

Bonds that Unite are Bonds that Tie:  
Complications of Altruism and Imprisonment in *Little Dorrit*, *Great Expectations*,  
and *A Tale of Two Cities*  
by  
Carmen Allen



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A thesis presented for the B.A. degree  
with Honors in  
The Department of English  
University of Michigan  
Winter 2013



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For RCP.



## Acknowledgements

This thesis represents a year's worth of research, but in many ways it also signifies the culmination of my past four years at the University of Michigan. After all, my experiences outside of the classroom contributed as much as my classroom study to the topic of this thesis: the intersection of altruism, indebtedness, and imprisonment in the texts of my favorite author, Charles Dickens. These extracurricular experiences gave birth to my fascination with people, a subject to which this thesis largely devotes itself. Yet as the path to this final product was nuanced and twisting, I could not have arrived without the assistance of many mentors and peers. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Daniel Hack, whose patience and extensive knowledge of Dickens have guided me in innumerable ways.

I am also grateful to Kerry Larson for his impeccable feedback and willingness to work through abstract concepts with me. Thanks are also due to several of my former English professors, whose words of encouragement allowed me to embrace this challenge in spite of waning motivation. Jeremiah Chamberlin's praise for my writing inspired me to engage in a substantial production during my final year of study, and conversations with Scott Ellsworth pushed me to pursue the significance of the thesis beyond the scope of literary analysis. Buzz Alexander also encouraged me to consider the relevance of my topic to the social and sociopolitical structures in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

To my friends I owe much gratitude as well. Whether they listened to me talk out my arguments at 2:00 A.M. in the Ugli, bought me Starbucks during stressful weeks, or prayed with me, they significantly decreased my worry over this paper through their encouragement, humor, and provision. In addition, I deeply appreciate my family's continued support for me: my brother's hilarity, my sister's words of affirmation, and my father's verbal recognition that

my English degree will, in fact, carry me far. Many thanks are especially due to my mother, who leads me through my everyday apocalypses and whose love for literature surpasses my own.

Of course I am also indebted, pun intended, to Charles Dickens himself, master of the English language with keen insight into the messiness of relationships. Through my drafting, I have discovered the Lucie Manettes in my life, the Charles Darnays in my relationships, the Arthur Clennam in my actions, and the Miss Havisham in me. After this year of study, I am convinced that *Great Expectations* is one of the greatest pieces of writing in the English canon with his other works close behind, and I am honored to have devoted this time to a love affair with his works.

Above all, I am forever thankful to my Savior, to whose redemptive sacrifice I returned time and again in my analysis of the texts. His grace alone has kept me in the midst of late nights and deadlines, and through His delight I have found joy.

## Abstract

Much criticism of Charles Dickens's mature novels has focused on the relationship between literal and metaphorical modes of confinement and psychological internalization of imprisonment. This thesis seeks to enter the conversation in order to pivot it somewhat, analyzing the relationships in Dickens's texts as the root of the underlying sense of obligation in the novels. For this purpose, the texts under analysis include *Little Dorrit*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Great Expectations*.

In order to examine the function and effects of relationships, the thesis has identified a three-part character set that acts as a trope throughout the novels. The set includes a prisoner, a donor whose act of service or payment releases the prisoner from literal or psychological incarceration, and an influencer who causes the donor to perform such an altruistic action. Over the course of three chapters, the thesis analyzes the donors' motives in providing aid to the prisoners by calling attention to the donors' relationships with their respective influencers, the ramifications of the donors' provision, and the question of autonomy each character faces.

By using the character sets as a foundation, the thesis seeks to show how the underlying sense of imprisonment identified in previous criticism stems from feelings of indebtedness toward a person or system. Therefore, the thesis places the character sets in the context of other relationships in the novel as well as social demands. Both of these contexts reveal the transactional nature of the characters' relationships, comprised of toxic exchanges of vulnerability and power, as well as the futility of individuals' resistance to their role as a member of the collective. Rooted in guilt, feelings of inadequacy, and interdependence, altruistic relationships in the three novels provide a new framework for viewing the complex character webs in Dickens's mature novels, the relationship between the individual and the collective, and character patterns in his writing as a whole.



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## INTRODUCTION

Often characterized by an underlying sense of imprisonment, many of Charles Dickens's mature novels have received significant criticism regarding the function of captivity and incarceration in the texts. Certainly the syntax of the novels contribute to the dismal portraits Dickens paints in these works, but the deep-seated despair, suffering, and above all, confinement emerge from the characters whose fates are shaped by their interactions with other characters in the novels. By driving the plots of the various narratives, these relationships create the sense of imprisonment that permeates the texts but have garnered little attention as a focal point of discussion on the topic.

Ideas of imprisonment in the novels have stretched over 150 years of criticism, beginning soon after the books' publication. Early responses to Dickens's writings, such as Alfred Trumble's *In Jail with Charles Dickens* (1896), addressed the overarching sense of imprisonment by pointing to the prison itself, emphasizing the structure and history of the literal facilities he referenced: the Marshalsea in *Little Dorrit*, the infamous Newgate prison in *Great Expectations*, and the French Bastille in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Comparing the role of the prison in Dickens's fiction next to his representation of the institution in his journal, *Household Words*, early critics from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often credited Dickens's father for the author's use of the prison. As a prisoner in the Marshalsea debtors' prison and responsible for Charles's dismal upbringing, John Dickens no doubt significantly impacted his son's subject matter. Such historicist approaches to Dickens generally confined their interpretation of the prison in his works to a biography-centered analysis, claiming that the theme of imprisonment stemmed from Dickens's own torment over his lost youth. As

such, their analysis highlighted Dickens's own reality in Victorian England: the deep consequences from the state for crime, particularly debt.

Over time, however, the role of imprisonment was seen to possess a significance that transcended Dickens's childhood. Employing a metaphorical approach, critics began focusing their analysis on the role of Victorian social control in inducing characters into modes of imprisonment. Their interpretation claims that society itself is the prison, as H.M. Daleski expands upon in his book, *Dickens and the Art of Analogy*. Referring to *Little Dorrit*'s bureaucratic, public Circumlocution Office that only demonstrates "how not to do it" through its inefficiency, Daleski writes, "The name of the office suggests not only the evasiveness of its techniques but the endless round to which its petitioners are condemned, like the unchanging streets in which Londoners are imprisoned; in its failure to do 'whatever [is] required to be done,' it is the very model of paralysis" (198). Daleski and critics parallel social regulation to literal facilities in order to highlight its impact.

Symbolic interpretations of the prison gained popularity with the publication of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, in which the French theorist popularized Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. Designed as a building of surveillance in which a prison guard would stand in a middle tower and could theoretically watch any given prisoner at any given moment without his knowing it, the Panopticon existed to impose upon inmates a feeling of constant surveillance. Throughout his text, Foucault turns the Panopticon into a metaphor for surveillance and social control under an institution. Since Foucault's entry to the world of criticism, much analysis has been devoted to various applications of the Panopticon to Dickens's and other Victorian texts, most notably by D.A. Miller in his book *The Novel and the Police*.

While society and the metaphorical certainly play a critical role in any exploration of imprisonment in *Little Dorrit*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*, this paper favors a more nuanced approach to social bondage by examining the impact of specific relationships at work in the novels. After all, the relationships that make Dickens notorious for his complicated plot webs stand responsible for motivations and actions behind imprisonment in the first place. Long limited to the relationship between government and incarceration facilities or metaphors of confinement, discourse on imprisonment in Dickens has failed to analyze how his characters create and propel the underlying forces of social obligation in his texts.

Certainly the characters inside the literal facilities, such as the Newgate and the Marshalsea, remain subject to the demands of the state. Yet characters outside of the facilities demonstrate the same sense of obligation, either to a system or an individual, as the prisoners inside literal walls. Therefore, an examination of social control and imprisonment in Dickens remains incomplete if it does not recognize how relationships in Dickens reflect the characters' obligations to others. Whether obligated to individuals or systems of social control, characters become indebted to the forces of power over them, all manifested in the relationships in the texts.

Over the course of the next few chapters, this paper will examine the role of indebtedness through a pattern of character sets in *Little Dorrit*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*. In each of these texts, Dickens presents a three-member character set that mimics a basic prototype; each set contains a prisoner, a donor, and an influencer. In these texts, the prisoner is freed from confinement or obligation through the support of a donor. For the purpose of this paper, the term "donor" encompasses benefactors, altruists, and supporters

with a unique interest in the welfare of an individual. The term comes from Vladimir Propp's use of the word to describe a provider for the hero. In *The Morphology of the Folk Tale*, Propp writes, "It is from [the donor] that the hero . . . obtains some agent (usually magical) which permits the eventual liquidation of misfortune" (Propp 23). While the role of the donor differs somewhat from Propp's interpretation due to the dissimilarities between Dickensian writing and the folk tale, the idea of the donor as a provider is an important quality of Dickens's characters. For the purpose of the character sets, donors also possess an intentional, continued means of support that they deliver to their respective individuals to promote his or her welfare. As the paper progresses, the reader will understand how each donor intentionally responds to the needs of a prisoner rather than reacting to happenstance. The donor's support remains sustained over an extended period of time rather than dissolving after a single instance. Yet rather than free the prisoner from obligation, the donor only transfers the prisoner's indebtedness from one system or individual to another. Likewise, the donor's own sense of indebtedness plays a crucial role in his supporting actions.

Each character set also presents an influencer, whose role in the donor's life causes her to initially support the prisoner. While the individual cases surrounding the influencers vary in each of the novels, the influencer significantly impacts the donor. In fact, all three character sets showcase the influencer's relationship to the donor as the primary reason for the donor's aid to the prisoner.

*Little Dorrit* tells the story of the Dorrit family, locked in the Marshalsea debtors' prison for twenty-some years because of William Dorrit's failure to pay his debts. Businessman Arthur Clennam, believing his family is somehow responsible for the Dorrits' demise but ignorant of any specific evidence, researches the family's affairs and discovers a

hidden inheritance that releases them from prison and introduces them to English high society. Yet the family's new social role distresses Mr. Dorrit's daughter, Amy, more than her lifelong internment in the Marshalsea prior to her release. In the novel, the role of the prisoner rests in none other than the Dorrit family, particularly Amy. While the reader can credit Clennam's attraction to Amy Dorrit for his willingness to so significantly assist the family as the novel's donor, the primary reason for his investigation stems from his suspicion that his mother, the influencer, is somehow responsible for the Dorrits' ruin, and Clennam seeks absolution for his mother's sin through his aid.

In *Great Expectations*, young Pip, raised by his sister and her blacksmith husband, receives the opportunity to learn how to become a gentleman from a wealthy woman named Miss Havisham at her mansion, Satis House. Soon after, he receives an inheritance from a mysterious benefactor whom he believes is Miss Havisham but who turns out to be Magwitch, a convict the boy helped years earlier. Prior to any knowledge of his benefactor, Pip enters British society, hoping to someday win the love of Miss Havisham's beautiful but cruel ward, Estella. His great expectations drive him into financial and emotional ruin. Rather than suffer behind literal bars, Pip finds himself imprisoned by the social caste system and lack of opportunities of the time<sup>1</sup>. Just as Clennam's support of the Dorrits stems from their clandestine connection to his family's sins, Magwitch's patronage of Pip emerges from his inability to provide for his unknown daughter (whom Pip later discovers is Estella).

*A Tale of Two Cities*, the final book under examination, details the account of Charles Darnay, heir to the hated Marquis but masquerading under a common name to hide his identity in the heart of the French Revolution. Over the course of the story, Darnay's love and

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<sup>1</sup> Pip's role as a prisoner will undergo further analysis in chapter one.

later wife, Lucie Manette, befriends the drunken lawyer Sydney Carton. When the revolutionaries discover Darnay's identity and sentence him to death at the guillotine, Carton sacrifices his life for Darnay's freedom by pretending to be the latter and replacing him. Yet Carton makes his fatal sacrifice on behalf of Darnay's wife and Carton's love interest Lucie, for whom Carton once promised he would do anything, even if it meant death.

As this paper explores the relationships among the characters in the sets, it will reveal how indebtedness becomes increasingly significant as different facets of the sets are analyzed. In doing so, it seeks to understand the nature and extent of characters' obligation to each other. Beginning with an investigation of the donor's motives for providing aid, the first chapter will attend to the self-perception (acknowledged or ignored) of the donor. In chapter two, the thesis will identify how the ramifications of the donors' aid to the prisoners encompasses both the donors' and reader's perceptions of others. Finally, the third chapter will examine the perpetual indebtedness among characters, even beyond the character sets, under a larger social structure.

Understanding the role of indebtedness in these three texts remains important because it calls for a new conversation on the intersection of two age-old themes: imprisonment in Dickens and social control in Victorian society. Aside from fundamentally providing a general analytical structure, the character sets that span the three novels signify the tension between the individual and the collective with regard to indebtedness to another; likewise, the character sets are analyzed in light of a Society<sup>2</sup> that claims the role as the major debt collector in Dickens. Society particularly interests itself in its ability to influence through

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<sup>2</sup> Over the course of this essay, Society will appear with a capital S as a representation of the figure Society in *Little Dorrit*. Society's role in the novel parallels the relationship between the characters and social expectations or aspirations in *Great Expectations* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, and as the paper progresses, the reader will understand how Society acts as a character as much as it does a code.

subtle forms of control. As Foucault introduced in *Discipline and Punish*, the Panopticon's role in Victorian literature rests primarily as a form of surveillance. In Foucault's own words, "the major effect of the Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (201). Thus, in assuming a panoptical role throughout the novels, Society influences power dynamics among the identified character sets and, inadvertently, among all characters in the novels. By viewing Society's role and influence through the character sets, the reader will discover how obligation functions on an intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal level as well as how indebtedness to another individual or system induces the sense of imprisonment in the novels through the reality of the characters' relationships.

## CHAPTER ONE

### BEHIND THE AID: A CLOSER LOOK AT MOTIVATION

#### I. The Role of the Donor

So far, this thesis has established the tri-part character sets evident in *Little Dorrit*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Over the next few chapters, the significance of Society's role regarding the donors' decisions will develop. This chapter will begin the study of indebtedness by elaborating on the role of the donor in the character sets. In doing so, it will provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex motives and circumstances driving their actions.

The role of the donor in *Great Expectations* has been discussed in Bruce Robbins's essay, "How to Be a Benefactor Without Any Money," and a number of the concepts he addresses applies to the character sets in *Little Dorrit* and *A Tale of Two Cities* as well. Though largely focused on the donor's role in separating the domestic sphere from the non-domestic through his or her support for the protagonist, Robbins's essay notes the complications behind the donors' provisions for other characters. Likewise, Robbins's interest in the donor remains primarily centered on his or her promotion of the social welfare state through upward mobility. Even so, this thesis recognizes that in implementing social mobility, donors aim to satisfy a debt and therefore release the prisoner from bondage.

Robbins's emphasis on the nondomestic sphere holds some significance in examining the role of the donor. All three novels, after all, show the donor filling a need that the prisoners' families can in no way satisfy. In fact, each prisoner's familial relations are responsible in one way or another for his or her situation. Amy Dorrit's literal imprisonment

in the debtor's prison is due to her father's failure to pay the state. Likewise, Pip's obsession with becoming a gentleman begins before the arrival of his benefactor's gift, in his first visits to Satis House<sup>3</sup>. Pip's experiences at Satis House introduce him to the glaring reality of class distinctions, primarily through Estella's incessant insults about his stupidity and his class. As time progresses, he grows increasingly tormented over the social status that separates them as well as increasingly bitter toward Joe and Mrs. Joe for their positions in the laboring class. One day, upon returning from Satis House, he says, "When I got into my little bedroom I was truly wretched, and had a strong conviction on me that I should never like Joe's trade. I had liked it once, but once was not now" (Dickens *Great* 113). Recognizing the transformation that is happening in him, Pip's gradual separation from his family only grows easier when he receives his mysterious bequest from Magwitch. Even Darnay can credit his ancestor's sins for his imprisonment in the Bastille.

Robbins recognizes that the benefactors in *Great Expectations* have a stake in the upward mobility of the protagonist. He writes, "Benefactors, donors, patrons, responsible for managing and conveying the meaning of upward mobility . . . occupy the true extrafamilial center of a narrative that aims beyond the reproduction of the status quo" (Robbins 175). This insight also applies to the donors in *Little Dorrit* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, for the donors' interest in their respective prisoners always returns to advancing the prisoners' position, most fundamentally through an introduction or reintroduction into society.

The donors' support impacts the recipient more significantly than one might initially believe. Whether releasing the prisoner from the debtors' prison, like Clennam; rescuing the prisoner from social nonexistence, like Magwitch; or sparing the prisoner from death, like

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<sup>3</sup> Satis House is the home of Miss Havisham, who "educates" Pip to want to become a gentleman.

Sydney, the donors offer a significant payment, monetary or otherwise, in order to release the prisoners from bondage. The role of the donor suggests an importance that a first reading of each novel may not provide, namely, according to Robbins, that “the center of the narrative of social mobility is no longer the protagonists at all, but rather the mentor or donor or benefactor” (Robbins 181).

Robbins’s emphasis on social mobility holds a crucial role in understanding the part each donor plays because it provides a more comprehensive view of how imprisonment functions as a form of indebtedness in the novel. Certainly the allure of Society drives both the prisoners’ desires and the donors’ actions. Quoting critic Fredric Jameson’s thoughts on the donor in literature, Robbins writes, “The donor is . . . the element which explains the change described in the story, that which supplies a sufficiently asymmetrical force to make it interesting to tell, and which is therefore somehow responsible for the ‘storiness’ of the story in the first place” (Robbins 177). Jameson is right to recognize the importance of the donor. Yet analyzed in light of the social mobility narrative, the donor plays the puppet to a greater force that will unfold in the following sections: that of Society itself.

## **II. The Motives of the Donor**

Examination of the donor’s actions may cause the reader to question the motives behind them. In his essay, “Charles Dickens,” Orwell speaks of Dickens’s “good rich man,” a character type that spans several of his novels, as “a superhumanly kind-hearted old gentleman who ‘trots’ to and fro, raising his employees’ wages, patting children on the head, getting debtors out of jail and in general, acting the fairy godmother” (Orwell 6). Orwell cites characters from Dickens’s “early optimistic period,” such as Pickwick, Cheerybles, and

Scrooge. Although he concedes that the “good rich man” does not appear to the same extent, if at all, in *Little Dorrit*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*, the same “pure dream figure” makes an appearance through the donors. Perhaps it is because the donor is defined by his demons rather than his wealth that Orwell does not classify him as a “pure dream figure,” but the donors’ willingness to offer significant provision to other characters remains the same. In fact, each donor’s ability to provide for an all-encompassing need of the prisoner may appear to echo the *deus ex machina* of the novels with Orwell’s self-identified “good rich men.”

For this reason, understanding the circumstances and motives surrounding the actions of the donor remains crucial. It is a question Robbins himself poses, however briefly, in his own analysis of benefactors: “*Why* should the benefactors offer their assistance? What fissure or contradiction do their mixed, uncertain, perhaps not altruistic motives open up in the powers that be?” (Robbins 181). It is a question that demands further examination of Society’s stake in the donors’ decisions. And it is precisely the question that legitimizes a comparison of the character sets in the three novels because its answer allows the reader to weave together the parallels among Dickens’s works by refusing to take salvation-oriented plot twists for granted.

Robbins questions the motives of Dickens’s benefactors by calling attention to the secrecy surrounding their actions. Speaking particularly of the peculiar situation in *Great Expectations*, he writes, “Magwitch’s benefaction has taken the form of an interdiction – thou must not ask where the money comes from” (183). Although the secrecy behind the means of support manifests itself differently in each novel, the donors all mask their work from the prisoners they support.

As evidenced by Robbins's comment, Magwitch stands as the most prominent example, using Jagers to deliver his money to Pip in order to conceal his identity. Moreover, the sacrifices he makes in order to provide for Pip deserve some recognition. When he arrives at Pip's London home years after first meeting him on the marshes, he describes some of them: "I've put away money, only for you to spend. When I was a hired-out shepherd in a solitary hut, not seeing no faces but faces of sheep till I half forgot wot men's and women's faces was like, I see yourn" (Dickens *Great* 298). By showing up in London, the city in which he was condemned to capital punishment, Magwitch faces the considerable risk of meeting Compeyson, his partner in crime who betrayed him years earlier. Magwitch's willingness to provide for Pip and risk his life to reunite with him has serious implications. As Magwitch's story unfolds over the course of the novel, the motives behind his clandestine methods become clearer, and the following sections will explore their significance.

Similarly, when Carton appears in the Bastille to claim his place as Darnay's substitution, he embraces extreme measures in order to secure Darnay's freedom while providing vague reasons for his actions, even drugging Darnay to remove him from the Bastille and dictating his explanation through a letter rather than telling Darnay directly. In reality, Carton's letter addresses Lucie as he cites a prior conversation with her: "If you remember the words that passed between us, long ago, you will readily comprehend this when you see it . . . I am thankful that the time has come when I can prove them" (Dickens *Tale* 356-7). Only at the end of the novel, in Carton's final speech, does the reader grasp a more comprehensive understanding of the motives behind such a large sacrifice.

Although Clennam's circumstances do not involve the violence and risk that characterize Magwitch and Carton's accounts, his insistence on minimizing his assistance to

the Dorrit family through his humility allows him to mask his reasons for helping them. Certainly a portion of his help is driven by his attraction to Amy. Yet one must take into account the way Clennam consistently diverts attention from himself and most noticeably back onto Amy. When she idolizes him for his goodness, he responds with praise. The diversions may initially seem no more than the humility harbored by a kind man, but as this next section will show, a closer reading of Arthur's situation suggests otherwise.

### III. The Role of the Influencer

The secrecy behind the donors' support is due largely to an influence of which the recipients are unaware for the majority of the novel. In the three character sets, after all, the donor acts because of an influencer in his life. As with the actions themselves, the influence manifests itself in different variations. All three donors, however, can credit the influencer for inducing a common feeling: guilt.

Guilt appears in both a legal and psychological sense<sup>4</sup> in *A Tale of Two Cities*, in which Carton, in literally substituting for Darnay to meet Sainte Guillotine, struggles with his conviction about his wasted life. In addition, he allows Society, depicted through the revolutionary mob, to identify him as a criminal because the revolutionaries have branded Darnay as such. Even so, Carton's decision for Darnay holds very serious ramifications. By exchanging clothes with his look-alike, Carton never lets anyone know of his noble sacrifice and only pretends to become the man he has idolized over the course of the novel. Consider his words at the beginning of the book, in which he reflects on his opinion of Darnay. He tells himself, "A good reason for talking to a man, that he shows you what you have fallen away

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<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this paper, legal guilt refers to the branding one receives following a criminal law proceeding, however rudimentary, while psychological guilt refers to one's internalization of guilt.

from, and what you might have been! Change places with him, and would you have been looked at by those blue eyes as he was, and commiserated by that agitated face as he was?” (Dickens *Tale* 85). Of course Carton is referring to the eyes of Lucie, Darnay’s later-wife, idealizing both Darnay as a man and his situation. In looking at Darnay, Carton identifies the self he could have been.

This reflection makes his sacrifice at the end of the novel all the more significant because it changes his mindset from a forlornness over his deteriorated self to a resolve to become that man again through an act of nobility. Directly responsible for that change, Lucie Manette extends such compassion to Carton that he tells her, “It is useless to say it, I know, but it rises out of my soul. For you, and for any dear to you, I would do anything. If my career were of that better kind that there was any opportunity or capacity of sacrifice in it, I would embrace any sacrifice for you and for those dear to you” (Dickens *Tale* 154). When the opportunity finally arises to save Darnay from the mob by taking his place, Carton of course follows through on his promise. In doing so, Carton recognizes the nobility of his sacrifice even if his initial feelings for Lucie were arduous. His final words evidence his transformation: “It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go than I have ever known” (382). Indeed, in taking the place of Darnay, he does in fact become the embodiment of the very man he idolizes.

Lucie’s role in Carton’s final moments deserves particular attention. Although she is not present at the point of the switch, her compassion for Carton, especially following his drunken confession and promise to her, causes her to tell Darnay, “I would ask you, dearest, to be very generous with him always, and very lenient on his faults when he is not by. I would ask you to believe that he has a heart he very, very seldom reveals, and that there are

deep wounds in it. My dear, I have seen it bleeding” (210). The great irony rests in the fact that Darnay actually remembers everyone except Carton in the moments before his rescue, as Dickens relays to the reader in the brusque sentence, “He never thought of Carton” (353). Darnay’s failure to recognize Carton in the moments before his arrival heightens the nobility of Carton’s action and demonstrates Lucie’s ability to quietly incite reform within him. For Carton, the reform appears through his sacrifice and the change of heart it represents. Demonstrated through her care for her unstable father as well as her kind words to Carton, Lucie’s character propels him to change his own.

The representation of the donor’s legal guilt is most prominent in *Great Expectations* as Magwitch’s identity as a criminal dictates the course of the novel. In many ways, Magwitch seeks absolution not for his lifestyle or his crimes but for his branding and subsequent inability to climb the social ladder. His recognition of his permanent status emerges when he tells Pip his story, saying, “Muzzled I have been since that half a minute when I was betrayed into lowness, muzzled I am at the present time, muzzled I ever will be” (Dickens *Great* 314). Magwitch’s conversations with Pip allow the reader to see the revenge driving his actions, as he explains: “And then, dear boy, it was a recompense to me, look’ee here, to know in secret that I was making a gentleman. The blood horses of them colonists might fling up the dust over me as I was walking; what do I say? I says to myself, ‘I’m making a better gentleman nor ever *you’ll* be!’” (299). For the convict, the ability to essentially own a gentleman outweighs the cost of never attaining such a level himself on his own scales of justification.

Even so, one can make a case for the psychological guilt that influences the convict as well. On a fundamental level, Magwitch claims to have chosen Pip as his beneficiary because

“you acted noble, my boy . . . and I have never forgot it!” (Dickens *Tale* 294). Yet just as with Carton, the effect of an influencer cannot remain unnoticed. For Magwitch, the influence of the third figure, his unknown daughter Estella, stems from her absence rather than her presence. Believing his daughter to be dead, Magwitch does not disclose the information to Pip when he tells him his story. The guilt he feels regarding his wife and daughter, however, emerges through his evasion of the topic. Lost in his story, he suddenly declares, “My Missis as I had the hard time wi’ – Stop though! I ain’t brought *her* in –” (322). Only later does Magwitch reveal more about his past to Pip’s roommate, Herbert, particularly that his wife was acquitted for murdering a woman of whom she was jealous. According to Herbert, ““This acquitted young woman and Provis<sup>5</sup> had a little child: a little child of whom Provis was exceedingly fond . . . The young woman presented herself before Provis for one moment, and swore that she would destroy the child . . . and he should never see it again; then, she vanished” (371). Although Pip knows that this daughter, Estella, was taken as Miss Havisham’s ward and not actually destroyed, Magwitch had no way of knowing as he never saw his wife or daughter again. Magwitch’s long-lost daughter would make the ideal recipient had he believed her to be alive. Instead, he chooses Pip because of the boy’s fear-induced act of kindness to him in the marshes. In many ways, Magwitch substitutes Pip for his daughter, taking pride in his rise through society in order to live vicariously through him and even planning on moving in with the young man upon the convict’s return from Australia. Estella’s gaping absence in Magwitch’s life significantly impacts his choice to assist the young boy, and one can see through the convict’s actions that his support is a deliberate response to his own feelings of inadequacy as a provider.

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<sup>5</sup> When Magwitch arrives in London, he takes the name Provis as an alias.

By far the most obvious example of psychological guilt festers in Arthur Clennam, who experiences guilt without even knowing the sin behind it. Upon returning to London after his travels, Clennam arrives at his mother's home with the haunting suspicion that the family holds very grave secrets. He implores Mrs. Clennam,

“If reparation can be made to anyone, if restitution can be made to anyone, let us know it and make it. Nay, mother, if within my means, let *me* make it. I have seen so little happiness come of money . . . . 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” (Dickens *Little* 52).

Of course, Arthur's suspicions stem from little more than fragmented evidence, mainly his father's watch with the inscription, “Do Not Forget” and his mother's unwillingness to disclose information about its meaning. Yet Arthur also possesses some vague knowledge of his parents' business practices from childhood recollections, a more subtle force behind his qualms than the secrets.

Indeed, Mrs. Clennam's role in driving Arthur to help the Dorrits only increases as Arthur's fascination with Amy grows. Reflecting on Amy's daytime employment as a maid at the Clennam home, he muses,

What if his mother had an old reason she well knew for softening to this poor girl!  
 What if the prisoner now sleeping quietly – Heaven grant it! By the light of the great Day of Judgment should trace back his fall to her! What if any act of hers, and of his father's, should have even remotely brought the grey heads of those two brothers so low! A swift thought shot into his mind. In that long imprisonment here, and in her

own long confinement to her room, did his mother find a balance to be struck?

(Dickens *Little* 93)

Of course it is Arthur who finds the balance to be struck by attempting to absolve himself of his family's sins in spite of his ignorance of them. Dickens draws masterfully on Arthur's internalization of guilt, presenting an underlying motif that extends throughout the novel. Since Mrs. Clennam refuses to offer Arthur the information he solicits, he is left to create his own explanation for family secrets and responds accordingly.

Yet the family secrets that propel him to help the Dorrits hang over him. Dickens describes the torment that causes Arthur to look up the Dorrits' affairs in the Circumlocution Office: "When he awoke, and sprang up causelessly frightened, the words were in his ears, as if her voice had slowly spoken them at his pillow, to break his rest." At this point, Arthur is haunted by the echo of his mother's words: "He withers away in his prison; I wither away in mine; inexorable justice is done; what do I owe on this score!" (Dickens 93). With this same urgency Clennam pursues both the answers to his questions about the Dorrits' affairs and his attempts to cultivate himself as a moral man, further distinguishing himself from his perception of his parents' business long after the Dorrits have received their inheritance. Over the course of the novel, Clennam likewise returns to thoughts of his "harsh" upbringing under his stern, Calvinist mother. His desire to cultivate goodness stems not from reflections of goodness in the world as a whole but from a recognition of the misery produced by the austerity of his mother's hand.

#### **IV. Social Acceptance and the Demand for Restitution**

Behind each of these instances rests a more powerful influence than the influencers. To understand it, the reader must first consider the social implications of the character sets. In desiring absolution, after all, the donors attempt to find it by satisfying the social debt of the recipients. In both *Great Expectations* and *Little Dorrit*, the benefaction delivered is largely financial as well, but all three instances involve an introduction or reintroduction into social acceptance. Robbins identifies Society's role in *Great Expectations*, writing, "It is the state, of course, that defines Magwitch as a criminal and deals with him accordingly" (179). The state acts on behalf of the people, and Society, the organization of the people, responds by branding convicts like Magwitch outside of Newgate. Society also represents the larger social structure at play: the strict hierarchy that rules all three novels, even when manifested as mob reign.

Upon an initial reading of the three novels, the reader might believe the social systems contain too many differences to undergo the umbrella branding of Society. Yet closer analysis shows that in spite of the different manifestations of the systems, they all possess the qualities of a governing body useful for understanding Society in this paper. In all three novels, the form of Society that influences the characters dictates the community's social norms. In *Little Dorrit*, this power exists in English high society because this elite group possesses the most social power over the characters. *Great Expectations* witnesses the same power in the English government as well as the underlying class system, whose identities grow less distinct as the novel progresses, particularly when the reader follows Magwitch's story. Meanwhile, the mob rule in *A Tale of Two Cities* may have emerged as a response to the tyrannical monarchy, but the cruel yet organized system behind characters like Madame DeFarge and the Vengeance retains the real power over the characters' fates.

Above all, all three forms of Society demand restitution for the mistakes the recipients have made or the inadequacies that prevent them from achieving social mobility. Pip's narrative largely demonstrates his insecurity about his inadequacies, depicted through the expectations he develops when his time with Miss Havisham begins, all a reflection of the class system that determines his status. The other two recipients face perhaps graver stakes: Amy is born and raised in the Marshalsea, forced to carry the stigma of belonging to the institution because of her father's inability to pay his debts while Darnay must shed his blood to satiate the revolution's fury over his father and uncle's sins.

The donors' willingness to satisfy the debts of their recipients can be understood through Rene Girard's collective violence and scapegoat theories, described in his book *The Scapegoat*. The book analyzes various myths under the idea that societies collectively attribute blame to a scapegoat to justify collective violence. In his description of scapegoating, Girard explains that victims of persecution are chosen "because they bear the signs of victims" through some vulnerability or weakness (Girard *Scapegoat* 21). Likewise, those who speak against the majority are more likely to be targeted in the future (20).

In addition to their branding as scapegoats, all three donors internalize their identity as social outcasts, and this internalization causes them to act on behalf of the recipients in their lives. Such a reading of Dickens demands its interpretation as a "text of persecution" (e.g. Girard 24), and while the novels do not all depict bloodshed, the social persecution runs rampant. Of course the most graphic example rests in *A Tale of Two Cities*, in which the revolutionaries demand Darnay's blood upon learning the truth about his ancestors. Dickens writes, "A terrible sound arose when the reading of this document was done. A sound of craving and eagerness that had nothing articulate in it but blood. The narrative called up the

most revengeful passions of the time, and there was not a head in the nation but must have dropped before it” (Dickens *Tale* 337). Even Mrs. Merdle’s portrayal of Society remains equally ruthless, declaring that men “must place themselves in a better position towards Society by marriage, or Society really will not have any patience with their making fools of themselves” (Dickens *Little* 400). In addition, Magwitch fully understands the extent of his branding, as previously mentioned when he tells his story to Pip and Herbert.

Although Society’s role may be well understood, the scapegoating of the donors is equally evident. The donors all embrace their identities as social outcasts: Magwitch and Carton are branded as social scapegoats, Magwitch for his criminal activity and Carton for his identity as a drunken bum (e.g. 85), while Clennam chooses to become a scapegoat in his anxiety over his father’s sins and subsequent willingness to make reparation (e.g. 51). Therefore, when Society demands restitution from the recipients, the donors are willing to pay because they value the price of social acceptance. Yet it is the recipient that reaps the rewards of social acceptance, not the donors. Rather, the donors value absolution that will return them to their own freedom of conscience rather than social standing. In their willingness to pay for the inadequacies of the prisoners, they are absolving themselves of their own sins.

Up to this point, the study of indebtedness has focused primarily on the relationships among individuals. Yet controlling each of the individuals’ actions, however subtly, is the pressure from Society itself. By recognizing the social control that generates the actions of the characters, one must take into account the implications of Foucault’s Panopticon as a source of surveillance and regulation. In his essay, “Prison-bound: Dickens and Foucault,” Jeremy Tambling argues that the confessional language of *Great Expectations* evidences the power of the Panopticon in procuring a confession from a guilty narrator, in this case Pip.

The Panopticon accomplishes its acquisition through the control of language (Tambling 15), allowing the prison to exist as an “inherently oppressive” force. As a result of the novel’s emphasis on imprisonment, characters are divided among the oppressors and oppressed (17), and through the characters’ identification in terms of the carceral, guilt develops (19).

Tambling writes, “That guilt-fixing belongs to Foucault’s Panopticon society, and indeed the sense of being looked at is pervasive” (19). Tambling identifies the power of the Panopticon as a social force, but his reduction of its impact to confessional language limits the power it holds over other areas of the characters.

Surely Tambling recognizes the Panopticon’s effect on the characters’ identity, for he writes, “Identities all become a matter of social control and naming” (20). Yet he confines his discussion to Pip’s criminal identity rather than extending his discussion to the social implications of that identity. This is where the character sets across the three novels play a crucial role, for all three sets detect the Panopticon-induced actions of the donor on behalf of the prisoner in creating an identity. Since Tambling spends very little time referencing Magwitch, he loses a valuable opportunity to explore how social orders induce him, not just Pip, into confession. As a result, he minimizes his analysis to the impact of the Panopticon on language instead of recognizing how the characters’ language evidences their future actions. By restricting the discourse of confession to Pip’s experience, Tambling ignores the opportunity to explore the parallels between Magwitch’s guilt and Pip’s. Driven by his haunted memories, Magwitch’s willingness to step into the role of benefactor is less generous than it is self-cleansing. By providing for Pip, Magwitch not only inserts him into his daughter’s position but also lives vicariously through Pip’s actions. Similarly, Clennam and Carton perform their service or provide their payment with a keen awareness of the

ramifications of societal approval. Both donors also recognize that in releasing their respective recipients into a higher rung on the social ladder, the social control does not lessen.

Yet Tambling is clear to draw the parallel between the Panopticon and Society, and it is this parallel that will lay the foundation for greater discussion of the guilt-induced action in this paper. Tambling writes, “*Great Expectations* comes close to suggesting that in an understanding of a society, the concept of the individual is unhelpful, that what is important are the total manipulations of power and language by whatever group has the power of definition and control”<sup>6</sup> (26). Beyond *Great Expectations* and Magwitch’s role as the individual separated from Society because of his criminal history, the donors in the other novels, Clennam and Carton, experience the same social control that forces them to identify as an outcast. All three donors feel the brunt of their identity as social outcasts as well as the pull from their respective Society as a whole. In addition to identifying the donors’ relationships to the prisoners they assist, the following chapter will explore the donors’ relationships to Society and to the recipients of their aid. In all three cases, the Panopticon-induced confession, driven by Society’s demands for social control, instills deep guilt in the donors that Tambling identifies within Pip. By viewing the novels in light of Girard’s theory, readers can see how the donors’ guilt leads them to confess not through discourse but through their actions.

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<sup>6</sup> The power of definition and control belongs to the social governing bodies in *Little Dorrit* and *A Tale of Two Cities* as well.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RAMIFICATIONS OF THE DONORS' AID

#### I. Displacement in *Little Dorrit*

The desire for absolution permeates all three texts because it drives the donors' support and calls into question the altruism of their actions. To absolve themselves, the donors provide payment or service for their family's or their own sins, but they also seek reconciliation by attempting to distance themselves from aspects of their identity that bring them discomfort. In "The Displacements of *Little Dorrit*," Rodney Edgecombe identifies the various ways the characters in the novel displace themselves from their identity and fill it with something else. As this chapter progresses, it will expand on Edgecombe's ideas of displacement to show how the donors who displace their identities affect both themselves and the prisoners they aid. Referring to Clennam, Edgecombe writes, "Just as Little Dorrit empties her personality and refills it with service, so he displaces *his* own self, and lets 'Nobody' transact his emotional life" (Edgecombe 374). Clennam's separation from himself begins one evening after dining with the Meagles when he "made up his mind that he was glad he had resolved not to fall in love with Pet" (Dickens Little 204). Yet the effort he exerts in maintaining his resolution shows its initial frailty. Upon hearing of Gowan's proposal to Pet, Clennam reflects that if he "had not decided against falling in love with Pet; if he had the weakness to do it . . . he would have been, that night, unutterably miserable. As it was - . As it was, the rain fell heavily, drearily" (214). Later, following a good deal of deliberation on his part and his resolve not to fret over Gowan and Pet's relationship in spite of his

recognition of his own superior virtues, he thinks, “Of course he could have no such merits as these, and such a state of mind was nobody’s – nobody’s” (316).

To distance himself from vulnerability, Clennam creates his identity out of what he is not. He is *not* in love with Pet because the feelings that he would attribute to Pet belong, in fact, to Nobody<sup>7</sup>, a character Clennam creates as mutually exclusive from himself. Yet Clennam’s attempts to create an identity through negation are not limited to his relationship with Pet. As Edgecombe points out, Clennam’s “paternal protectiveness towards Little Dorrit disqualifies him in turn from being her lover for most of the novel” (Edgecombe 374). Such protectiveness is intentional on his end as he continually references his fatherly concern for Little Dorrit whenever he extends his aid and thus solidifies his position as *not* a lover. Even so, Clennam’s entire introduction to the Dorrit family begins when he visits his mother to demand answers and leaves renouncing his stake in the family business – another attempt to create an identity by disassociating himself from the corrupt secrets that may or may not plague his family.

Aside from the guilt discussed earlier in this paper, Clennam’s displacement of identity reveals his fear of vulnerability. In “Guilt, Authority, and the Shadows of *Little Dorrit*,” Elaine Showalter calls particular attention to Clennam’s speech before he renounces his inheritance: he complains that he is the “only child of parents who weighed, measured, and priced everything” (Dickens *Dorrit* 23). Showalter explains that “the resentment towards his father who kept him ‘always grinding in a mill I always hated’ is also a kind of displaced resentment of the mother who ruled them both” (Showalter 33). Both Edgecombe and Showalter provide excellent insight into Clennam’s character, especially his tendency to

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<sup>7</sup> Nobody is capitalized in the text when Clennam is attributing qualities to something he is not and used in its lowercase form when he attributes them to no one in general.

create an identity for himself through displacement. Yet his actions also demand serious analysis. Born from fury toward his parents, Clennam's service to the Dorrits is performed out of spite, as much proof to himself of his virtue as a condemnation of the cold blood that chased the dollar to the grave. By displacing himself from his identity as his parents' son and as Amy's lover – echoed in his relationship with Pet – Clennam's guilt-ridden search for absolution concerns itself less with his parents' corruption and more with his association with it.

Clennam's perpetual identity displacements throughout the novel, however, reveal the underlying force behind his service: beyond absolution, Clennam's willingness to help Amy stems from his discomfort with himself. By purging himself of his family's name and the desires he fears will never be satisfied, Clennam seeks transformation into a new man altogether. His reason for service, after all, is born out of his efforts to absolve his inadequacies rather than merely a pure, altruistic interest in the welfare of the Dorrits. When he visits the Casbys<sup>8</sup>, after all, in an attempt to discover more information about the Dorrit family, his reflection on the event reveals the personal nature behind his search. "Bred in a creed too darkly audacious to pursue, through its process of reversing the making of man in the image of his Creator to the making of his Creator in the image of an erring man, this had rescued him to judge not, and in humility to be merciful, and have hope and charity" (168). This musing emerges after watching Flora stutter silly, drawn-out sentences and feeling somewhat guilty for the pain he caused her when their relationship ended. By alluding to the harsh childhood in the shadow of his mother's intense, subverted Calvinism, Clennam appeals

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<sup>8</sup> Clennam almost married Flora Casby prior to the novel's beginning, and the woman still has not recovered from their separation when they meet in the novel years later. He approaches her father with the belief that he may have information about the Dorrits.

to his sense of goodness to redeem him from the harshness of his youth and the mistakes in him that they produced. The reflection also takes place in the heart of his search for the Dorrits' fortune, a good act "rescuing" him from a lifetime of wrongs, whether from his own actions, as with Flora, or from his family.

Moreover, Clennam's near-obsessive focus on not confronting his vulnerabilities – namely his feelings toward the women in his life – produces ramifications in Amy's post-Marshalsea relationship with him. Because Clennam places such a large emphasis on his parental relationship to Amy, the young woman in turn feels the need to repress her own feelings for him. In spite of his intentions, Clennam has only strengthened the power difference between the two of them by providing such significant aid to her family, essentially enslaving her in a platonic relationship through his rhetoric. Social conventions and gender roles may seem responsible for Amy's extreme shyness and lack of self-confidence, preventing her from acting on her feelings for Clennam. Yet other women in the novel, most notably Amy's sister Fanny, possess boldness and ambition regardless of their similar socioeconomic position. Rather, Amy's repression of any fantasy arises as soon as Clennam begins providing aid, actions that extend long before the Dorrits' release from the Marshalsea. Clennam has made clear his role as a provider, not a lover, accentuated by the diminutive language he employs when referring to Amy with terms like "my poor child" and "my Little Dorrit" (e.g. Dickens *Dorrit* 101).

Even Amy recognizes Clennam's provision as an emotional and material substitution for her father, evidenced in her constant excuses for William Dorrit's indolence. While other characters understand that the entire family hangs upon Amy's service, the young woman defends her father. After Clennam has offered his assistance to her in a particularly parental

form, Amy begs him, “Don’t judge [my father], sir, as you would judge others outside the gates. He has been there so long! I never saw him outside, but I can understand that he must have grown different in some things since” (101). Amy’s recognition of Clennam’s parental qualities, however, demands payment from Amy as soon as the seemingly platonic provision begins. Taking Clennam’s insistence on the platonic at face value, Amy responds to his service by displacing her desires in an eerily similar way to him with his references to Nobody. Rather than divert to Nobody, however, Amy attributes her heartache to a headache, a literal parallel to the rationalization she undergoes in purging herself of self-interest. When Maggy encourages her to come see Clennam during one of his visits, Amy feigns a headache until Maggy tells him to come back another time. Upon Maggy’s return to the Dorrits’ chambers, Amy says about her headache, “But it’s all over now – all over for good, Maggy. And my head is much better and cooler, and I am quite comfortable. I am very glad I did not go down” (Dickens *Little* 299). Of course Amy is actually referring to her resolve to protect her heart from its desire for Clennam, but the metaphors she laces through her speech evidences her attempts to remove herself from it. With Maggy, she distances herself from her fantasies by placing them in a story world about a princess who keeps the shadow of a good and kind man until it sinks to her grave (300).

Upon her release from the Marshalsea, Amy’s awareness of their platonic relationship is overemphasized in her letters to Clennam by displacing her feelings for him to an elevation of Pet, now Mrs. Gowan<sup>9</sup>, for whom Amy knows Clennam cares. Regardless of how she might avoid her own awareness of her feelings for Clennam, Amy’s references to Mrs. Gowan speaks to Amy’s feelings of service toward her rescuer. She tells Clennam three times

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<sup>9</sup> Pet has married Henry Gowan and is referred to Mrs. Gowan at this point in the novel but has been known as Pet before this point.

during the letter that Mrs. Gowan “looked most beautiful” and assures him twice that the woman is doing well and is happy (478-80). Most significant is Amy’s rather self-defeating comparison to Mrs. Gowan: “If I was Mrs. Gowan (what a change that would be, and how I must alter to become like her!)” (478). Although Amy recognizes Mrs. Gowan’s admirable qualities, her letters betray her belief that Mrs. Gowan’s underlying value rests in her role as Clennam’s object of affection.

Amy’s imprisonment is one of relational indebtedness: a simultaneous recognition and avoidance of the fact that her desires will never be fulfilled coupled with a sense of obligation to perform to the expectations of the relationships in her life. As a result, she puts her own identity secondary to her role as a provider. Many critics, such as H.M. Daleski in *Dickens and the Art of Analogy*, refer to the fluidity of the prison in *Little Dorrit* as a move from one form of confinement to another, but their emphasis generally remains focused on the institutional – the way Society itself or London as a city enslaves its residents to regulation in the same way the Marshalsea confines its prisoners (Daleski 209). Yet this same fluidity defines Amy’s relationships. Beyond feeling the need to provide for Clennam’s happiness by convincing him of her own and continuously referencing Pet, Amy also internalizes the pressure of providing for her father’s contentment. When William Dorrit calls his daughter into his chambers to scold her for her lack of progress in adopting the mannerisms of their newly acquired class, Amy internalizes the guilt that he heaps on her. Dickens writes, “There was a repressed emotion in her face. Not for herself. She might feel a little wounded, but her care was not for herself. Her thoughts still turned, as they always had turned, to him . . . even now she could never see him as he used to be before the prison days” (Dickens *Little* 487). Recognizing the shadow of the Marshalsea in her conversation with her father, Amy “began

with sorrowful unwillingness to acknowledge to herself, that she was not strong enough to keep off the fear that no space in the life of man could overcome that quarter of a century behind the prison bars” (488). Yet in viewing herself as a representation of everything William Dorrit wants to leave behind, Amy works all the harder to conform to Society for his sake. Amy essentially scapegoats herself in the same way Clennam did when he assisted the Dorrits, thereby perpetuating the feeling of inadequacy that must be remedied. In doing so, she inadvertently imitates Clennam’s repression of feelings, as Edgecombe noted earlier when the author identified her displacement of herself with service.

As posited the beginning of this chapter, Clennam’s motivations for providing for the Dorrits present unintended consequences for the prisoners because of the way his motives cause him to exercise his support: he represses his desires in order to transform himself into a version he can tolerate. Clennam’s experience mirrors those of the other donors in the character sets. While the first chapter of this paper identified the absolution evident in each of the donors’ cases, Clennam shows how the absolution is not limited to the purging of an identity but extends to the creation of a new one. Yet the self-concern driving the donors’ acts of service forces the newly-released prisoners into different forms of imprisonment; each case stems from the emergence of a new debt that cannot be repaid.

## **II. Displacement in *A Tale of Two Cities***

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Carton addresses his guilt for his fallen lifestyle through his noble sacrifice for Darnay, but in his moments before the guillotine he conveys his desire not to just redeem himself for his past sins through martyrdom but to actually become Darnay. Note how Dickens describes the way Carton changes clothing with Darnay:

“For a few seconds [Darnay] faintly struggled with the man who had come to lay down his life for him; but, within a moment or so, he was stretched insensible on the ground. Quickly, but with hands as true to the purpose as his heart was, Carton dressed himself in the clothes the prisoner had laid aside, combed back his hair, and tied it with the ribbon the prisoner had worn” (Dickens *Tale* 358).

On one level, this exchange exists so the revolutionaries will not suspect the real Darnay’s escape. Yet Carton’s actions fulfill the guilt, masked in cynicism, he expresses earlier in the novel following his first encounter with Darnay. Carton comments to Darnay, “This is a strange chance that throws you and me together” (83), as though some fate were responsible for their meeting. As the story progresses, however, Carton’s insistence on literally bringing Darnay and himself together as one propels Carton to sacrifice for Darnay in the end. The sacrifice requires Darnay to lay senseless so that Carton can embody him like an expedited resurrection. The passage speaks to the underlying guilt in Carton: purging himself of his guilt is not enough. He must transform himself into a new man, and the only way he can do so without the relentless baggage of his drunken past is to embody his alter ego.

This distinction is important because it changes Lucie and Darnay’s lives following Carton’s sacrifice. If Carton were primarily concerned with replacing a body for a body to satisfy the revolutionaries’ demand for blood, he could have possibly presented himself as such a sacrifice to the Bastille guards. By choosing to become Darnay down to his very clothing and rendering the real Darnay useless in order to do so, Carton is placing his own desire for transformation above his nobility. For the Manettes, the difference in the results remains particularly significant. Had Carton replaced a body with a body, Darnay may have been able to live in more freedom, though the revolutionaries’ cry for vengeance guarantees

nothing. Since, however, Carton replaced Darnay himself, Darnay must “die” as well to the revolutionaries, whether through exile out of the country or undercover living within France. Note that Dr. Manette, Lucie’s father, remains responsible for Darnay’s death sentence in the first place, making it all the more crucial that Darnay avoid his father-in-law until the end of the revolution and perhaps forever. Of course in sacrificing his life for Darnay, Carton deserves some credit, but the motivations behind the actions foster consequences that would otherwise not exist.

### III. Displacement in *Great Expectations*

*Great Expectations* presents a similar result for the prisoner following the donor’s sacrifice. As identified earlier, Magwitch acknowledges that he will never be able to exercise social mobility because of his branding as a convict and lack of education. His relationship with Pip, however, shows that he tries to climb vicariously through the young man. Although all of those on whom he seeks revenge will never see him in his anticipated new lifestyle, Magwitch aims to take up residence with Pip as soon as he reconnects with him. Consider the interaction between the two when Magwitch arrives at Pip’s door years after Pip aided him through theft. Not recognizing Magwitch, Pip asks:

“Do you wish to come in?”

“Yes,” he replied; “I wish to come in, Master.”

I had asked him the question inhospitably enough, for I resented the sort of bright and gratified recognition that still shone in his face. I resented it, because it seemed to imply that he expected me to respond to it. But, I took him into the room I had just

left, and, having set the lamp on the table, asked him as civilly as I could, to explain himself.

He looked about him with the strangest air – an air of wondering pleasure, as if he had some part in the things he admired – and he pulled off a rough outer coat, and his hat (Dickens *Great* 293).

Magwitch's eagerness to embrace his new status is evidenced in the way he immediately makes himself comfortable and gives the room a look of possession. Although Magwitch emphasizes Pip's evolution into a gentleman when he tells the young man his story, the convict's mannerisms give him an air of entering a home he built himself; Pip is, in a sense, only a means to his happiness – both as a way for him to obtain wealth and a way for him to embody the father he could not be in his actual life by expanding his wealth on Pip. While Magwitch recognizes the risk he takes by living in London, he harbors unrealistic expectations about his ability to adopt a persona and spend the rest of his days alongside Pip as though his wealth will shelter him from the police. He tells Pip, "There's disguising wigs can be bought for money, and there's hair powder, and spectacles, and black clothes – shorts and what not" even though he will be sentenced to death if he is caught again (308). By speaking about living in Society with Pip, Magwitch is expressing his fantasy, as though as a benefactor he was able to completely transform his identity. In reality, Magwitch can only remain safe if he hides in isolation without any risk of Compeyson or police officers finding him. Magwitch's fantasy of transformation is further identified in the way he calls Pip "Master," aware that living with Pip in London will give him the opportunity to live under its umbrella.

Of the three donors, Magwitch's effects on Pip are the clearest. Even Pip's initial reaction to Magwitch is one of resentment, significantly different from his fearful response to the convict as a boy. Such resentment shows how Magwitch's money, coupled with the time spent at Satis House with Miss Havisham and Estella, has transformed the young man. When Joe visits earlier in the novel, awkwardly stumbling through his words and calling Pip "Sir," Pip treats him with equal rudeness. As soon as Joe proves to be useful to him, however, by providing information of Estella's coming, Pip's demeanor changes entirely, and he admits, "If I had known his errand, I should have given him more encouragement" (Dickens *Great* 215). As occurs with Amy, Pip's relationship with Joe signifies a displacement of identity following a donor's aid. In addition to showing how Pip has alienated himself from his boyhood life, however, the passage reveals how Pip has adopted the utilitarianism of the capitalist Society into which Magwitch's money released him. Joe is only valuable if he is useful to Pip.

Magwitch's provision for Pip was initially intended, among other reasons previously discussed, to give Pip social mobility. Yet the misery and spending that characterize Pip's experience as a gentleman, haunted by his pursuit of Estella, show that he must constantly maintain an image of himself. Even his diminishing money but unsatisfied expectations show how Magwitch has only carried Pip into greater misery through his lifestyle. Pip is forever attempting to cater to the expectations of the version of himself he is trying to create. Upon Magwitch's arrival, Pip begins to recognize the cost of serving the gentleman version of himself, the fantasy hero with the money and woman that will not play out quite so smoothly in reality. At the center of this revelation rests Joe, the greatest casualty of Pip's enslavement

to his new self; Pip muses, “But the sharpest and deepest pain of all – it was for the convict, guilty of I knew not what crimes . . . that I had deserted Joe” (301).

Of course the largest debt Pip owes as a result of his social rise is to Magwitch himself. In spite of the disgust he harbors toward his benefactor at their reunion, Pip is most aware of his obligation to him. Magwitch reminds him of the price that comes with the convict’s service to him: repayment to Magwitch through a relationship in spite of Pip’s eagerness to sever all bonds with him (301). As a result of the relationship Magwitch seeks to establish, Pip faces much higher stakes than he would if Magwitch returned asking for merely a dividend, for his actions and lifestyle are now attached to Magwitch’s wishes. When Magwitch’s safety becomes a legitimate concern after Compeyson enters the plot, Pip’s sense of obligation to Magwitch causes him to assist the convict in his escape in spite of his mixed feelings toward him (293). Over time, Pip’s feelings for Magwitch grow fonder, but the sense of obligation drives his actions, such as helping the convict and sitting with him at his deathbed.

#### **IV. Effects of Displacement**

The selfish motivations behind Magwitch, Carton, and Clennam’s seemingly altruistic actions produce greater consequences than one might initially assume. As evidenced in the examples in this chapter, all three donors provide significant assistance to the prisoners, but their emotional needs create bonds of obligation for the prisoners. Writing specifically on *Little Dorrit*, Daleski notes that movement in the novel “is always from one [metaphorical] prison to another . . . the overall impression of the narrative, then, is of a movement that is constantly checked, of flight that is frustrated – in a word, under arrest” (196-7). This

constant feeling of entrapment or stagnancy emerges from the donors' attempts to displace an unwanted identity with an idealized version of one's self. As a result, they unassumingly create bonds of obligation that keep the recipients from truly reaching the freedom initially intended.

The fates of Magwitch and Clennam, however, show how attempts to create an idealized self fall short because the donors' idealized fantasies do not function sufficiently in the real world. Just as Clennam's fear of addressing his weaknesses inhibits him, Magwitch cannot completely transform his identity simply by changing his location and appearance. For Carton, acting as Darnay's savior produces very serious ramifications because in borrowing Darnay's identity for his martyrdom, he risks robbing it altogether. Above all, the donors' displacement of their identities displaces the prisoners as well, including Darnay's adoption of a hidden identity through exile, Amy's displacement of herself with selfless concern for others, and Pip's replacement of all aspects of his childhood self with a fantasy suitor of Estella when he believes Miss Havisham to be his benefactor.

While the first chapter cast a dark light on the donors' motivations, it is important to recognize that the donors do act in part out of concern for another. Certainly they provide aid to the prisoners in order to pursue their own absolution, but Clennam, Magwitch, and Carton all intend for the happiness of the prisoners nonetheless. Rather, the ramifications of their actions exist because of the social setting in which they occur. As mentioned in chapter one, the donors respond to the social order, and that order does not disappear after their sacrifice. Whether or not the donors feel that they receive absolution for their guilt is secondary to the fact that the social order impacts the prisoners as well as the donors. As the examples in this chapter have shown, the donors transfer the role of social scapegoat to the prisoners when the

donors perform their sacrifice. After all, when the donors attempt to absolve themselves of guilt, the prisoners embrace guilt of their own, as manifested in Amy's pressure to conform to her father's standards, Pip's obligation to assist Magwitch in his flight from the police, and Darnay's implied internalization of living indebted to a man he can never repay.

This guilt exists because the social order shaping the donors' actions does not welcome relationships in which such gross sacrifices can be performed without any sense of reciprocal obligation. Instead, in all three novels, Society cultivates relationships from exchanges rooted in an expectation of repayment for service rendered. Society's role is evident in every aspect of the narrative between the donor and the prisoner, even before any transaction is ever made between the two.

In *Little Dorrit*, after all, Society's pressure first affects the characters before Clennam discovers the Dorrits' inheritance. Consider, for example, Fanny Dorrit and Mrs. Merdle's conversation while the Dorrits still live at the Marshalsea. Fanny has rejected Edmund Sparkler, Mrs. Merdle's son by her first marriage, on the basis that "he is almost an idiot" (Dickens *Little* 248). In the Dorrit sisters' conversation with Mrs. Merdle, the woman attempts to inform Amy Dorrit about her sister's decision by appealing to Society's exacting demands. The irony, of course, rests in the underlying threat for Mrs. Merdle, wife of one of the wealthiest men in England and a representative of the Society of which she speaks. By declaring the social impossibility of a match between a professional<sup>10</sup> and the son of Society's matriarch, Mrs. Merdle is only working to prevent it from happening. Had Fanny chosen to accept Edmund's proposal, Mrs. Merdle's only response could have been to cut her son's ties, undermining her own desire to elevate his social position through his stepfather's influence.

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<sup>10</sup> The term "professional" solidifies Fanny's class status as an Opera dancer; this very status is what prevents her from marrying Edmund.

Instead, Mrs. Merdle perpetuates the social order in place by solidifying class boundaries and then apologizing for the status quo. Consider her farewell passage to the Dorrit sisters:

“If we could only come to a Millennium, or something of that sort, I for one might have the pleasure of knowing a number of charming and talented persons from whom I am at present excluded. A more primitive state of society would be delicious to me. There used to be a poem when I learnt lessons, something about Lo the poor Indian whose something mind! If a few thousand persons moving in Society could only go and be Indians, I would put my name down directly; but as, moving in Society, we can’t be Indians, unfortunately – Good morning!” (248)

Ironically, Mrs. Merdle blames social progress for her inability to befriend those of other classes while referring to *coming* to a Millennium, an idea that connotes future advancement to a more developed, amiable state. By contradicting herself, Mrs. Merdle betrays her role as a member of the caste system but attempts to shift responsibility to the character Society.

At this point in the story, of course, Society exists as an oppressor, one that prevents Fanny from exercising any autonomy in spite of her attempts to believe in it. Likewise, it precludes her from moving from her situation as a dancer and keeps the rest of the Dorrits in a similar social position until their inheritance is discovered. Yet even when the Dorrits join Society and entertain with prominent figures like the Merdles, the oppression persists. Fanny marries Edmund Sparkler not for love but in order to spite Mrs. Merdle (618) and thus avenge herself for what Mrs. Merdle withheld from her in her previous social status. Fanny may appear to be acting on autonomy, but her marriage to Edmund shows that her decisions are driven by Society rather than what will make her happy. Likewise, Amy’s struggle to

conform to Society extends beyond the presentation and appearance of social norms. In one of her letters to Clennam, she writes,

“Changed as [my father] is, and inexpressibly blest and thankful as I always am to know it, the old sorrowful feeling of compassion comes upon me . . . that I want to put my arms round his neck, tell him how much I love him, and cry a little on his breast . . . .. But I know that I must not do this . . . and so I quiet myself. Yet in doing so, I struggle with the feeling that I have come to be at a distance from him; and that even in the midst of all the servants and attendants, he is deserted and in want of me” (480).

Amy’s new governess, Mrs. General, has demanded that Amy observe proper decorum even in her relationship with her father, and this letter reveals Amy’s torment over her inability to engage in an artificial relationship with her father following their closeness in the Marshalsea. Clennam has essentially released her into a social institution as harmful as, if not more harmful than, the Marshalsea itself.

Yet perhaps Amy’s situation should come as no surprise to the reader. After all, in finding a way to satisfy the Dorrits’ financial obligations, Clennam introduces them to the same social forces that caused him to sever himself from his family in the first place: the corruption behind wealth and power. Amy Dorrit’s indebtedness to different facets of Society has changed, but her obligations do not terminate when she possesses money or class rank. Her choice remains simple: she can embrace the restrictions that come with her new social position, as Fanny and Mrs. Merdle do, or she can wrestle with anguish, the *de facto* position for any character that rejects the former option.

Society’s overarching role, however, is not unique to *Little Dorrit*. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Society takes the form of the Revolution and the people of which it is comprised. In

many ways, this new Society emerges as a response to the norms and practices in place under the monarchy, but its force remains equally brutal. Consider, for example, the debts the Revolution demands from its citizens. When the revolutionaries learn that Darnay is a descendant of the Marquis, they call for his immediate arrest in spite of his attempts to disassociate himself from his family. Even Dr. Manette, a figure of influence in the community because of his history in the Bastille, cannot stand up to the soldiers that summon Darnay. At first, he attempts to use his influence, grabbing the revolutionary's shirt and saying, "You know him, you have said. Do you know me?" (Dickens *Tale* 297). The doctor's efforts, however, prove futile, for the soldier eventually tells him, "Citizen Doctor, ask no more. If the Republic demands sacrifices from you, without doubt you as a good patriot will be happy to make them. The Republic goes before all. The People is Supreme. Evrémonde, we are pressed" (297).

This scene provides key insight into the relationship between Society and its members and stands as perhaps the greatest example of Society's violence and oppression throughout the character sets. Society presents serious demands: sacrifices made willingly to an institution that must be the first priority in the midst of its members' everyday lives. As the book later indicates, failure to obey or conform to Society results in something far more extreme than the isolation in *Little Dorrit*: death at the guillotine. Furthermore, Society refers to Darnay as Evrémonde, the name that associates him with his family and status. In doing so, it displaces Darnay from the identity he has tried to carve as a commoner. Even with Dr. Manette's influence, Darnay is subject to Society's wrath.

Society's eagerness to hang Darnay for his family's sins may initially appear strange, but further analysis shows how the hunger for control drives the governing social system in

the novel. At the end of Dr. Manette's account of the Marquis and his brother's violence, he writes, "And them and their descendants, to the last of their race, I, Alexandre Manette, unhappy prisoner, do this last night of 1767, in my unbearable agony, denounce to the times when all these things shall be answered for. I denounce them to Heaven and to earth" (337). Of course Dr. Manette does not realize that he will condemn his son-in-law to death with these words, but the passion in his letter parallels the hunger for vengeance that characterizes the Revolution, the social governing body of the novel. More frightening than the doctor's anger is the people's response to it:

When the President said . . . that the good physician of the Republic would deserve better still of the Republic by rooting out an obnoxious family of Aristocrats, and would doubtless feel a sacred glow in making his daughter a widow and her child an orphan, there was wild excitement, patriotic fervor, not a touch of human sympathy (338)

This passage, and perhaps *A Tale of Two Cities* as a whole, provides the best example of how Society maintains its ability to dictate the social structure: through the people's support. More subtle but equally powerful, Society in *Little Dorrit* and *Great Expectations* retains its power through the tacit consent of its people by their compliance with the social norms it issues. Although the Society manifested in *Little Dorrit* and *Great Expectation* differs in form from the mob rule in *A Tale of Two Cities*, both groups command the consent of their people because the power to change the system rests in the hands of those who benefit from it. In the class hierarchy, the aristocrats and others with money perpetuate the class divisions. Meanwhile, those in the mob benefit from the autonomy afforded them as part of the majority rule.

In an effort to maintain these norms, however, Society demands perpetual debts from its members with no evidence of future reprieve. Driven by fear of monarchical tyranny, the Revolution dictates not only that Darnay must die for the sins of his family but that the doctor must release his son-in-law and even his past experience to Society in what revolutionaries would call a purging. What is best for Society is not necessarily best for its members, but its members are forced to devote themselves to their cause for the sake of Society's power or else face the oppression of a different social system, in this novel the monarchy. Therefore, as Society gains power, its control over its members only tightens because any members who see it as extreme cannot gain enough leverage to fight without being ostracized, forcing the individuals to sell their friends and family as scapegoats in attempts to secure their own survival.

*Great Expectations* showcases societal pressure in a similar vein, affecting Pip on a profound emotional level. Rather than respond out of vengeance and fear as in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Pip acts out of guilt. Such feelings are not unique to the young man, however: the same guilt that drives Pip to become a gentleman propels Magwitch to become the boy's benefactor earlier in the novel. In this book, Society is the elitism of the class system, and its demands on Pip begin before Magwitch's money enters into Pip's narrative. When he first arrives at Satis House and meets Estella, he is confronted with a different type of oppression: unattainability. Consider Pip's interaction with Estella on his first day at Miss Havisham's. Miss Havisham tells Estella, "Let me see you play cards with this boy."

"With this boy! Why, he is a common laboring-boy!"

I thought I overheard Miss Havisham answer – only it seemed so unlikely – 'Well?

You can break his heart.'

‘What do you play, boy?’ asked Estella of myself, with the greatest disdain.

‘Nothing but beggar my neighbor, miss.’

‘Beggar him,’ said Miss Havisham to Estella. So we sat down to cards” (Dickens *Great* 73)

Estella makes clear the difference between her class and Pip’s first by responding with indignation to Miss Havisham’s command and then by referring to him by his class rather than as an individual. The entire card game exists for Miss Havisham’s amusement, emphasized by her whispered comment to Estella that grows in significance as Pip continues his visits to Satis House. Most importantly, however, in referring to a term of the game by telling Estella to “beggar him,” Miss Havisham also alludes to the socioeconomic and emotional depravity Pip will experience as his infatuation with Estella grows. At this moment Pip becomes aware of Estella’s unattainability and plants the first seed of desire that will later manifest as an attempt to prove himself to her through social mobility.

Both Miss Havisham and Estella manifest what Society truly is for Pip: not the wealth and woman of which the young boy dreams but the power and prestige that accompany status. Later in the first day, after all, she awakens Pip to the disgrace of his class in a scene he describes as follows:

“She put the mug down on the stones of the yard, and gave me the bread and meat without looking at me, as insolently as if I were a dog in disgrace. I was so humiliated, hurt, spurned, offended, angry, sorry – I cannot hit upon the right name for the smart . . . that tears started to my eyes. The moment they sprang there, the girl looked at me with a quick delight in having been the cause of them. This gave me the power to keep them back and to look at her: so, she gave a contemptuous toss – but

with a sense, I thought, of having made too sure that I was so wounded – and left me”  
(75)

Estella is only able to exert control over Pip because she shows no vulnerability herself, and her brutality even brings him to tears about his situation. Estella’s words haunt Pip to the point that he later embraces his secret inheritance with fervor, but in doing so, he makes the mistake of believing that he can master Society as soon as he becomes a gentleman.

Certainly Pip adjusts to a new, finer way of life, but his shame over his class status as a boy follows him. Yet when the two characters come of marrying age, Estella continues to treat Pip like an acquaintance and insults him for his desire for her, telling him, ““When you say you love me, I know what you mean, as a form of words; but nothing more. You address nothing in my breast, you touch nothing there. I don’t care for what you say at all. I have tried to warn you of this; now, have I not?”” (333). Far worse for Pip is Estella’s following admission that she is to marry the mean-spirited Bentley Drummle simply as an exercise of her own autonomy (334), a man who ends up abusing Estella not long into their marriage. The most influential character in Pip’s actions and aspirations, Estella brings him back to the disgrace of his boyhood self after years of his social progression.

This passage is important because in it, Estella embodies the attitude of Society, the oppressive force forever teaching characters what they want and then withholding their desires from them. As in the other novels, severe sacrifice is required in order to survive in such a world, and often characters must abandon all happiness in order to achieve power. Yet once they assume power, they remain subject to the norms and practices of Society itself. Pip may climb the social ladder, but like the prisoners in other novels, his entrance into society evidences a sense of indebtedness to the force behind the donor: Society itself. In each novel,

the prisoners adopt guilt the same way their donors did and similarly displace their identities because both the donors and prisoners operate under the same social governing system dictating their motives or the motives of those around them.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AUTONOMY AND INDEBTEDNESS

#### I. The Permanence of Indebtedness

The severe ramifications of the donors' actions may cause the reader to question whether the prisoner will ever find freedom from indebtedness from an individual or group. As the stories progress, after all, the prisoners provide aid of their own, offering a new twist in obligation within various relationships.

In *Little Dorrit*, Amy spends the last several chapters at Clennam's sickbed, nursing him back to health with promises of her undying love (Dickens *Dorrit* 780). Yet Mrs. Clennam, in an effort to protect herself from blackmail that would completely ruin her financially, entrusts the young woman with the family secret that tormented Clennam over the course of the novel. Still unaware of the secret itself, Clennam suspects his father plays the primary role in the mystery. Rather than tell Clennam, Amy keeps her promise to Mrs. Clennam to leave everything a secret until Clennam's mother has died. The novel shows no indication of Amy ever telling Clennam. Instead, Amy asks Clennam himself to burn the evidence:

“I want you to burn something for me.’

‘What?’

‘Only this folded paper. If you will put it in the fire with your own hands, just as it is, my fancy will be gratified.’

‘Superstitious, darling Little Dorrit! Is it a charm?’

‘It is anything you like best, my own,’ she answered, laughing with glistening eyes and standing on tiptoe to kiss him, ‘if you will only humor me when the fire burns up’” (841)

In the closing pages of the novel, the paper is never again mentioned, but the reader has no reason to believe that Amy has forgotten about its contents simply by burning it. Rather, she has prevented Clennam from ever knowing its contents in an act of emotional protection. Such heroics, however, demand that she carry the burden of its knowledge for the rest of their marriage. As a result, Amy must safeguard against the topic whenever Clennam muses about his family’s past, a conversation that the novel does not portray but that inevitably will occur in the following years. By burning the paper with the implication that she will never speak of it again, Amy mimics the secrecy behind the donors’ service in all three novels: Carson at the guillotine, Clennam in his pursuit of the Dorrits’ inheritance, and Magwitch in his decision to entrust Jaggers with Pip’s money for the majority of the story.

Dickens presents a happy picture of Amy and Clennam’s marriage in the novel’s closing moments, perhaps causing the reader to hope that the lovers’ union signifies a retreat from the bonds of Society that plagued them for the majority of their relationship. Dickens writes,

“[They] went down to give a mother’s care, in the fullness of time, to Fanny’s neglected children no less than to their own, and to leave that lady going into Society forever and a day. Went down to give a tender nurse and friend to Tip for some few years, who was never vexed by the great exactions he made of her, in return for the riches he might have given her if he had ever had them, and who lovingly closed his eyes upon the Marshalsea and all its blighted fruits. They went quietly down into the

roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along the sunshine and shade, the noisy and the eager and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar” (844)

The emphasis in this passage is not on Clennam and Amy’s union, though joyful and promising, but on the world into which they are descending. Rather than retreat to a quiet home or a refuge of sorts, the newlyweds enter the heart of Society that governed their actions over the course of the novel; while Amy leaves behind her place in high Society, she still must face its ramifications on her sister and brother. Surely Dickens aims to set them apart from the collective masses through their virtue and concern for another, but the reality remains that they will continue to live in this vain, noisy, arrogant world. Even with Clennam at her side, Amy sacrifices herself unnecessarily to her brother and sister’s needs, adopting a complex much like Mrs. Flintwinch in the old woman’s incessant references to her husband and Mrs. Clennam as “the clever ones” (e.g. 43). While Amy’s motivations differ from Mrs. Flintwinch’s, her desire to protect those she loves ensures the same result: a self-denying sacrifice that allows others to take advantage of her service.

After all, Dickens is never one to provide a paradise even for his virtuous characters at the end of his novels. Rather, as in this novel, any distinction he makes between the protagonist lovers and the rest of Society comes in the form of an ugly exile or a peak at the dismal reality of their situation. Clennam and Amy’s fate is evident in the passage above, in which the couple must live with the other characters in their lives, primarily Tip and Fanny. Yet even in *Great Expectations* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, the couples are forced to carry their baggage into a new stage of their lives still controlled by the norms and practices of their respective Societies. In *Great Expectations*, Dickens presents an ambiguous ending. Upon

promising to be friends, Pip writes, “I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so, the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw the shadow of no parting from her” (Dickens *Great* 439). Scholars speculate about whether or not Pip and Estella do indeed marry, but regardless, their meeting at Satis House, “the ruined place,” signifies the baggage they will carry into the next stage of their story, whether as friends or spouses. Similarly, as discussed in chapter two, Darnay and Lucie are forced into exile following Carton’s sacrifice because the Revolution will kill them if they remain in France.

Readers might question the permanence of these ramifications as the characters’ various social positions change at the end of the texts. Yet Dickens is clear to show how the sense of indebtedness transcends the specific social systems at work. When Magwitch passes away, Pip, sitting at the convict’s bedside, cries, “O Lord, be merciful to him, a sinner!” in reference to a biblical passage they had read together earlier (Dickens *Great* 419). This line is significant because Pip delivers this cry not only for the convict but for himself, associating himself and his sins with Magwitch’s. Pip’s association with criminality also parallels the criminal actions he performs when he is with the convict in the two significant points in his life: his childhood, when he steals Joe’s file to free Magwitch’s leg from iron bondage, and his adulthood, when he assists Magwitch in his escape from the police. According to Tambling, Pip’s entire narrative acts as a self-accusation as the man reflects on how he became the man he did (e.g. Tambling 21).

In the chapters that follow Magwitch’s death, Pip holes up in his room, surrounded by debt and too ashamed to apologize to Joe, who comes to nurse him, until after Joe leaves.

Magwitch does not have to remain alive for Pip to feel a sense of indebtedness; instead, that sense is transferred from the person who helped the young man to the person he hurt as a result of the donor's aid. Furthermore, the relationship of indebtedness extends to another of Pip's significant relationships: that with Herbert, his roommate. In an effort to help Herbert gain a livelihood, Pip recruits Miss Havisham's aid to help him provide money to Herbert the same way Magwitch once delivered it to him. As with the convict, Pip provides the money in secret and only confesses when Herbert hears about it through another Clerriker.

Likewise, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the death of Madame De Farge does not prevent Darnay's death; rather, the Revolution grows only more heated. Ironically, the Revolution itself becomes Madame De Farge's downfall, revealing how the cause she represents transcends even her ability to control it. Even if the mob rule were to be crushed in the novel, the characters would find themselves under the tyrannical monarchy they sought to fight in the first place. As much as the characters and, indeed, Dickens himself hope for a utopian world by portraying the debt, crime, and class system of which the characters' realities are comprised, the idea of social equality and individualism is nothing more than a fancy, whether the characters live in Victorian England or any other world Dickens touches.

## **II. Character Sets as a Trope**

As all three novels have shown, the death or termination of the source of indebtedness does not eliminate indebtedness as a whole. A closer look at the novels shows that these transactional relationships that result in obligation are happening to all individuals at all levels, not just those represented by the three character sets. In the relationships that develop over the course of the three novels, the characters are interested in securing their own

interests, most often out of guilt but also out of anger, fear, or the desire for revenge. As a result, the characters enslave those to whom they provide aid because, as seen in chapter one, their motivations are not, in fact, purely altruistic at all.

In *Little Dorrit*, the most prominent secondary character example exists in Miss Wade's relationship with Tattycoram, the personal assistant to the Meagles family. Angry at the men in her life, Miss Wade takes out her anger by taking Tattycoram under her wing and teaching her to respond with anger and defiance to the Meagles' care for her. Edgecombe reflects on the peculiarity of this relationship, writing, "Dickens . . . presents Miss Wade's relation with Tattycoram as yet another displacement of love by power, continuous with the way in which, throughout her life, she has systematically construed kindness as malice disfigured" (Edgecombe 374). In another example, Mr. Casby, father of Clennam's former flame and characterized as the benevolent Patriarch, hides under this affable guise to slave-drive his employee, Mr. Pancks, into harsh debt collection of the tenants on Casby's land. Rather than stemming from any hatred, as with Miss Wade, Casby's relationship with Pancks emerges from the former's vacillation between his desire to be liked and his greed. Eagerly greeting his tenants with smiles and gifts, Casby enslaves Pancks in the relationship through the power of his image among the tenants. Edgecombe writes, "But of course this philanthropy is not simply an inert, functionless icon – it masks an active wickedness" (372). So, too, do the other relationships in the novel in which characters provide aid for another. "Active wickedness" may seem particularly harsh and may apply to Casby alone, but there is always some self-serving motive to donors' acts of kindness.

In *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham and Estella parallel this trope through the dysfunction of their relationship. Left at the altar on her wedding day, Miss Havisham freezes

her entire world to the moment of her heartbreak and enslaves Estella in it as well. Upon hearing of Estella's upcoming marriage to Bentley Drummle, Pip implores her, "Miss Havisham gives you to him, as the great slight and injury that could be done to the many far better men who admire you, and to the few who truly love you" (Dickens *Great* 334). Estella merely scoffs at Pip's words and enters into a miserable marriage, too influenced by the woman who raised her to soften her heart until she has experienced pain. As discussed previously, even Pip's willingness to aid Joe at the end of the novel stems from years of guilt over ignoring him simply because of his class (Dickens 301).

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, characters witness a similar pattern in the relationship between Madame De Farge and Dr. Manette. One of the major leaders of the Revolution, Madame De Farge makes Dr. Manette a force of influence in the community because of his tragic history with the monarchy. Yet Madame De Farge only uses him to advance the cause itself, not to promote his welfare as an individual, as is evidenced at Darnay's sentencing. Darnay's identification with the Marquis significantly outweighs his association with Dr. Manette simply because Dr. Manette is a tool for the revolution, not an advocate. Madame De Farge, representing the Revolution as a whole, has welcomed him and supported him only out of her own anger toward those who hurt him. Thus, Dr. Manette is indebted to the Revolution at the time of Darnay's sentencing because of his intimate ties to its genesis. His inability to free Darnay is his true imprisonment: by falling under the Revolution's care, he must respond to its cries of justice over his own interests.

Analyzing the role of imprisonment in Dickens using the character sets moves the conversation beyond "Society is the prison" by understanding the root of Society: individuals who perpetuate the system in place. It is the relationships among characters that create bonds

of obligation and perpetuate the social norms in which the characters live. By viewing how characters adopt the roles of donor, prisoner, and influencer, one can better understand how Dickens creates such complicated but tight-knit plot webs: every character touches another because every character is somehow connected to a role in the character set. Like Pip, prisoner in one relationship and donor in another, the characters may change roles throughout the novel or encompass more than one role at a time, but the character sets provide a framework for understanding how relationships work as exchanges within these characters' social settings.

## EPILOGUE

This thesis has sought to carry the conversation about imprisonment in Dickens from an emphasis on literal facilities and the metaphorical implications of characters' incarceration to an emphasis on the relationships that create characters' senses of imprisonment throughout the novels. In order to actually secure one's freedom from the indebtedness in the social systems, whether in high Society, mob rule, or English common law, characters would have no choice but to remove themselves from the system altogether. So long as characters live and interact in Dickens's world, they are touched and, to some degree, plagued by their surroundings.

Surely Dickens integrates virtuous characters in the novels, such as Amy, Lucie, and Joe, and these characters, Amy and Joe especially, often engage in self-effacing behavior in their attempts to provide aid for others. The motives behind their actions do not stem from guilt or anger, as the donors previously identified in the text, but rather from feelings that they have not provided enough for loved ones. As a result, the stronger characters to whom they provide aid often scapegoat them out of their own feelings of guilt or anger, providing a twisted reversal of the character sets but illuminating the nature of the pattern nonetheless. In this reversal, characters that should be indebted to their donors, such as Fanny to Amy or Pip to Joe, manipulate the donors into providing more for them. The donor is thus imprisoned by those he or she aids.

Moreover, the character sets have been discovered in *Little Dorrit*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Great Expectations* because of the nature of imprisonment in these novels, but the idea of viewing relationships as transactions transcends even these three texts and permeates

the study of Dickens as a whole. Characters in *Bleak House*, *Our Mutual Friend*, or *David Copperfield* will likely fall under variations of this same character set; after all, the exchange of relationships speaks to the underlying complications of Dickens's character-driven plots as a whole.

By applying the character sets to the larger study of Dickens's imprisonment through relational bonds of obligation, the thesis introduces a new conversation of the role of Society in Dickens's world. By identifying as a member of the collective, characters relinquish their autonomy, even if they aim to resist the social demands at play. Above all, the guilt or anger driving the donors' payment or service reflects Society's power and reveals how the force behind altruism may not be so benevolent after all.

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