reader's sympathy:

If Clennam had not decided against falling in love with Pet; if he had had the weakness to do it; if he had had, little by little, persuaded himself to set all the earnestness of his nature, all the might of his hope, and all the weather of his matured character, on that cast; if he had done this and found that all was lost; he would have been, that night, unutterably miserable. As it was--

As it was, the rain fell heavily, drearily (LD 180).

Fascinated with Pet, Arthur remains blind to Amy's devotion. She "was his innocent friend, his delicate child, his dear Little Dorrit" (LD 445). Absorbed in his desire to help her, Arthur does not recognize her love for him:

He heard the thrill in her voice, he saw her earnest face, he saw her clear true eyes, he saw the quickened bosom that would have joyfully thrown itself before him to receive a mortal wound directed at his breast, with the dying cry, "I love him!" and the remotest suspicion of the truth never dawned upon his mind. No. He saw the devoted little creature with her worn shoes, in her common dress, in her jail-home; a slender child in body, a strong heroine in soul; and the light of her domestic story made all else dark to him (LD 329).

Because Arthur doubts himself and is blind to Amy's love, he is more credible. His struggle to demonstrate love and the mistakes he makes lend a human quality to his character.

Arthur's decline of health in prison reinforces the sensitivity which is suggested by his self-doubts. Marshalsea "bore hard" (LD 633) on Arthur; he began "shrinking from the observation of other men, and shrinking from his own" (LD 633). While prison becomes a strengthening refuge for William, Arthur weakens beneath its shadow: "the weight under which he bent was bearing him down" (LD 649). Soon "the

despondency of low, slow fever" (LD 650) weakens him physically as well. Arthur suffers not from any diagnosable illness but from the doubts he casts upon himself. His sensitivity enables the reader to relate to him as an almost human character.

Though both Arthur and Jarndyce are motivated by their pasts, Arthur is a more fully realized character. Arthur develops during the novel, maturing from a character with no will to a successful businessman. Arthur, motivated by doubts of his father, actively tries to help the Dorrits and others. Jarndyce, also, is motivated by his past. Though he takes the responsibility of three orphans, his primary influence on their lives is provided by advice. Jarndyce does very little else. Since Jarndyce changes before he is introduced in the novel, the reader does not see him change and cannot appreciate or relate to him because of that change.

Dickens is more successful with the omniscient narrator who presents Arthur than with Esther's narrative which presents Jarndyce. Esther as a narrator is limited to her external views of Jarndyce; she cannot explore his inner thoughts because she does not know them. She can only relate, then, what she sees and what she feels, but this information is not enough to fully develop Jarndyce as a character. On the other hand, the omniscient narrator can present Arthur's thoughts and doubts as well as his external actions. While Dickens could have developed Jarndyce through the omniscient

narrator, he does not, perhaps because Jarndyce's function as a guardian/protector was sufficient. Arthur, revealed by his self-doubts, his desire to love, and his concern for others is a much more well-rounded character than Jarndyce.

Dickens is renowned for his memorable characterization. Many of these characters, however, are one-dimensional or flat, but a few of his major characters achieve roundness; David Copperfield and Pip, through their first-person narratives, are prime examples. Dickens models them after himself and reveals their lives through their own words from their birth to adulthood. Using this method, Dickens involves the reader in their development.

Dickens uses this first-person narrative with Esther, but he is less successful with her than he had been with David. Esther's life is really not that of Dickens, and, perhaps, he finds it difficult to deal with a female character rather than a male. Furthermore, Dickens condenses her past into a short three pages, and the reader loses much about her early development, which would make her a more interesting and more credible character than she is. Nevertheless, by using her own comments and showing her vanity and potential for emotion, Dickens does develop her more fully than he does her counterpart in Little Dorrit. Amy is revealed, not through first-person narrative, but through an omniscient narrator. Dickens keeps Amy aloof from the reader by

reporting her birth and condensing her childhood also. The reader, however, is not given many of her feelings. Dickens does not risk weakening the impact of her devotion to duty by allowing her to express any inner conflicts or doubts. Amy, therefore, seems to be little more than an innocent, dutiful person. Therefore, Amy remains a much less interesting character than Esther.

Esther's sympathetic narrative and Richard Carstone's struggles with Chancery help to bring him to life. Through the kind eyes of Esther, Dickens maintains sympathy for Richard and places the blame for his immaturity upon society. Richard is destroyed, a victim of society. On the other hand, Dickens does not maintain as sympathetic a balance for William as he does for Richard. William is a victim of society when he is imprisoned. By releasing him from prison, Dickens allows William to destroy himself with his own foolish delusions and fears about the past. William turns his back on his friends and his loving daughter. Therefore, his death is not that of a victim but of a villain who has ruined himself.

In the development of Jarndyce and Arthur, Dickens does not achieve the success with Jarndyce that is achieved with Arthur. Esther's first-person narrative does not allow the reader to see Jarndyce as life-like. Jarndyce remains the constant advisor of his wards; his change of character has occurred before the novel began. Since this change is

not presented and his inner thoughts are not revealed, Jarndyce remains flat: an eccentric, benevolent guardian. In contrast, Arthur, Jarndyce's counterpart in Little Dorrit, does mature within the novel. Presented by the omniscient narrator, Arthur's thoughts and doubts are revealed. While Esther is limited to reporting what she sees and feels, the omniscient narrator who knows all can present these needed details. Arthur's doubts and sensitivity revealed to the reader make him a more fully developed character than Jarndyce.

The success of Bleak House and Little Dorrit is not entirely dependent upon the success of these six characters. However, their development through the narrator's comments, the observations of other characters, the characters' own actions and comments, and the contrast with other characters combines with the plot, imagery, and other elements to make Dickens's novels classics.

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