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The University of Southern Mississippi

THE SELF-(UN)MADE WOMAN:  
JUNGIAN ARCHETYPES IN CHARLES DICKENS'S *LITTLE DORRIT*.

by

William David Love

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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May 2015

## ABSTRACT

### THE SELF-(UN)MADE WOMAN:

### JUNGIAN ARCHETYPES IN CHARLES DICKENS'S *LITTLE DORRIT*

by William David Love

May 2015

Charles Dickens's novel *Little Dorrit* (1857) depicts an abundance of surrogate mothers while simultaneously revealing an absence of biological motherhood. The primary female characters become surrogate mothers in their own ways in order to bypass the legal and physical dangers associated with biological motherhood. To do this, they embrace various alternate forms of femininity—the crone, the maiden, the woman warrior, and the seductress. These women negate themselves willingly in actions that would seem to reinforce the gender norms of their time, but their self-negation actually leads to empowerment and sustainability for themselves and for others. Furthermore, a Jungian interpretation of both these female characters and Dickens's personal relationships reveals that *Little Dorrit* might have been an attempt to reconcile his desire for the normative maternal with his desire for a strong female presence separate from the domestic realm, thus providing a more nuanced view of Dickens's ideas on femininity.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife and my children for their patience, understanding, and unconditional love, and to all of the strong women and men who refuse to conform to expectations.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Alexandra Valint, for her guidance, patience, and infectious positivity throughout this research. She is the epitome of what a compassionate and dedicated mentor should be. Thanks are also in order for my other committee members, Drs. Nicolle Jordan and Emily Stanback, for their comments and support in seeing this work to fruition. Their final suggestions, along with those of Dr. Valint, made all the difference in my success.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1857), there is a marked absence of biological mothers and an abundance of surrogate mothers. The majority of the female characters in *Little Dorrit* are maternal in their own various ways, yet each also manages to circumvent the role of biological motherhood while simultaneously losing herself in and embracing other feminine roles not connected to reproduction—the maiden, the crone, the woman warrior, and the seductress. By modern standards, these roles could justifiably be argued against as sexist and limiting, as female psychology cannot be condensed into one specific part, but even with that idea in mind, these archetypes are serving to undermine the societal norms of Dickens's time. While the roles that these women choose might appear to strip them of selfhood and agency, the activation of these non-maternal subconscious figures shows that these women can repurpose societal expectations and gender norms into centers of personal power. This repurposing of the norm, though not limited to the female characters alone, would seem counterintuitive in light of Dickens's thoughts<sup>1</sup> on women. However, an examination of his personal relationships reveals that *Little Dorrit* might have been an attempt to reconcile Dickens's desire for the normative maternal and his desire for a strong female presence separate from the domestic realm, thus providing a more nuanced view of Dickens's ideas on femininity.

*Little Dorrit* has numerous subplots and a multitude of memorable characters, but the novel's primary plot centers on three families: the Clennams, The Meagleses, and the Dorrits. Arthur Clennam has recently returned from China after his father's death to

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Slater explains that Dickens's ideal woman possessed a stereotypical "intuitive insight," "natural timidity," and "physical gentleness" which would aid in her role "as bearer and nourisher of children" within "the domestic or private circle...her proper sphere" (310).

handle some personal and business affairs with his mother, Mrs. Clennam. The Meagles family, including both parents, their daughter Pet, and their angry servant/adopted daughter Tattycoram, were in a government-required quarantine with Arthur Clennam and Miss Wade, a proud and independent primary character with some ulterior motives, after returning from traveling abroad (Dickens 53). Miss Wade eventually becomes a surrogate to Tattycoram when the latter leaves behind the neglect she feels at the hands of her adoptive family (723).

Little Amy Dorrit, the novel's title character, works as a seamstress in the Clennam household, and William Dorrit, her father, is imprisoned in the Marshalsea debtors prison (Dickens 53-129). Arthur discovers that Mr. Dorrit is the heir to a small fortune, thus providing an escape from his incarceration. The family takes a tour of Europe and tries to forget about their previous poverty, though Little Dorrit struggles to function outside of the prison—the only home she has ever known (473-481). Both William and his brother Frederick die abroad, and Little Dorrit goes to live with her sister, a seductive and plotting ex-dancer named Fanny. Little Dorrit eventually marries Arthur Clennam and both gains and quickly loses her own wealth (894).

## CHAPTER II



## VICTORIAN MOTHERHOOD

Motherhood was a double-edged sword for Victorian women: on one hand, motherhood was expected and revered, while on the other, biological motherhood was synonymous with danger, both in the legal aspects of relationships between husbands, wives, and children and in the physical danger posed to women during childbirth. In her chapter “Pregnancy and Childbirth,” Helena Wojtczak describes the legal restrictions associated with women. According to Wojtczak, the role of any Victorian woman was to be a wife and mother, especially if said woman belonged to the middle- or upper-class. For women during *Little Dorrit*’s time period, “reproduction was considered a woman’s only correct occupation,” and “the average working class wife was either pregnant or breast feeding from wedding day to menopause” (Wojtczak). Ann Laura Stoler reinforces and expands Wojtczak’s claim. She says, “Child rearing ...was hailed as a national, imperial, and racial duty” (qtd. in Rosenman 2). Ruth Bienstock Anolik incorporates Wojtczak’s description of marriage and motherhood in the concept of coverture. Anolik explains that when a Victorian woman married “under the system of coverture, the woman’s legal identity was covered by that of her husband. She underwent a civil death and forfeited all rights to possess property, custody of her own children and, indeed, herself” (26). These concepts are the impetus for the decisions of the primary female characters in Dickens’s novel: to escape the confines of motherhood imposed upon them by a highly patriarchal society and to retain rights to themselves and their adopted offspring, these women forgo biological motherhood, instead choosing to hide (or cover) themselves. In essence, they take the rigid laws of their society and self-impose them;

doing so gives them the upper-hand in their circumstances and relationships, thus negating the intention of the established laws.

The legal ramifications of marriage and motherhood, however, pale in comparison to the physical threat pregnancy and childbirth posed to Victorian women. This threat would present yet another reason for Dickens's characters to avoid biological motherhood. Despite advances in medical approaches and sterilization processes, childbirth was the second most common cause of death in women, after disease, in Victorian times (Dever 11). Conditions such as puerperal fever ran rampant, in one instance killing fifty-six of eighty-eight pregnant women being treated at the Rotunda Hospital in a period of eleven days in 1835 (12). This was not an uncommon occurrence. If the fear of a figurative loss of self could not serve as a deterrent to motherhood, then the threat of a painful death certainly would. It is this macabre reality that pushes the women of *Little Dorrit* to seek motherhood outside of traditional means.

It is also this macabre nature which places *Little Dorrit* within the Gothic genre—a genre known for its concern with biological and surrogate maternal roles. Here, I borrow heavily from Deborah D. Rogers's *The Matrophobic Gothic* and Ruth Bienstock Anolik's "The Missing Mother: The Meanings of Maternal Absence in the Gothic Mode." Rogers argues that the writing of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novelist Ann Radcliffe shifted the Gothic mode from the *Male Gothic*, with its focus on the persecution of a heroine within a Gothic setting, to the *Female Gothic*, with its emphasis on "female kinship relations" (38). In the Radcliffian Gothic, daughters and mothers are separated and usually trapped in a gothic setting; therefore, there is a search for "maternal identity." (38-39). Radcliffe's writing

centers on both the absence and the redundancy of mothers. Even if the heroine's mother is actually or supposedly dead, mother-doubling is considerable. Surrogate mothers abound. But it is their apparent motherless status at the outset...that compels Radcliffe's deluded heroines to stand alone. Only when their individuality is absolute can they mature.”  
(39)

Thus, missing mothers are not just a trope of Gothic writing; they are actually a driving force behind the plot. This is true of Dickens's surrogate mothers as well: by abnegating themselves, they propel the central plot forward.

This maternal “absence” is further explained by Anolik. For her, and for definitional purposes in this writing, “the typical Gothic mother is absent: dead, imprisoned, or somehow abjected” (25). The various women of *Little Dorrit* represent these definitive Gothic<sup>2</sup> characteristics—specifically, the juxtaposition between the fear of motherhood, the lack of maternal presence, and the simultaneous need for some form of maternal identity—but their application of the characteristics is innovative. These female characters undermine Rogers's analysis because it is through their self-negation that power is attained. They do not seek out their own absent mothers or the doubles to replace them; it is not a motherless state that pushes them to power. Rather, these women

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<sup>2</sup> Gothic tropes are not restricted to *Little Dorrit*. Though critics tend to overlook the features of the Female Gothic in Dickens, some have noted an abundance of gothic elements in his work: the “gothic arches” of local buildings and “stone slabs” of the churches in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Janes 325); the “horror at the cold dullness of ...[life]” and “the titillating description of decay” found in *Dombey and Son* (334); the resurfacing of the past as a ghost or as a sense “that a past injustice has been left unaddressed” in *The Pickwick Papers* and *Little Dorrit*, respectively (Ballinger 36); and the “atavistic, devilish criminal” Fagin in *Oliver Twist* (39) all support the idea that Dickens was not only comfortable but also masterful in the gothic mode. Perhaps he owes a bit of that mastery to one of America's most celebrated horror writers: Edgar Allan Poe. Dickens and Poe met during the former's initial voyage to America, and the influence of Poe's “The Fall of the House of Usher” can be seen in *Little Dorrit* in the collapse of the Clennam household and the simultaneous collapse of Mrs. Clennam, the woman most closely associated with the home (Edgecombe 32-34).

embody the surrogate or missing mother role as defined by Anolik in order to claim power over themselves and others. These are no orphans seeking a reunion with some deceased or forgotten maternal specter; instead, these are mature women refusing to be relegated to the dangerous position of biological mother in a time when that refusal was an anathema.

Biological mothers do exist in the world of *Little Dorrit*, but they are all either dead or disempowered by their maternal role in some way. Mrs. Dorrit is introduced and her death is explained via flashback before chapter six concludes (Dickens 97-104). Arthur's biological mother is dead before the narrative begins as well, driven to an early grave by mourning for the child she gave away (847-848). After her husband's suicide, Mrs. Merdle moves in with her son and daughter-in-law, Fanny. Immediately, the two women begin "warring...foot to foot." Mrs. Merdle nearly loses her social position, as "many important persons had been unable to determine whether they should cut Mrs. Merdle, or comfort her," and she and Fanny become "sworn rivals" destined to "fight it out in the lists of Society" (873-874). She will spend the remainder of her life arguing with her younger rival—the rival that came into her life as a direct result of her role as a mother<sup>3</sup>. Little Dorrit herself eventually becomes a mother after the events of the story unfold, but this fact is largely absent from the novel—it is mentioned once in passing in the final paragraph (895).

The most prominent biological mother in the novel is Mrs. Meagles, but her identity as a human is lost in her maternal role. She is physically present, but the

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<sup>3</sup>Edmund Sparkler—Mrs. Merdle's son—takes a liking to Fanny and wants to propose. As he is heir to a large sum of money and Fanny is a poor dancer, a relationship between them would be taboo. Mrs. Merdle buys Fanny off with a bracelet. Fanny takes the bracelet and leaves Edmund alone, but she is still offended that Mrs. Merdle believes the Dorrits to be inferior (Dickens 280-290).

descriptions and mentions of her are centered on her role as a mother, not as an individual. The first thing she says in the novel is “Well, Mr. Meagles, say no more about it now it’s over ... For goodness sake *content yourself with Pet*” (emphasis added, Dickens 54), as if their biological child were all either parent would need for personal contentment. Mrs. Meagles is elsewhere described as Pet’s “defend[er]” (235); and Mr. Meagles, as they are leaving for Paris specifically to be with Pet, ignores her individuality by referring to her as “Mother” on more than one occasion (580-581). Her initial appearance in the book is marked by the same title. Mr. Meagles first refers to her as “Mother” in chapter two, explaining that that is his “usual name” for her (56). Her existence and name in the novel are bound to her maternal role—without Pet there could be no Mother—and she is an inverted image of the other women discussed. Whereas they forgo biological motherhood in a variety of ways to cement their own agendas and powerbases, she becomes a biological mother who continually disappears in deference to her child. The danger here is that she has no agency or personality of her own. The harsher reality of the situation is that her self-negation is for naught, both for her and her daughter. Pet goes on to marry Henry Gowan, a poor, bragging, volatile man who treats his wife “too much like a beautiful child” (548). Therefore, Mrs. Meagles’s constant acquiescence to her child has robbed both women of any agency. Pet is locked in a permanent state of childhood; her very name is suggestive of obedience and subservience. Mrs. Meagles’s lack of power has been inherited by her daughter, and both women have fallen victim to the concept of coverture. They are consumed by the strict societal expectations that the surrogate mothers in the novel escape.

CHAPTER III  
DICKENS AND JUNG

Charles Dickens, through his usage of various models of femininity, presents an interpretation of motherhood different from the norms of his day, and, whether Dickens realized it or not, he revealed his own penchant for psychological insight. *Little Dorrit* is focused on the reinvention of motherhood outside of reproductive confines; therefore, Jungian theory is useful in interpreting the novel because Carl Jung himself was concerned with female roles outside of reproductive confines as well. Jung disagreed with his mentor Freud's focus on sex's "psychological universality" ("Psychology of Dementia Praecox" 45). Jung "suggest[ed] that psychoanalytic theory should be freed from the purely sexual standpoint. In place of it, [he]...introduce[d] an *energetic viewpoint*....All psychological phenomena can be considered as manifestations of energy..." ("Psychoanalysis" 50). If these phenomena are truly manifestations of energy, then that energy can manifest itself in numerous ways not linked to sex or relationships connected by intercourse or reproduction (husband/wife, child/parent, etc.). Dickens's characters reinterpret motherhood through other avenues of feminine identity, thus maintaining a connection to traditional female roles and reforming those roles for their own purposes.

Jung explains that Freud's concept of the unconscious is "nothing but the gathering place of forgotten and repressed contents, and has a functional significance thanks only to these" ("Archetypes" 286). While Freud views the unconscious as having "an exclusively personal nature," Jung writes that the unconscious consists of two parts: the personal unconscious, "a more or less superficial layer," and the collective unconscious, which is "not individual but universal" and "inborn." The personal unconscious consists of "feeling-toned complexes" while the collective unconscious

contains archetypes (286-287). These archetypes typically lie dormant until unconsciously activated, a reserve of sorts which has been passed down throughout human civilization (287-289).

Jung further explains his archetypes in “On the Nature of the Psyche.” He writes, “The archetype is pure, unvitiated nature [“Nature” is defined in his footnote as “that which is, and always was, given”], and it is nature that causes man to utter words and perform actions whose meaning is unconscious to him, so unconscious that he no longer gives it a thought” (80). Jung explains that the concept of archetypes—symbols and images representing a universal psychic energy independent from but connected to the individualized human spirit—can be found across all cultures and all time periods, and that these “preconscious archetypes...were never conscious and can be established only indirectly through the effects upon the conscious contents” (79-81). Here, Jung is undermining the Freudian stages of development as focused on Oedipal psychosexual constructs. Many of Jung’s female archetypes exist outside of a mother-daughter dichotomy and, thus, outside of the female capacity for procreation; that is, sex has nothing to do with becoming a crone, warrior, or maiden, and reproduction has nothing to do with the role of seductress. Jung’s claim that, historically, these archetypes were unconscious manifestations reinforces the idea that motherhood was not the only natural (or “given”) outlet for female productive power. Women could be mothers, channeling the preexisting maternal archetype, but they could also embody the archetypes not associated with biological motherhood. The women of *Little Dorrit* have tapped into these unconscious archetypes and used them to bend motherhood to their own wills,



effectively activating naturally-occurring aspects of themselves not deemed suitable for proper Victorian women.

Through his own empirical approach, Dickens presents an understanding of a collective mind, its fragmentary nature, and its relationship to dreams. Brian Rosenberg explains that Dickens's characters in *Little Dorrit* have a "fragmentation of consciousness"—a personal "complexity" that is more "collective" than "individual" (86). He cites several "alter egos, surrogates, or psychological complements" which form a sort of symbiosis or combination of psychic traits: Little Dorrit is "enlarged by Maggy," her charge with the mind of a child and the body of an adult; Tattycoram has Pet Meagles and Miss Wade; and the devilish Rigaud<sup>4</sup> "forms a symbiotic pair with Cavaletto," his docile cellmate (115). Rosenberg continues with the tale of Pet Meagles and her dead twin sister, who "form an even more overt psychological unit..." and who could never be separated, even by their own parents (115-116). Viewing Dickens's characters through the analytical lens of Jungian theory bolsters the universal consciousness functioning between several pairs of those characters, but this lens also reveals that Dickens himself possessed a keen awareness of human psychology. This awareness, in turn, shows that Dickens's quoted stance on the roles of women is countered by his own portrayal of them in *Little Dorrit*.

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<sup>4</sup> Rigaud/Blandois/Lagnier is a convict who knows the truth about Arthur Clennam's birth: Arthur's father's first marriage resulted in Arthur's birth, and when Mrs. Clennam discovered the fact after she was married, she sought out the first wife and forced her to give Arthur up so that she could raise him as her own. The first wife conceded and went away, while Mr. Clennam went to work in China, leaving Mrs. Clennam and Arthur behind. Arthur's great-uncle Gilbert, the man who arranged the marriage, felt remorse over the events, so he placed a codicil in his will stating that, upon his death, "one thousand guineas" would go to Arthur's biological mother, and "one thousand guineas to the youngest daughter her patron might have at fifty, or (if he had none) [his] brother's youngest daughter, on her coming of age." This patron was Frederick Dorrit, and his "brother's youngest daughter" was Little Amy Dorrit. Mrs. Clennam, instead of enforcing the uncle's wishes, tried to have the codicil destroyed, thus robbing Little Dorrit of her money (848-849). It is only at the end of the story and under the threat of full disclosure by the villain Rigaud/Blandois that Mrs. Clennam decides to tell the truth (Dickens 858-859).

A reading of Dickens's and Jung's ideas on dreams offers an even stronger connection between their respective works and mental processes. Ann Colley writes that nineteenth-century England witnessed a great deal of blending between the fields of medicine, psychology, art, and politics (qtd. in Rosenberg 95). The arts had just as much claim to mental analysis and interpretation as did psychology or philosophy, and the ideas presented among these "specialized" disciplines "were comprehensible and responsive to one another" (95-96). Therefore, it is no surprise that Dickens studied and wrote about dreams, their analysis, and their universal themes. Warrington Winters explains that Dickens's dream theories "are of real interest today, and the more so because of that very fact that he chose to rely upon his own observations rather than 'the usual stories in the books'" (985). This reliance on personal experience is mirrored in Jung. Anthony Storr writes, "Jung's conception of archetypes and the collective unconscious sprang not only from his observation of patients, but from his own experience" (71). This shared empirical focus on research via personal observation is just one link between the two men; the conclusions drawn from these personal observations were similar as well.

The personal observational approach to Dickens's and Jung's individual fields led to some identical conclusions about dreams. Winters says that Dickens made three claims about dreams: we do not typically dream about recent events; despite the diversity among humans, our dreams possess a "remarkable sameness"; and, "while we dream, there is a waking part of the brain which knows that we are dreaming" (986). The second and third notions are of particular interest because they once again hint at the concept of the collective unconscious. If, as Dickens claims, humans of all stations and creeds can, in their dreams, "fall off that tower," "read letters" that are indecipherable, and/or "go to

public places in [their] nightgowns” (qtd. in Winters 989), then it would logically follow that all of these dreams stem from some universal pool. Winters paraphrases Dickens’s claims that all humans “share a common world of dreams” (990), and Jung claims that our dreams contain “living” remnants “of the past,” a notion that led to his theory of the universal archetypes (“Confrontation” 75). Despite living and working decades and miles apart, the two men shared a personal approach to research in their individual yet overlapping fields. Through his literary approach to dreams and characterization, Dickens developed his own rudimentary concept of a collective unconscious. This development does not indicate a relationship of cause and effect between the two thinkers—it is unknown whether or not Jung ever studied Dickens—but it does lend credence to the logic of a Jungian reading of Dickens. In constructing his female characters as surrogate mothers who reform biological motherhood via archetypes, Dickens gives himself and the world a more expansive and inclusive view of maternity and femininity—a view which stems from the collective unconscious with which both he and Jung engaged.

## CHAPTER IV

### GENDER AND DICKENS’S PERSONAL LIFE

In examining Dickens's personal life, readers find the paradox of Dickens's simultaneous aversion to biological motherhood and his idealization of the domestic realm. In *Dickens and Women*, Michael Slater postulates that "it was for Dickens a fundamental belief...that man's nature...differed, fundamentally and inherently, from woman's" (302). He goes on to say that Dickens thought that "women," by way of their natural femininity, automatically understood "emotional truth"; that they were "a sort of natural priest"; that their "true source of heroism...[was] always domestic"; and that they were worthy of sympathy if employed in "traditional female domains" (303, 307, 309, 334). His personal life supports these claims of gender bias. After having numerous children with his wife Catherine—nine of whom were living at the time of their separation (138)—Dickens leaves on as amicable terms as possible, entering into a string of relationships with various women. The most notable of these women were Georgina, his sister-in-law, whom he referred to as "the best and truest friend man ever had"; and Ellen Ternan, a young actress he referred to as "the Princess whom I adore" (Slater 163; qtd. in Slater 202). Speaking of the dissolution of his marriage, Dickens is quoted as saying, "[Our unhappiness] mattered not so much when we had only ourselves to consider, but reasons have been growing since which make it all but hopeless that we should even try to struggle on. What is now befalling me I have seen steadily coming ever since the days ... when Mary [their eldest daughter] was born" (qtd. in Slater 140-141). Here, Dickens traces the source of his marital discontent back to his children. Slater writes that Catherine experienced "some post-natal illness" which Dickens may not have been "sympathetic" to, thus creating friction in his marriage (113). It seems that he was a contradiction to himself. On one hand, he idolized women in the domestic sphere—

the traditional biological mothers—but on the other, he saw motherly domesticity and the subsequent pregnancies as the downfall of his marriage.

Dickens's tenuous opposition to the domestic sphere is further portrayed in the love triangle he shared with Catherine and her sister Mary, who often played chaperone during Catherine's pre-marriage visits with Dickens (Slater 77-78). While there are no intimations of a sexual relationship between Dickens and Mary, and Catherine's regard for her sister was at least on the same level as the regard her husband felt, the relationship with his sister-in-law was, for Dickens at least, "more intense than anything he felt for [his wife]" (78). Catherine served as his maternal ideal/biological mother archetype: she was a "delightful hostess" who penned a book of elaborate menus under the pseudonym Lady Maria Clutterbuck (132). Mary, though, was like Little Dorrit, in Dickens's mind, a "shining Ideal of Maidenhood," but, as letters she wrote to numerous acquaintances reveal, she was also a "lively and affectionate" young woman with "a delightful appetite for social experience" (80) outside of the domestic sphere, much like Fanny.

Also like the seductive Fanny, Mary provided a certain feminine allure. Richard Bentley, an acquaintance of Dickens, wrote that he found himself incapable of leaving a party once simply because Mary offered him another glass of wine at Dickens's behest; John Strang, a friend of one of Dickens's publishers, wrote that "many a young man" could "los[e] his night's rest" over desire for Mary (qtd. in Slater 81). Mary's sudden death "in [Dickens's] arms" at the young age of seventeen (82) eternally cemented her maiden/seductress status. She would never grow out of this youthful, vibrant role, and she would be the inspiration for maiden characters in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Oliver Twist*, and *David Copperfield*, to name a few (83-95). Dickens reserved his most "intense"

feelings for the maiden/seductress qualities he found in Mary while still idolizing the maternal realm characterized by Catherine.

The power of surrogacy in Dickens's personal life is evident in his relationship to another sister-in-law, Georgina. Georgina came to live with the Dickens family in 1842, and she remained in the household after Catherine departed (Slater 163-168). In fact, Dickens died in her arms (164). John Forster, a prominent Dickens biographer, writes that "[Georgina] sacrificed to children" and always had "the children (of somebody else) to engross her," never marrying or bearing children of her own (qtd. in Slater 175). Thus, she became a surrogate mother to the Dickens brood even before the divorce. Dickens writes that she made his "commodious family mansion look natural and home-like" (qtd. in Slater 165). Georgina's motherly role outside of biological motherhood and her attention to domesticity made her the embodiment of Dickens's ideal woman, yet she also possessed attributes not limited to the role of mother and housewife. Like the warrior, she refused to be wed, ignoring the attentions of the painter Augustus Egg, an acquaintance Dickens personally chose as a possible suitor (165). Like the crone, she exhibited a depth of wisdom to rival Dickens's, leading him to proclaim that five men out of every six would be her "inferior intellectually" (qtd. in Slater 165). Furthermore, like the maiden, she never had any biological children of her own (175). She was proud of the choices she made, even if those choices led to personal and social turmoil.<sup>5</sup> Of her years with the Dickenses, she wrote, "I would not have it altered for the brightest and most prosperous existence any woman could have had" (qtd. in Slater 174). Just what is Georgina's

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<sup>5</sup> Rumors spread that Georgina's own mother questioned her actual position in the Dickens household, and numerous newspapers asserted that Georgina had children by Dickens. At the very least, there were "bitter feelings" between Georgina and her family because she remained in the home after Catherine's departure (Slater 171-173).

reward for this archetypically-driven surrogacy? According to Slater, she and Dickens shared a “domestic companionship that was both comforting *and* stimulating” (emphasis added, 174). This combination was found in no other relationship Dickens had.

It can be argued that “during the writing of *Little Dorrit*,” Dickens started to feel “strains” and “misgivings” about his marriage (Slater 135) because this is the novel in which the two parts of his emotional dichotomy come together. Dickens wanted a typical Victorian wife—à la Wojtczak’s definition—and found her in Catherine, yet he associated the downfall of his marriage with that child-producing domestic life. *Little Dorrit* centralizes the role of the surrogate mother more than any other Dickensian text, and it creates the domestic combination Dickens sought. The major female characters find their strength outside of biological motherhood, but, like Georgina, they still get to partake of motherhood via surrogacy.

Dickens does not restrict his reformation of domestic gender roles to women, however. While this argument focuses primarily on how the females reinvent social mores meant to constrain them, Lionel Trilling points out that there are many delinquent fathers in the text as well. Mr. Dorrit, “the Father of the Marshalsea ... is unable to exercise the simplest paternal function”; “The Patriarch”—Mr. Casby—“has tricked his peers into believing that he is a kind man; and Mr. Meagles, however solicitous of [his] own daughter, [is] ... but [an] indifferent parent to Tattycoram” (586). Dickens, in his presentation of these men, is pinpointing the inverse of his commentary on female social standing. He proves in *Little Dorrit* that women can traverse the domestic sphere on their own terms and through their own prowess, but, with the inclusion of male characters whose parental failures drive so much of the plot, he also points out that men have an

important part to play in that same domestic sphere. The walls between the two genders begin to thin: women are seen as free agents outside of their prescribed roles, and men are seen as important members of the domestic realm—the jurisdiction of the female normative identity in Dickens's time—whose absence creates conflict. Slater mentions that this thinning stands as a stark contrast against both the laws and expectations of Victorian society and the misogynistic views attributed to Charles Dickens. In this novel, Dickens tried to attain what he sought but could not find in the majority of his personal relationships.

## CHAPTER V

### CLOSE READING OF FEMALE ARCHETYPES



### Little Dorrit as Maiden

When readers first encounter Little Dorrit, she is presented as the archetypal maiden and her existence is ignored. Arthur Clennam asks Mrs. Flintwinch to identify the “girl...almost hidden in the dark corner” of his mother’s bedroom. Mrs. Flintwinch immediately negates the young woman’s very existence: “She?” she says, “Little Dorrit? *She’s* nothing; she’s a whim of – [*Mrs. Clennam’s*]” (Dickens 80). Little Dorrit’s face is “hidden” by the darkness, thus making it impossible to identify her. Readers learn later that she does needlework for the Clennam household (93). The act of repairing clothes is rather maternal, so, coupled with her lingering in the shadows and with Mrs. Flintwinch’s dismissal, Dorrit can be viewed as a hidden mother.

In direct juxtaposition to her maternal status is her childlike character and appearance. She is known even into adulthood as “the child of the Marshalsea” prison, and the milliner who teaches her to sew refers to her as “weak” and “so very, very little” (107, 113). Sherri Wolf comments on this notion that Little Dorrit is purposefully insignificant. Wolf writes that she “embodies attributes and produces effects similar to those of the figure whom Dickens and other Victorians sought to expose and contain”: the “ubiquitous figure” of “Nobody”<sup>6</sup> (223-224). She has become Jung’s definitive maiden figure—virginal and vulnerable, “a figure who raises love to the heights of spiritual devotion” (*Man* 185). This vulnerable mother/maiden dichotomy gives her the ability to provide for and protect her family, and she uses her childlike appearance to gain favors for her siblings. She seeks out an imprisoned dancing-master in order to get training for her sister Fanny. The text notes that the instructor “survey[s]” Dorrit’s “small

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<sup>6</sup> Wolf explains that the first working title of *Little Dorrit* was *Nobody’s Fault*; this Nobody was a creation of Dickens for the magazine *Household Words*, written as a response to the lack of social responsibility he observed in his society (223).

figure and uplifted face” and immediately agrees to be her sister’s tutor free of charge (Dickens 112). Little Dorrit uses her connections with Bob the turnkey—her godfather who tries unsuccessfully to leave her and only her a small amount of money in his will (110)—to find various occupations for her brother Tip, a lazy young man who abandons every job he starts and eventually is sent to the Marshalsea as a prisoner (115-117). Here, the text explicitly refers to Little Dorrit as “[Tip’s] small second mother” (116), thus plainly showing the nature of their relationship.

Little Dorrit, despite being the youngest of the Dorrit children, serves as a parent not only to her own siblings but also to her father. She realizes “that a man so broken as to be the Father of the Marshalsea could be no father to his own children,” (Dickens 112), so she assumes his responsibility as family provider, “[taking] the place of the eldest of the three” Dorrit children despite being the baby of the family (111). She is the one who decides that Mr. Dorrit should learn of neither of his daughters’ working-class roles of dancer and seamstress nor of his son’s recent arrest and imprisonment, for to do so “would kill [him]” (117-118). It is this persona of financial provider and emotional bulwark that makes Little Dorrit the mother of her family; it is her utilization of society’s perception of her as a “timid little shrinking figure” (123) in order to make those provisions that cements the importance of her role as a maiden. Through her negation of self in order to promote and provide for her family members, Little Dorrit becomes the epicenter of her familial world by simultaneously taking on the role of mother and then making that mother disappear into the background so that the others might thrive. The narrator relates, “She was not accustomed to think of herself, or to trouble anyone with her emotions” (139). Her diminutive status is something she treasures and defends. When

Little Dorrit visits Arthur in the Marshalea, Mr. Meagles, a friend of the family, refers to her by her given name. She interrupts to say, “Little Dorrit. Never any other name” (890). While this perpetual affix would seem to be a detriment, it actually serves as the family’s salvation. Little Dorrit has so embraced her “Little” role that she refuses to be called anything else.

In “The Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype,” Carl Jung comments on this self-denial in the section entitled “The Nothing-But Daughter,” an appropriate name for Little Dorrit’s purpose as the maiden of her story. Jung states that “*emptiness* is a great feminine secret. It is something absolutely alien to man; the chasm, the unplumbed depths, the *yin*. The pitifulness of this vacuous nonentity goes straight to his heart..., and one is tempted to say that this constitutes the whole mystery of woman. Such a female is fate itself” (349). This idea of unfathomable “emptiness” existing solely within women and constitut[ing] the whole mystery of woman” is blatantly sexist in its implications. Jung argues that this vacuum, if the woman is “normal,” will be filled by a “potent anima projection...” because “she can never find herself at all, not even approximately, without a man’s help” (348). Such arguments, by modern standards, are indefensible, yet Little Dorrit fits into this category. The fact that she is less known by her given name than by her nickname of “Little” attests to the idea that her value is somehow less than others. As previously discussed, she continually negates herself in order to serve those around her, but this Jungian female emptiness becomes a source of power for her. Toward the end of the novel in the same scene when Arthur Clennam is imprisoned in the Marshalsea, Little Dorrit comes to him with a proposal. She says that Tip is coming home “to take possession of [his father’s] property” and to bestow upon Little Dorrit the riches that both

siblings assume Mr. Dorrit has left behind (Dickens 827-828). With the idea of being rich in mind, Little Dorrit again decides to empty herself—this time financially—to aid the man she loves. She offers to pay off Arthur Clennam’s debt, but she uses language more fitting of a marriage proposal: “Dear Mr. Clennam,” she says, “make me of all the world the happiest, by saying Yes....[G]ive me the greatest joy I can experience on earth ... take all I have and make it a blessing to me!” (828). Initially, Arthur does refuse Little Dorrit (829), and it turns out that nothing remains of her father’s wealth, but the fact that she, the female protagonist, has the presumed financial upper-hand gives her a certain amount of power. Her temerity in pseudo-proposing to Arthur proves that she has a firm idea of exactly what she wants. Furthermore, Arthur agrees to marry her only after Little Dorrit reveals that her money has been lost in a pyramid scheme by Mr. Merdle. She says, “I have nothing in the world” (885), yet she gains her true love through this loss. She has effectively used her role as empty mother/maiden/child to establish her own agency.

Dickens does not limit the gender nonconformity to the character of Little Dorrit. In fact, this scene establishes Arthur’s role as a “feminized hero” (Rogers 38), as he is the one receiving the marriage proposal. In the final scenes of the novel, Arthur is ill in the Marshalsea, so Little Dorrit spends time soothing him with songs and readings as he lies in bed (Dickens 883). It is in this scene that Arthur Clennam feels a mother’s warmth and protection for the first time. Dickens writes, “Clennam, listening to the voice as it read to him, heard in it all the soothing songs she sings to man. At no Mother’s knee but hers had he ever dwelt in his youth on hopeful promises...But, in the tones of the voice that read to him, there were memories of an old feeling of such things...” (883-884). Here, Little

Dorrit's persona as maiden fully transforms into that of mother, but she is not just any mother. She is connected to Mother Nature herself and to all the archetypal power that concept suggests. The minute Little Dorrit stops singing, Arthur begins to stir and to shade his eyes from the sunlight streaming through the window. Little Dorrit stands and covers him with her shadow (884). This action symbolically reflects back to Ruth Bienstock Anolik's discussion of coverture, as Little Dorrit has proposed marriage and is now covering her fiancé with her shadow and her maternal protection. She stands in the light while he is concealed in the shadows. He is prostrate and passive; she is erect and active. The power structure has been inverted.

#### Mrs. Clennam as Crone

Readers are introduced to Mrs. Clennam in the same pages in which they are introduced to Little Dorrit, and from the first, she is presented as the mother/crone of the story. Jung defines his crone figure as the final stage in a series of female archetypal developments, having "wisdom transcending even the most holy and the most pure" (*Man* 185). For Mrs. Clennam, this transcendence has turned dark, lifeless, and blasphemous, but she still retains the secret "wisdom" which permeates the novel's plot: the truth of Arthur's parentage and Little Dorrit's finances. She is not Arthur's real mother, having forcefully adopted him from his real mother; she also has hidden an addendum to a will that would leave Little Dorrit money. As Mrs. Clennam breathes in the "smell of black dye in the airless room," she is reclining on "a black bier-like sofa," wearing "a widow's dress," and leaning against "one great angular black bolster like the block at a state execution" (Dickens 73). The death imagery immediately associates her with the final stages of life, and her statement that "The world has narrowed to these

dimensions” (73) suggests a weakening of eyesight. Readers learn that she was a harsh mother—“the peaceablest occupation of [Arthur’s] childhood” had been at the table with his parents silently ignoring one another (73)—and an equally harsh businesswoman. The narrator describes her business and personal interactions thusly:

Woe to the suppliant, if such a one there were or ever had been, who had any concession to look for in the inexorable face at the cabinet. Woe to the defaulter whose appeal lay to the tribunal where those severe eyes presided. Great need had the rigid woman of her mystical religion, veiled in gloom and darkness, with lightnings of cursing, vengeance, and destruction, flashing through the sable clouds. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, was a prayer too poor in spirit for her. Smite Thou my debtors, Lord, wither them, crush them; do Thou as I would do, and Thou shalt have my worship: this was the impious tower of stone she built up to scale Heaven. (86)

Mrs. Clennam here is driven by death imagery. Her face is “inexorable”—as unavoidable as the grave. Her eyes are “severe” and her religious need is represented by “gloom... darkness... cursing, vengeance, and destruction....” Furthermore, her connection to death is solidified figuratively and literally in the final statement: her very intentions have become lifeless “stone...built up to scale Heaven.” She is cold and immovable, but her connection to death makes her power-hungry enough to offer her God the ultimatum “[D]o Thou as I would do, and Thou shalt have my worship...” (86). Her characterization has not merely “transcend[ed]...the most holy”; it has established itself as superior to it.

Aside from this chilling description of Mrs. Clennam's vindictive nature, the description of the contents of the room hints at the feminine emptiness suggested by Jung: "There was the old cellaret, *with nothing in it* ... like a sort of coffin in compartments; there was the old dark closet, *also with nothing in it*, of which [Arthur] had many a time been the sole contents ..." (emphasis added, 72). Even Mrs. Clennam's bedroom is slowly creating a cavity of itself. Arthur enters his mother's "dim bed-chamber, the floor of which [has] gradually so sunk and settled, that the fire-place [is] in a dell" (73). This sinking, empty atmosphere is what associates her with the crone figure. Jung explains various symbols of the crone, and he specifically points out that "... a cave ... a deep well ... the grave," and "the sarcophagus" are all representative of this figure (*Psychological Aspects of the Mother* 333). These symbols represent the coverture—the covering, the hiding—described by Anolik, but Mrs. Clennam surrounds herself with them to create a veritable throne room.

Mrs. Clennam's physical presence couples with her role as vengeful crone/mother perfectly. Physically, she is representative of old age and death, and psychologically, she is the control center of the novel's mystery. She is the force which binds the stories of Arthur Clennam, Little Dorrit, and the menacing Blandois, who seeks to blackmail her with his knowledge of her husband's will. Jung goes on to write, "On the negative side, the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable" (*Psychological Aspects of the Mother* 334). This reads as a description of Mrs. Clennam—her own servant Flintwinch accuses her of "want[ing] to make everything go down before [her] ..." and "want[ing] to swallow up everybody alive" (Dickens 850-

851)—but it also reads as a list of offenses orchestrated by her in regard to Arthur’s true parentage and past. Mrs. Clennam is Jung’s “secret, hidden, dark” mother, and the acts that lead to her secrecy and darkness give the plot its final thrust.

Like Little Dorrit, Mrs. Clennam negates herself in order to establish her personal power. She singlehandedly forces Arthur’s mother to give him up, thus shifting the power from the biological mother to the surrogate, but she confines herself to her disintegrating house in the process. She exiles her husband to China and stays behind to run the family business at home (Dickens 846). Readers are made aware of her power via Arthur. When he first returns to his childhood home, Arthur tells his mother, “... [Y]ou being sole executrix, and having the direction and management of the estate, there remained little business, or I might say none, that I could transact, until you had had time to arrange matters to your satisfaction” (85). Here, the son and heir is waiting upon the mother to use her power. She controls not only the vital information of Arthur’s biological family history, but also the financial and economical prowess of her family business. In order to gain this power, she embraces the role of mother without embracing the dangers of biological motherhood, and she disappears into the shadows of her “gaunt” and “gloomy” home (94). She chooses to remain locked away in this gothic house in a death-like condition for so long, barely moving, that when she finally stands to her feet in a fit of anger near the end of the novel, she causes her two servants and the murderer Rigaud to “f[a]ll back” in amazement, “as if a dead woman had risen” (853). By never bearing a child, Mrs. Clennam breaks the bonds of Wojtczak’s “only correct occupation” for



women; and, by assuming the control of her stolen child and separating from her husband, she unravels Anolik's description of coverture.<sup>7</sup>

The final example of Mrs. Clennam's self-negation is found in the pivotal scenes where she tells Little Dorrit the truth about Arthur's mother and the codicil. Although she had not been outside her house in years, she forces herself to seek out Little Dorrit to disclose the truth before Blandois can. Upon returning to her home, she is nearly crushed as her house splits "asunder in fifty places, collapse[s], and f[alls]" (Dickens 862). At this exact moment, Mrs. Clennam is paralyzed, unable to "move so much as a finger again" or to "speak one word" (862-863). The bitter irony is that Mrs. Clennam, who defied societal expectations in her role as surrogate mother and crone figure, spends the final three years of her life as the personification of Anolik's "abjected" mother (25). The respite readers have is knowing that she drove herself to a physical and mental breakdown in an attempt to hide the truth of Arthur's parentage so that she might retain his respect (870). Furthermore, this notion of respect keeps Mrs. Clennam from appearing entirely villainous. Dickens provides her enough of a backstory to give readers a certain sympathy: through various conversations, readers learn that Mrs. Clennam was brought up in religious fear and terror (843) even worse than that she instilled in her son, and that her arranged marriage was loveless primarily because her husband was still in love with his first wife (859). These stories provide a buffer against Mrs. Clennam's harshness. She is portrayed as a survivor while Rigaud, the male villain, is given no such history. He is presented as a completely flat character who is eventually literally flattened by the falling

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<sup>7</sup> According to Teresa Mangum, Dickens's novel *Dombey and Sons* provides more mothers who are "deeply Other to sentimental portraits of radiant new mothers or reassuring middle-aged mothers" (76). Thus, Mrs. Clennam does not stand alone as the only destructive mother in the queue of Dickensian women; hers is a trope the author has utilized before. Miss Havisham comes to mind as well.

house while Mrs. Clennam's secret knowledge—the seat of her power as crone—leads her to safety before the home can claim her as well. Although she ends in a catatonic state, she still refuses to be covered by anyone (husband or child) or anything (her tomb-like home). Blandois may have forced her hand with his blackmail attempt, but Mrs. Clennam still went out on her own terms: “she lived and died a statue” (Dickens 863).

#### Miss Wade as Warrior

Just as Mrs. Clennam uses her status as a judgmental crone to steal a child in order to become a mother figure, Miss Wade uses her role as the woman warrior of *Little Dorrit* in order to become the mother figure to Tattycoram, the servant of Pet Meagles. According to Anthony Stevens in his analysis of Jungian psychology, “The [warrior] type tends to be independent and self-sufficient...She functions as comrade or competitor rather than wife or mother.” She tends to be “impersonal and objective,” with obvious “masculine overtones. When integrated with the conscious personality [this archetype] can enable a woman to achieve her goals...and individuation.” The dark manifestation of this type, though, “tyrannizes and manipulates her underlings so as to implement her will” (178). When Tattycoram and Miss Wade first interact privately, it is after Miss Wade has found her weeping and railing over the treatment she receives from the Meagleses. Miss Wade approaches her in a motherly fashion at first: “My poor girl,” she says, “what is the matter? ... I am sorry to see you so” (Dickens 64). Tattycoram's reply is to beg the woman to go away, for she is frightened of her. The explanation for this is that “[Miss Wade] seems to come like [Tattycoram's] own anger” and “malice”; this is the third time Miss Wade has found her in such a state (65). Here, Miss Wade is identified as both a caretaker and the embodiment of Tattycoram's own rage. This is a

piece of foreshadowing: later in the novel, readers learn that Miss Wade has beaten her path through life not by the prestige of age like Mrs. Clennam or by allure like Fanny Dorrit but by anger and self-destructive determination. Like Mrs. Clennam, though, Miss Wade's animosity is justified by her history. Her earliest years were spent with a woman she believed to be her grandmother. In actuality, Wade was an orphan and ward of the state who had to find her own way through life (725-727). Readers may not like Miss Wade, but they are certainly intended to sympathize with her. This indicates that Dickens's own loyalties reside with the women, both Clennam and Wade, who made something of themselves despite their beginnings and circumstances.

In Miss Wade's autobiographical chapter, she connects herself to the keen eye associated with a warrior by saying, "I have the misfortune of not being a fool. From a very early age I have detected what those about me thought they hid from me" (725). She also shows her self-reliance by continually finding new positions when her ill-temper makes the previous ones intolerable (730-731). This self-reliance is what makes Tattycoram run to Miss Wade from the Meagleses, but it also creates Miss Wade's dominant position over her. Tattycoram says, "[B]ecause I have nobody but you to look to, you think you are to make me do, or not do, everything you please...[you have] made me [your] dependent. And I know I am so" (724-725). And just how does Miss Wade perpetuate this dominant position? She embraces death, figuratively speaking.

The home to which the two women have escaped is described as "[a] dead sort of house, with a dead wall" and "a dead gateway" with "a pendant bell-handle produc[ing] two dead tinkles, and a knocker produc[ing] a dead, flat, surface-tapping....The door" has a "dead sort of spring" and leads to "a dull yard" with yet another "dead wall" (716).

Miss Wade has figuratively embraced the danger of motherhood by taking refuge in yet another death-like gothic structure, much like Mrs. Clennam did, but she is never put in the actual danger of negation and/or death associated with biological motherhood.

Tattycoram is clearly the child in the relationship, but she also sees in Miss Wade what Jung would call the “shadow self.” According to Jung:

Closer examination of the dark characteristics—that is, the inferiorities constituting the shadow—reveals that they have an *emotional* nature, a kind of autonomy, and accordingly, an obsessive or, better, possessive quality. Emotion, incidentally, is not an activity of the individual but something that happens to him... While some traits peculiar to the shadow can be recognized without too much difficulty as one’s own personal qualities, in this case both insight and good will are unavailing because the cause of the emotion appears to lie, beyond all possibility of doubt, in the *other person*. (“Aion” 91)

This reads like a point-by-point description of Miss Wade’s interactions with those around her. She is highly emotional, yet incapable of finding fault in herself. Trilling describes her by saying, “[S]he refuses to be lovable, she elects to be hateful” (585). She accuses her schoolmates of “patroniz[ing]” her; her life is “made stormy” by her obsession with a young friend; she finds other women just as “plotting” as the young girls; and she feels that the nurse in the house where she is governess is “in constant competition with [her]” (Dickens 726-728). The characteristics associated with a warrior archetype are strength, determination, and self-reliance; Miss Wade takes all of these and turns them into the Jungian shadow version of themselves—dark, emotional, possessive.

At the same time, however, she uses her ill-wrought freedom to bring Tattycoram under her wing. Her independence allows her to become a mother figure while bypassing biological motherhood, and it gives her the opportunity to have an advantage over those around her. When Mr. Meagles goes looking for Blandois's papers, he is informed by Little Dorrit that Miss Wade might have them. These papers contain the truth of Arthur's parentage and the codicil, and Miss Wade refuses to relinquish or acknowledge them as soon as she knows that they are important (874-879). She has come by these papers through her personal interactions with Blandois. She had previously hired him to be a spy (720), thus further demonstrating her own financial independence. Her resistance to turning over the papers puts her in a powerful position; she, however briefly, controls two key plot points—Arthur Clennam's parentage and Little Dorrit's inheritance.

Miss Wade's warrior power is eventually inherited by her protégé. Upon Mr. Meagles's return to the Marshalsea prison, he finds Tattycoram waiting there with the box of papers (879). In this scene, Tattycoram has come to represent the true nature of the warrior archetype. Now, she has shown her independence from both the Meagleses and Miss Wade. She has taken the darker characteristics of her mother figure, Miss Wade, and turned them into something positive. While it is true that she once found the relationship with the Meagleses oppressive, she now returns to it on her own terms, having proven that she could exist outside of it. As any classical warrior/hero would, she has gone on a journey, learned her lesson, and returned home. The fact that she returns bearing the information sought by the other primary characters gives her journey that much more value. She undermines concepts of patriarchal authority and maternal inevitability by making both the choice to leave *and* the choice to return. The implication

for Miss Wade here is that she, too, has undermined these concepts. She has achieved a form of “individuation” with blatant “masculine overtones,” two characteristics Jung associated with the warrior type (Stevens 178), but she has done it as an independent woman. In essence, she has singlehandedly created an heir: someone to carry on her legacy in her absence. In contrast to Mrs. Meagles, whose biological maternal relationship brings nullification to both mother and daughter, Miss Wade exhibits both personal strength and a strength of lineage passed on to Tattycoram.

#### Fanny Dorrit as Seductress

Fanny Dorrit is another character who undermines common Victorian concepts, but she does so through embracing the role of the seductress, a term defined by Stevens as “the opposite pole to the Mother. [The seductress or ‘Love Goddess’] is concerned with getting her man and relating to him at the intensely personal level rather than taking on the social role and responsibilities implicit in becoming a wife and a mother” (178). Readers learn early that Fanny is a dancer (Dickens 112), but a close reading of the text suggests that her employment is less than reputable. Little Dorrit goes to visit her sister, and the door of the theatre where Fanny works is described as “furtive,” having “a curious up-all-night air about it, ...ashamed of itself” and “hiding in an alley” (278). The physical location is hereby personified as some form of nocturnal alley lurker. With the hints of shame and being “up-all-night,” there is a strong connotation of prostitution. This idea is further supported by the “sight of some half-dozen close shaved gentlemen with their hats very strangely on, lurking around the door” (278). Their hats could be askance to hide their identities. Also, the first woman Little Dorrit meets upon entering “the dark hall ... was in such a *tumbled* condition altogether, that it seemed as if it would be an act

of kindness to iron her” (emphasis added, 278). The word *tumble* is often used as a euphemism for sex<sup>8</sup>; therefore, placed in the dark theatre, this minor character can be viewed as a prostitute as well. Fanny is a part of this world, and, upon finding Little Dorrit there, she immediately shows concern: “[W]hatever brought you here?” she asks, and then quickly “conduct[s] her [sister] to a more open part of the maze” in order to remove her from the more sexualized back rooms and corridors “where a quantity of people were tumbling over one another.” It is in this more open and accessible area that Little Dorrit finds more “young ladies want[ing] ironing” (279). These metaphorical prostitutes are Fanny’s contemporaries, and it is Fanny’s role as the archetypal seductress which both compels her to protect Little Dorrit—the novel’s maiden—and leads her to her personal power. This personal power is developed in a theater associated with darkness, shame, and indistinctness: attributes associated with the other death-like structures found in *Little Dorrit*. The difference for Fanny is that this structure puts her in the spotlight rather than hiding her away. This spotlight then acquaints her with her future husband and allows her to move beyond the theater and into the domestic realm with her personal power intact.

Fanny Dorrit’s self-negation is not as overt as the other female characters. She does not physically remove herself as Mrs. Clennam does, nor does she embrace a diminutive stature and status like Little Dorrit or a permanent death-like home like Miss Wade. Instead, she potentially sabotages her chances of ever becoming a wife and mother by associating with the social undesirables found at the theater where she dances. Hers is not a negation of self, per se, but a more nuanced negation of social respectability. The

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<sup>8</sup> According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the earliest use of the term in this sexual context dates to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

irony of her situation is that this negation eventually leads to a higher social standing. Michael Slater echoes Wojtczak's ideas that, for Victorians, the domestic realm was "the right and natural place for a woman" (Slater 339). He explains that prostitutes, however, give up their hopes of ever "becoming a respectable wife and mother" (339). The novel exemplifies this notion with an interaction in chapter 14. When Little Dorrit lingers too long outside of the prison, she is locked out for the night. She and Maggy walk the streets for a while, eventually running into a "young" prostitute. The woman approaches Little Dorrit, asking for a kiss from the "little child." When she realizes that Little Dorrit is an adult, the prostitute "recoils," saying that she "never should have tried to touch [Dorrit]." And then, "with a strange, wild cry," she flees. (Dickens 217-218). The woman is fearful—not of Little Dorrit and Maggy harming her somehow, but of her presence somehow harming them. She asks Little Dorrit if she has a mother or a father; she warns, "[B]e afraid of me" (218). The prostitute appears to fear that Little Dorrit may end up in the same predicament as she, so she commands her to "go home to [her father]" (218). This scene shows the bleak, dejected existence of Victorian prostitutes, who, as related here, knew that their physical presence and interactions with others could taint those others somehow. Thus, through her associations, Fanny has hindered herself from ever becoming an acceptable mother figure.

However, Fanny destroys this notion of social inferiority by using her allure to torture and marry Edmund Sparkler. She becomes his surrogate by mothering him and undermining the authority of his mother, Mrs. Merdle (Dickens 550-552, 648-653). Mrs. Merdle has decided to pretend that she does not know the Dorrits in an attempt to forget that Fanny was a poor dancer before her father's release from prison, so, in retaliation,



Fanny decides to lead on Edmund, Mrs. Merdle's son from a previous marriage (550-551). The first example of this occurs when she and Little Dorrit are on a gondola while Edmund is on another following them. Fanny makes numerous gestures and poses to attract his attention while simultaneously ignoring his existence (549). When questioned by her sister as to whether or not she "mean[s] to encourage Mr. Sparkler," Fanny responds, "Encourage him, my dear?...No, I don't mean to encourage him. But I'll make a slave of him" (551). And she succeeds. The impetus behind her marriage is not love but a specific desire to undermine Edmund's relationship with his biological mother. Fanny specifically says so: "I know that I wish to have a more defined and distinct position," she says, "in which I can assert myself with greater effect against that insolent woman ... I would oppose her in everything, and compete with her, I would make it the business of my life" (649-650). Fanny goes on to say that she wants to be a constant reminder of Mrs. Merdle's age; she is, in essence, placing herself in juxtaposition to the matriarch (650). First through her role as "enchantress" and then through her "imperious self-willed step" (651-654), Fanny gradually reduces Edmund Sparkler to a timid man-child who "scarcely ever spoke without first looking towards [her] for leave" (651-652). This timidity on his part makes Fanny his new mother figure; Edmund has been "wholly absorbed...in her light" (658). This absorption of his identity is tantamount to an impregnation *with* him rather than *by* him, and it is reminiscent of both Anolik's "coverture" and Rogers's "feminized hero." Fanny has effectively defaced and replaced his biological mother. For Fanny, stability comes through embracing her seductive powers, dominating her husband, and destabilizing the potency of her mother-in-law.

Fanny does settle into domesticity in a new home, and she does get pregnant around the same time (Dickens 760), but she refuses to give in to societal expectations of conventional motherhood. Fanny laments her circumstances and views her pregnancy as a stumbling block to her social advancement (Dickens 760), but she still manages to turn the situation in her personal favor; she may not be able to go out to the social gatherings, but she can, through her control of her husband, bring the social situations to her. “I must arrange,” she says, “to have some people or other always here; for I really cannot, and will not, have another such day as this has been” (761). She has so established herself as the dominant figure that all her husband can do is quietly acquiesce to her desires, agreeing to bring people in to her as if they were paying homage to a queen. This is in direct defiance of the expectations of the time. According to Isabella Beeton in *The Book of Household Management*,<sup>9</sup> a Victorian housewife’s “high[est] rank” is to “enter into a knowledge of household duties” (*Book I* 4). Frivolous, multiple attachments to a large variety of people should be avoided; frugality and modesty should be espoused; a husband’s shortcomings should never be mentioned; and the naturally occurring disposition to motherhood should be trusted (*Book I* 81-84, *Book III* 345). Fanny undermines her husband’s authority by ordering him about, and her desire to have “some people or other always here” indicates that she does not care who her associates are, so long as they provide some sort of distraction from her roles as wife and mother.

Fanny’s relationship to her children is mentioned once in the novel’s final paragraph, and it does not paint her in a flattering light. Yet despite this, she still maintains her seductress status. As Little Dorrit and Arthur Clennam leave the church

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<sup>9</sup> Published in book form in 1861, “it has long been regarded as the quintessence of Victorian cookery” and housekeeping in general, with its most recent publication dating to the 1960s (*Book I* 4).

after exchanging vows, they make certain to give their respects “to Fanny’s neglected children” and to Fanny herself, a “lady going into Society forever and a day” (Dickens 895). This final image of the family shows that Fanny, despite having children, has still maintained her social mobility. Her children are neglected as a sacrifice to her personal desires—a direct denial of social expectations—but Fanny has linked her social life to arousal in a previous passage. When she and Edmund discuss Amy coming to live with them, Fanny explains that Amy will need to be “roused” from her melancholia and that the means to produce said arousal is social interaction (761). Thus, by perpetually “going into Society,” Fanny is also perpetually in a state of arousal. She has a husband and children that fulfil her social responsibility, but she still owns her own sensuality.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

The surrogacy undertaken by the women of *Little Dorrit* gives the female characters the best of both worlds. Despite the legal and physical dangers associated with the maternal role, these women are able to employ alternative approaches to maternity and femininity in order to break the confines of their society's gendered expectations. Simultaneously, they utilize the death and nullification concepts associated with marriage and motherhood to achieve power for themselves and provisions for others. The maternal ideal, however, is elusive. While these women do attain power and provisions, the fact that they all must triumph as surrogate mothers rather than biological mothers serves as a testament against the unrealistic demands of motherhood. The burdens of biological motherhood and the opportunities of social mobility and self-empowerment never coincide in *Little Dorrit*. Hence, these women achieve the Victorian maternal ideal through routes of their own choosing—routes that are best understood through the lens of Jungian theory.

For Dickensian readers and researchers, this rerouting accomplishes three tasks. First, it shows Dickens to be a sharp psychological thinker via his analysis of dreams and his characters' synchronicity. Secondly, it reveals a reification of Dickens's personal struggle to meld the world of domesticity he idolized and the independence he craved in his female companions. Finally, it suggests that Dickens's self-proclaimed ideals of femininity may not express the views he portrayed in his writings and his life. These concepts mark Dickens not only as a talented author but also as a prominent figure serving as a segue into both psychological and feminist critical thought.

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