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THE OBLIQUE HEROINE: LITTLE DORRIT, MILLY THEALE, AND CADDY COMPSON

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THE OBLIQUE HEROINE: LITTLE DORRIT, MILLY THEALE, AND CADDY COMPSION

by

DEBORAH JANE BURCH BARRETT

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

[Signatures with titles]

HOUSTON, TEXAS

MAY, 1983
DEDICATION

For David, Davy, and my Mother
and Father
... trying to make that book what--
match the dream.

--Faulkner on *The Sound and the Fury*
Abstract

THE OBLIQUE HEROINE: LITTLE DORRIT,
MILLY THEALE, AND CADDY COMPSON

Deborah Jane Burch Barrett

Characters, more often than not, form the central interest and the meaning of a novel, and the diversity of character types attests to both the richness of the novel as a genre and the difficulty of cataloguing characters in definitive or even satisfactory groups. Such grouping, however, yields interesting similarities among what are often thought to be very different novels. Little Dorrit, The Wings of the Dove, and The Sound and the Fury are three novels not previously grouped, yet they exemplify a structural pattern which depends upon what I call an "oblique heroine." Because of the indirect presentation of the heroines and the dominance of a male character, critics tend to discount the novelists' professed fondness for the heroines or their originals and to dispute the novelists' claim that they intended the heroines to be the central interests of their novels. The heroes in the novels--Arthur Clennam, Merton Densher and Quentin Compson--function as traditional protagonists are expected to: they serve as
the centers of consciousness for a good portion of the novel, they develop in the course of the novel, and they provide the point of identification for the reader and the novelist. Little Dorrit, Milly Theale, and Caddy Compson, however, are the unifying principles and the raison d'être of their respective novels. Occupying two worlds—the ideal and the real—the heroines possess much greater individuality than often allowed at the same time that they serve three primary symbolic and thematic functions—that of (1) illuminating the faults of the society which surrounds them, (2) illustrating the shared belief of Dickens, James, and Faulkner in man's limited perception, and (3) representing an ideal for the novelists. Thus, the obliqueness of Little Dorrit, Milly Theale, and Caddy Compson is essential to their own character and to the three novels that they inhabit. The oblique heroines are successful and significant creations whose novels are important in the canon of their creators and in the development of the novel.
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... most great novels exist to reveal and explore character.

-- W. J. Harvey,
   Character and the Novel

Every era has the heroines whose selection reveals what it values most in women.

-- Martha Banta,
   Henry James and the Occult
Chapter I

DEFINITION, CONTEXT, AND DIRECTION

The novel, complying with the freedom of the original meaning of "novel," has resisted the numerous attempts to codify its elements. The diversity of the essays in collections such as Mark Spilka's *Towards a Poetics of Fiction* and Philip Stevick's *The Theory of the Novel* provides evidence of the difficulties encountered, not only in defining the genre but also in adequately describing its parts or deciding which is quintessential—language, point of view, technique, plot, character or theme. Every critic of the novel has his hobby-horse, but most would acknowledge that all the elements work together to make the novel what it is and has been since *Don Quixote*. If asked to establish a hierarchy, however, most novelists and many modern critics alike would admit to the centrality of character. It is on the assumption that character is the central component of the novel that this study is based. We may enjoy a well-written novel, may delight in the "play" of the language, and may even revel in the intellectual games provided by novels such as Donald Barthelme's *Snow White*, but it is essentially for character that we read novels, it is character that we
take from the novel, and it is in character that we look for meaning and usually find it. As Fernando Ferrar writes in his "Theory and Model for the Structural Analysis of Fiction," "The objects and the events of fiction exist . . . because of the character, and in fact, it is only in relation to it that they possess those qualities of coherence and plausibility which make them meaningful and comprehensible."\(^1\) The second assumption underlying this study is that novels do carry meaning and that meaning is found in the central character or characters.

Rawdon Wilson in his "On Character: A Reply to Martin Price" says that "the problem of character in literature has been, in my opinion, the least successfully treated of all literary concepts. . . . Character is still largely, as Galsworthy . . . remarked, 'devoid of documentation, and resists precise definition.'"\(^2\) For my purposes, characters are basically persons in fiction. Within that very broad group are one-dimensional or what Forster calls "flat" characters, those who serve an auxiliary or background function. They are, to borrow from drama, the supporting actors. And there are the three-dimensional or "round" characters, to use another Forster term, those characters who, as Warner Berthoff describes, yield a "sense of active human presence susceptible to passion and change."\(^3\) And, of course, there
are those characters who fall somewhere in between. Deciding in which category to place which character has provided rich fodder for critics of the novel and will continue to do so because of the difficulty of specifying exactly what makes one character more complex, interesting, or "real" than another. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, no easy test exists to declare which character is "real" and which not. Often the decision results from individual taste, but sophisticated readers of the novel approach it with certain expectations according to the role the character or characters play in the novel. As Robert Scholes explains, structuralists and formalists tend to base their studies of fiction on Vladimir Propp's and on Levi-Strauss's classification of stock roles found in fairy tales. For instance, Propp locates eight character roles—the villain, donor, helper, princess (the sought-for person), her father, the dispatch, the hero (the seeker or victim), and the false hero. The more traditional critics would at the least expect to find a protagonist, an antagonist or obstacle, and a desired person or goal. A protagonist is expected to be "round," and often the critic's judgment of the value of the novel rests on the adequacy of the characterization of the protagonist more so than on any of the other characters in the novel.
Critics of the novel expect a protagonist to be the central character, and they expect him to be dynamic. For instance, W. J. Harvey says that the protagonists are "those characters whose motivation and history are most fully established, who conflict and change as the story progresses, who engage our responses more fully and steadily, in a way more complex though not necessarily more vivid than other characters," and Norman Friedman defines the protagonist as "the one upon whom causes of action fall, and from its consequences flow; the one who undergoes the major change; the one whose career serves as the chief focus of interest; the one around whom all else in the plot revolves." Both definitions emphasize the centrality of the character and his growth. The problem with these definitions, as with most attempts to define elements of the novel, is that not all novels fulfill the requirements, and too often the definitions are accepted as prescriptions for what makes the novel a success. The tendency to demand that the center of a novel be a protagonist who "serves as the chief focus of interest" and as the "one who undergoes the major change" has resulted in the numerous articles based on attempts to posit the center of novels as diverse as Vanity Fair, Middlemarch, and Hard Times in one character; when that does not work, critics argue that theme or imagery forms
the center which holds the novel together. When all else fails, they find dual or multiple protagonists, as Friedman does. Many critics, however, view arguing for a thematic center or for dual or multiple centers as equivocation, ways of justifying novels which lack focus or central control, novels, therefore, which they consider flawed because they do not present one central developing hero. It is almost as if they expect literature to conform to the elementary principle of physics that no object can occupy the same place at the same time as another.

Friedman's struggle over Daisy Miller is an example of what happens when the "center" does not coincide with the protagonist as he defines him: he says that he "once thought Winterbourne was the protagonist of Daisy Miller, since he undergoes a change of thought with regard to Daisy (an affective plot), [but he] now think[s] it is Daisy herself, and that Winterbourne's discovery is a means of revealing her to us. One reason is that his change seems to leave no particular mark on his life, and so the reader is concerned not so much with him as with what can be seen through him." Friedman is obviously handcuffed by his definition of protagonist; Daisy is unequivocally the center of interest of the novella, yet Winterbourne shows signs of growing because of her. Friedman is equally troubled by Hester and Dimmesdale in The Scarlet
Letter and by Lady Brett and Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* and mentions the perennial question of who is the protagonist in *The Great Gatsby*, *All the King's Men*, and *Moby Dick*. My intention is not to single out Friedman but to show the problems encountered when demanding the center of a novel to be a developing character. The number of narratives of education, a type of narrative which dates back to the birth of Christ, as Scholes and Kellogg illustrate, attests to their importance in the history of the novel, but numerous novels just do not conform to the pattern and have resisted the attempts to force them into any mold. 8

Three such novels are *Little Dorrit*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Sound and the Fury*. These novels are closely related to what Lawrence Buell calls the "observer-hero narratives," of which *The Great Gatsby*, *Moby Dick*, and *All the King's Men* are three out of the several examples that Buell discusses. 9 In the narratives, a split exists between the center of interest and the developing character, although Buell does not describe it in these terms. For instance, he says that "the Marlow of *Heart of Darkness* is both the protagonist of his own tale and the mere reporter of an encounter with someone far more memorable than he"; thus, the observer-hero is more like us, and the character being described is more romantic. 10
The reader, then, would probably tend to identify more closely with the observer-hero than the supposed hero, but I think the reader's response is more complicated than identification, although I acknowledge its importance. The observer-hero more closely fulfills our expectations of what a protagonist should be, that is, a developing character, while the character whose story is being told remains rather static. Too often, change and growth are demanded in order for a character to qualify as complex and "real" enough to be granted the honor of being the protagonist and the center of his tale. In *The Great Gatsby*, Nick qualifies as "round" and Jay Gatsby as fairly one-dimensional; therefore, Fitzgerald must have intended that Nick be considered the center of the novel, as the argument runs. Also, Nick garners our attention because he is the narrator. In her discussion of Henry James's failure to keep Milly Theale the central interest in *The Wings of the Dove*, Mary Doyle Springer says that the "main-ness" of a central character is accomplished by "sheer weight of presence," which is often influenced by the point of view: "in fiction, opening the door to interior consciousness automatically opens the door to a great deal of centrality for the character--for the reader to be spared that kind of knowledge is to be spared a strong demand for attention. No amount of sheer
physical presence commands that same degree of attention.\textsuperscript{11} Just as in a room of people we would attend to the speaker and assign him center stage, in the novel we tend to focus our attention upon the narrator. As Wayne Booth points out in \textit{The Rhetoric of Fiction}, James often started with a germ for a story centering on some character or action and found in the unfolding of that germ that the interest shifted to the observers of that action or character, which Booth feels often leaves the reader confused as to who is the protagonist or at least, where the thematic center lies.\textsuperscript{12} Readers tend to gravitate towards the character who presents the narrative and assume that since he does the judging and is affected by the character being evaluated, then he is somehow more important. This is the assumption behind the question asked of William Faulkner: "Who is the central character in \textit{Absalom, Absalom!}\textsuperscript{13} When Faulkner answers "Sutpen," he is answering for Conrad, James, Melville, and all of the numerous other novelists who have written observer-hero narratives, and he is illustrating that the central character, or characters, does not have to be a protagonist, a developing hero. A novel may have both a central character, the one around whom the action revolves or the center of interest, and a protagonist, the one who changes or is affected by the central character, who may have
equal presence in the novel, who may narrate all or a portion of the tale, who may possess more of the conventional trappings of a hero, and who may be more like us, whatever that means. In the following chapters, I will discuss how a similar split occurs in *Little Dorrit*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Sound and the Fury*. Arthur Clennam, Merton Densher, and Quentin Compson are the protagonists of the novels, but Amy, Milly, and Caddy are their novel's raison d'être.

Although *Little Dorrit*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Sound and the Fury* share the basic, though very important, splitting of protagonist and central character, they differ from the observer-hero novels and belong in a class by themselves. Their central characters are what I am calling oblique heroines. They are oblique in that they are presented indirectly and remain shadowy. We are never allowed to get very close to them; instead, they are like guests of honor at a party who are always across the room from us, cowering behind a chair, standing majestically on a staircase, or perhaps outside (do I dare say in a creek or tree?). We meet the host, others who know her, her future husband, or her brothers, but if we ever even hear her voice, it is soon overshadowed by the other party-goers.

The oblique heroines are also the second part of my
coined term; they are heroines. Carolyn Heilbrun distinguishes between "heroine" and "woman as hero": a heroine is "that female character who plays the largest, or most important role in the life of the hero, who is the chief sexual event in his life," and the woman as hero is "the protagonist [by this she too means the central character who develops] of a work, the character who undergoes the central action, the character whom men, as well as women, may view as an actor in a destiny possibly for them."\textsuperscript{14} Isabel Archer is her example of the woman as hero, and although Heilbrun does not give examples of heroines, I feel sure that she would include Little Dorrit, Milly Theale, and Caddy Compson.

Feminist critics have often attacked male novelists for their tendency to idealize women, causing women in literature to become "symbols rather than people."\textsuperscript{15} They argue that since novelists often only allow their heroines to exist in social roles, "none of these are persons in the sense that a novelist's protagonist must be a person"; thus, heroines actually have "no story of their own."\textsuperscript{16} Dickens and Faulkner are particularly vulnerable to this type of criticism; feminist critics, and others as well, have devoted pages to their women and to James's, although his women are acknowledged as individualized people instead of stereotyped women.\textsuperscript{17} The problem with feminist
criticism, however, is similar to what Mary Doyle Springer says is the problem with thematic criticism: it "files away character under brief and often vague headings, robs them of even circumscribed life that fiction makes possible to them, and deserts them as static elements."\(^{18}\) This is what has too often happened with Little Dorrit, Milly Theale, and Caddy Compson. Since they are heroines and not women as heroes and since they serve a symbolic or thematic function in their novels, they are assigned labels and dismissed. The bulk of my study is aimed at dispelling the notion that these heroines are only abstractions or symbols. They do embody the ideals of their creators and to some extent of their age, but they also possess much greater specificity and individuality than often allowed.

Although I spend several pages illustrating that Amy, Milly, and Caddy have greater depth than a cursory reading of the novel would suggest, I acknowledge that they remain rather shadowy creations. One reason perhaps lies in the epistemology of the novelists. James and Faulkner were particularly fond of experimenting with different points of view and suggesting the limitations of man's ability to know and to see "reality." Dickens struggled with remaining in the mimetic tradition and pleasing his public while attempting to capture the inner life of his
characters and recognizing the mysteries of life and man's inability to solve those mysteries and know all of the answers.

The narrative technique of *Little Dorrit*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Sound and the Fury* suggests that Dickens, James, and Faulkner had a greater shared epistemology than is often realized, but another less philosophical and more personal reason for the shadowy creations emerges from the biographies of the novelists and from the novelists' comments on these heroines. Part of my study is based on these external sources and reveals a similarity in the three novelists and the creation of these novels which distinguishes them from any other of their novels and separates Amy, Milly, and Caddy from other indirectly-presented central characters. That distinguishing characteristic is the unusual affection each of the novelists felt for these heroines or their originals. Faulkner told one interviewer that he "fell in love with Caddy," and he referred to her as his "heart's darling."¹⁹ He even said that "in *The Sound and the Fury*, he had already put perhaps the only thing in literature which would ever move me very much: Caddy climbing the pear tree to look in the window at her grandmother's funeral while Quentin and Jason and Benjy and the negroes looked up at the seat of her drawers."²⁰ Some
biographers believe that Caddy is based upon a woman that Faulkner was in love with at the time of writing *The Sound and the Fury*, but whether or not she was based upon a living woman, she lived for Faulkner and occupied a special place in his heart. James never referred to Milly with the hyperbole Faulkner uses for Caddy, but Milly was modeled upon his young cousin whose premature death, James says, marked the end of his youth and haunted him throughout his life, and he suggests that she remained for him an ideal woman. Similarly, Amy Dorrit is believed to be modeled upon Mary Hogarth, Dickens' sister-in-law, who died in his arms at age seventeen and served as his example of ideal womanhood. These heroines are special to the novelists, and they may have kept them distanced to protect them or their memory of them, but more important, they seem to look upon them in a way similar to the way the protagonists in their novels do, as that which does, can, or could have changed their lives. To the novelists the heroines also represent that forever sought—an unattainable ideal similar to what James says about the ideal of art in the preface to *Roderick Hudson*—the "veiled face of his Muse which he is condemned forever and all anxiously to study." Obviously, the oblique heroines have a tremendous effect upon the protagonists of their novels, and while it is always
dangerous to equate a novelist with any character that he creates, perhaps one additional reason that the three male protagonists of these novels are more vibrant for most readers than the oblique heroines is a shared emotional attachment and awe for the heroine between the novelists and the protagonists.

The novels with oblique heroines are important because of what they reveal about the novelists, and they are important for what they say about the novel in general. The titles alone suggest the movement in the novel away from the concrete, ordered reality of the Victorian novel towards the more symbolic and fragmented reality of the modern novel. With *Little Dorrit*, the title names the heroine and suggests her presence. *The Wings of the Dove* is a symbolic title which identifies the values to be associated with the heroine. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the title appears to have no concrete or symbolic reference to the heroine. The title most obviously refers to Benjy since he is the idiot, who initially "tells the tale," but it refers to Caddy also. She represents the void at the center of the Compson world and at the center of the novel; she, more than Little Dorrit and Milly Theale, is the heroine who is not there. Faulkner's pronouncements about Caddy reveal a greater passion than Dickens or James ever reveal about a character or publicly
about a person, and Caddy is certainly a more passionate character. She teems with emotion and energy, and Faulkner's distancing of her in the novel suggests a need to protect her and perhaps sublimate his desires. Obviously, with *The Sound and the Fury*, we have to read more into the text and supply more of our own order and meaning than with *Little Dorrit* and *The Wings of the Dove*, but James was moving towards Faulkner. *The Wings of the Dove* suggests the novels' movement inward and provides a bridge from the mimetic to the more self-reflective novels of the twentieth century. From Little Dorrit, who is physically present, however sporadically, we move to Milly Theale, who is physically present yet becomes only a memory in the last part of the novel, and finally to Caddy Compson, who is never physically present and only exists in the memories and consciousness of her brothers and fades out completely in the last section of the novel.

In the following discussion of the novels with oblique heroine, I, too, will begin with the concrete and the specific and move to the symbolic and the general. Each chapter develops from the inside out and rhetorically parallels the preceding chapter. After a brief discussion of the novelists' intentions in each of the novels, I begin the heart of each chapter with the most concrete
impression of the heroine—the physical descriptions of Little Dorrit and Milly Theale and the initial image of Caddy Compson. Then, I move into a fairly conventional study of character; this section is the longest in each chapter for two reasons: first, because this aspect of these heroines is the most often overlooked; and second, because I hope to illustrate that a character can be interesting and complex without being particularly dynamic or having the characteristics of a protagonist. Also, in the characterization section, I attempt to answer some of the important critical questions raised in the few discussions in which the heroines are examined as individuals instead of just types. From the study of character, I move into the heroines' effect upon the males in the novel. I argue in these sections that Arthur Clennam, Merton Densher, and Quentin Compson resemble each other and are the protagonists as I explained in the discussion of the observer-hero narrative; they are the characters who change or who are tremendously affected by the heroines, who narrate a major portion of the novel, who exemplify the typical modern hero, who provide the point of identification for the reader and the novelists as well, and who are too often assigned a greater importance than the heroine. From the discussion of the heroes, I move out to the heroines and society
because in each novel, the heroines underscore the faults of the time in which their novelists lived. I conclude with an explanation of each heroine's symbolic function in the novel and her place in the metaphysics of her creator.

The oblique heroines provide the keys to their novels. To dismiss them is tantamount to dismissing their novels, which unfortunately has sometimes happened. Thus, in defending the heroines, I am defending their novels. I can only hope that my defense is successful and that my interpretations open the novels up, not lock them up in a neat little box away on a shelf.
ENDNOTES – CHAPTER I

1NLH, 5 (Winter 1974), 252. This number of NLH is devoted to character and contains many important essays.


6Friedman, p. 80.

7Friedman, p. 94.


18 Mary Doyle Springer, p. 23. Also, see Culler, p. 230, who says "the general ethos of structuralism runs counter to the notions of individuality and rich psychological coherence which are often applied to the novel. Stress on the interpersonal and conventional systems which traverse the individual, which make him a space in which forces and events meet rather than an individuated essence,
leads to a rejection of a prevalent conception of character in the novel: that the most successful and 'loving' characters are richly delineated autonomous wholes, clearly distinguished from others by physical and psychological characteristics. This notion of character, structuralists would say, is a myth."


Chapter II

LITTLE MOTHER, PERCEPTION, AND LOVE

I believe that the sympathy and society of those who are our best and dearest friends in infancy, in childhood, in manhood, and in old age, the most devoted and the least selfish natures that we know on earth, who turn to us always constant and unchanged, when others turn away, should greet us here, if anywhere, and go with us side by side.

Dickens, "Soiree of the Mechanics' Institution: Leeds" (December 1847)

Little Dorrit, a popular novel when the first numbers began appearing in December 1855, was not received favorably by contemporary critics; most were troubled by the novel's darkness, the social invective, and the sad middle-aged hero.¹ John Forster, the person closest to Dickens and his intentions, felt that the chief defect in the novel was the lack of coherence and the absence of "a central interest in the plan of it."² Dickens reveals in his letters and in changing the title on the eve of publication of the first number that he was struggling with the focus; he also confesses to having great difficulty getting started with the novel and sustaining his energies, particularly in the first three numbers before deciding to change the title.³ That Dickens finally decides to make
Little Dorrit - the "central interest" in the novel seems obvious, however, from his titling the novel after her, having Browne center her in the picture for the cover, and stating in a letter to Forster that he hoped to make Little Dorrit "very strong in the story." Critics have failed to accept her as the "central interest," however; they, instead, catalog her as a type and dismiss her to go on to characters that they consider more interesting, such as Arthur Clennam, Mr. F's Aunt, Miss Wade, Flora, or Meagles, or they mention her as only a part of Dickens' larger thematic purposes. From Trilling's trend-setting introduction to the novel, in which he identified her as "the Paraclete in female form," to a recent Derridean approach, in which she is labelled the "primary signified," she is most often recognized as a symbol of redemption and, therefore, incomplete as a "real" character or as a protagonist. In fact, even Forster found her "tiresome by want of reality" in comparison to the much more interesting minor characters, and one recent critic states that it "is generally agreed that Little Dorrit herself is probably the greatest weakness in the book."

Little Dorrit, then, contains a major critical problem, a discrepancy between what the author intends the central focus of his novel to be and what the readers tend to perceive as the center. In other words, to paraphrase T. S. Eliot, an apparent shadow falls between
Dickens' conception of *Little Dorrit* and the creation, and to most critics Dickens fails to provide the central focus necessary to unify the novel. What Dickens has done, however, is what James and Faulkner do in creating *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Sound and the Fury*; he has created a novel which does not conform to standard expectations in novel criticism, particularly of the Victorian period, and he has also produced a novel which causes readers to recognize our often distorted and limited perceptions as critics and as people. No character, at first, sees Little Dorrit as any more than the good little servant, and the melodramatic rhetoric causes many readers to take a similar limited view. In correcting Arthur Clennam's vision, Dickens hopes to correct ours. We follow Arthur Clennam, identify with him, and should experience a similar recognition of the problems in society, our own faults, and the power of individual love. In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens presents a secretive and solipsistic world of deception as he traces Arthur Clennam's evolution into self identity. His development and the existence and importance of the novel depend upon Little Dorrit. She is the one who breaks through the deception, quiets the claims of the past, and provides the hope for the future.

Little Dorrit is the key to her novel. She is the oblique heroine. She ties the novel together, embodies
the themes, rescues the protagonist from his empty life, and possesses interest as a character in her own right. Since her characterization is what is most often neglected, it is to it that I will devote most of my attention. The first in my discussion of oblique heroines, Little Dorrit resembles her fictional counterparts in personality as well as in function. She is similar to Milly Theale in her role playing and her perception, and to Caddy Compson in her early tendency to take care of others. In addition, Little Dorrit brings Arthur Clennam to a crisis point very similar to that to which Milly Theale brings Merton Densher. Dickens does present Little Dorrit with greater melodramatic flurry than James does with Milly or Faulkner with Caddy. This is important because it causes modern readers to withdraw from her, as I shall discuss, and it illustrates one major difference between the Victorian novel and the modern, as well as suggesting a split between Dickens the man and Dickens the artist. His presence is felt at almost every instant that Little Dorrit is on stage. In describing her, he is often the crowd-pleasing performer intent upon appealing to his audience and pleasing it; this Dickens is the same Dickens who changes the ending of Great Expectations for similar reasons. Much in Little Dorrit's characterization results from Dickens' knowledge of what his audience expected, but
it also results from the ideal of womanhood that he carried around with him from the day of Mary Hogarth's death.

On the other side is Dickens the artist and social critic. In creating Arthur Clennam, Dickens creates the prototype of the modern anti-hero; he is melancholy, introspective, passive, and adrift, characteristics which he shares with Merton Densher and Quentin Compson and numerous others. He is one of the first such heroes; thus, Dickens anticipates a type of hero. He also anticipates a narrative technique, that of third-person limited, perfected by James. Dickens' position in relation to Arthur Clennam is one of the critical problems in the novel and one on which I will devote several pages, particularly in analyzing the "nobody" chapters. Part of Dickens obviously identifies with Arthur Clennam, but another part is removed and critical. Dickens was critical about much at this time in his life and about society. As a result, Little Dorrit is a dark and angry novel. Since much of Dickens' audience still expected "sweetness and light," he knew that he took a chance of alienating some of them, but he spoke out, as he had in Hard Times, because he was concerned and unhappy.

Thus, Little Dorrit is a complex novel which encompasses much. It reveals the artistry of its creator in using language, experimenting with point of view, and
creating interesting and complex characters, and it reveals the inner struggles of a sensitive man over his ideals, his life, and his society. All combine to create a unified and important novel which centers on an oblique heroine. Little Dorrit is melodramatic, she is static, she is a symbol, she is the moral touchstone, and she is perhaps too perfect, yet she is the only character in the novel whom we can trust, she is the only character who unites theme and plot, and she is very human in her desire to protect her family, in her role playing, and in her love for Arthur. What I hope to do in the following pages is to capture some of her often neglected complexity and justify her as the "central interest" in the novel.

From her first introduction, Little Dorrit stands out as different from the rest of the characters. Small and reticent, she is presented by Arthur Clennam as a rather curious and contradictory figure:

a diminutive figure, small features, and slight spare dress, gave her the appearance of being much younger than she was. A woman, probably of not less than two and twenty, she might have passed in the street as little more than half that age. Not that her face was very youthful, for in truth there was more consideration and care in it than naturally belonged to her utmost years; but she was so little and light, so noiseless and shy, and appeared so conscious of being out of place among the three hard elders, she had the manner of the appearance of a subdued child.8

Immediately, she contrasts with the "hard elders" and
emerges as a woman who looks as shy and self-conscious as a child, yet who appears as serious and world-worn as an adult. Clennam continues to observe her and finds that it was not easy to make out Little Dorrit's face; she was so retiring, plied her needle in such removed corners, and started away so scared if encountered on the stairs. But it seemed to be a pale transparent face, quick in expression, though not beautiful in feature, its soft hazel eyes excepted. A delicately bent head, a tiny form, a quick little pair of busy hands, and a shabby dress—it must needs have been very shabby to look at all so, being so neat—were Little Dorrit as she sat at work. (p. 53)

In the early descriptions, Clennam sees Little Dorrit as a pathetic, shy, diminutive young woman with a rather plain face yet beautiful eyes. Her face suggests honesty and quickness, and her manner, diligence and neatness.

Dickens also suggests, however, that she may be more than just the "quietest and weakest of Heaven's creatures" (p. 92), and in fact, shortly into the novel, we find out that she is the mainstay of her family. The family turns every matter of difficulty over to her (p. 70), and she, "the head of the fallen family," is the indispensable strength (p. 70). She supports the family and makes the arrangements for her sister, brother, and herself to learn occupations (Bk. I, Ch. 7). When her brother passes from one job to another and eventually becomes a collegian himself, she protects him and her father, despite Tip's failure to understand why. She creates or sustains
"necessary fictions," as Janice Carlisle calls them. The "prop and stay of the rest," as Dickens calls her in his number plans, she performs her duty, and in doing it serves as a model for the others and a character with whom we should sympathize.

Dickens presents Little Dorrit in similar terms to those he uses in presenting another of his pathetic little women—Little Nell; both are pitiful and admirable. Harvey Peter Sucksmith argues in his *Narrative Art of Charles Dickens* that Dickens, as a conscious artist and rhetorician, was very aware of the effects of pity and fear and used them more successfully in his depiction of Little Dorrit than he had with Nell. Little Dorrit is more complex than Nell, but Dickens' melodramatic descriptions and hyperbole used to underscore her plight tend to force modern readers to withdraw from her and find her unsympathetic and rather insipid. As Douglas Hewitt points out, "our dissatisfaction with Little Dorrit is provoked, not by any rejection of her theoretical role—the proof that only self-sacrificing love can survive untainted in prison and bring comfort to the imprisoned—nor mainly by any sense that her behaviour is psychologically implausible, but by the banality of the rhetoric in which she is presented." Dickens often uses melodramatic devices, such as invocation, apostrophe, direct address, and incidental aside to create sympathy for those characters who are good
and condemnation for those who are bad in the tradition of the Victorian theatre and popular fiction, but they cause Little Dorrit to appear as little more than a cardboard melodramatic heroine tied to the railroad tracks awaiting her last-minute rescue.¹² For instance, in one description of a scene with her father, the narrator says, "what affection in her words, what compassion in her repressed tears, what a great soul of fidelity within her, how true the light that shed false brightness round him!" (p. 93). Frequently, the descriptions of Little Dorrit are dotted with exclamation points which suggest that if the passage were read aloud it would be read with great emotion. How could anyone criticize a character who is so virtuous; on the other hand, how could anyone identify with her or even take her seriously?

The narrator also makes it clear that the ideal little woman battles a hostile world. After Little Dorrit and Maggy are locked out of the Marshalsea and have to spend the night in the street, the narrator says, "this was Little Dorrit's party. The shame, desertion, wretchedness, and exposure, of the great capital; the wet, the cold, the slow hours, the swift clouds, of the dismal night. This was the party from which Little Dorrit went home, jaded in the first grey mist of a rainy morning" (p. 171). Little Dorrit, frail and defenseless, must not only
protect and hold her family together, she must battle the elements and the "great capital" for her personal survival.

Dickens goes even further in his description of Little Dorrit than he does Nell and equates her with those who are inspired and tragic; her inspiration is akin to the poetic and her tragedy to that of classical heroines:

She was inspired to be something which was not what the rest were, and to be that something, different and laborious, for the sake of the rest. Inspired? Yes. Shall we speak of the inspiration of a poet or a priest, and not of the heart impelled by love and self-devotion to the lowliest work in the lowliest way of life. (p. 70)

Little Dorrit, although reduced to the work of a servant, shares the inspiration of the poet—the muse, love, or perhaps depth of feeling beyond the ordinary man—and of the priest—inspiration from his religion or his God. Her motivations are not of common man but are exalted. In her devotion to her father, she joins the classical heroines: "There was a classical daughter once—perhaps—who ministered to her father in his prison as her mother ministered her. Little Dorrit, though of unheroic modern stock, and mere English, did much more, in comforting her father's wasted heart upon her innocent breast, and turning to it a fountain of love and fidelity that never ran dry or waned, through all his years of famine" (p. 222). Dickens wants Little Dorrit to be viewed on a very human
level in her daily struggles and sad pitiful existence, but he also wants her recognized as above the rest of humanity in her strength, her perseverance, and her loyalty.

To make Little Dorrit even more pathetic, Dickens makes her family extremely neglectful and selfish. For instance, her father never thinks "of her dress, her shoes, her need of anything. No other person upon earth, save herself, could have been so unmindful of her wants" (p. 223). When Mrs. General tells him that "Fanny has force of character and self-reliance, Amy, none," Mr. Dorrit replies, "True, madam." The narrator adds, again with melodramatic flair, "None? O Mrs. General, ask the Marshalsea stones or bars. O Mrs. General, ask the milliner who taught her to work, and the dancing master who taught her sister to dance. O Mrs. General, Mrs. General, ask me, her father, what I owe to her; and hear my testimony touching the life of the slighted little creature, from her childhood up!" However, the narrator says, "no such adjuration entered Mr. Dorrit's head" (p. 459). Shortly afterward, her father tells her that she embarrasses him, and she, although "a little wounded," still turns her thoughts to him and not to herself (p. 463). Of all the people who should appreciate her, her father is the most neglectful. He bestows "his life of
degradation as a portion on the devoted child upon whom its miseries had fallen so heavily and whose love alone had saved him to be even what he was" (p. 224), yet she bears all and never complains no matter how much he misuses her.

She only occasionally even reveals her pain. When her father attempts to manipulate her into being "kind" to John Chivery for his own purely selfish reasons, she, though obviously hurt, comforts her father when he cries and restrains her own emotions until alone in her room; she thinks that "the spikes had never looked so sharp and cruel, nor the bars so heavy, or the prison space so gloomy and contracted" (p. 225). Even here, when her father has suggested that she take advantage of a man's attraction for her to better her father's situation, which, as George Holoch points out, is similar to a "form of prostitution," she transfers her own discomfort to concern for her father and focuses on the cruel existence that he has had to live.  

She mentally escapes into a vision of "sunrise on rolling rivers, of the sunrise on wide seas, of the sunrise on rich landscapes, of the sunrise on great forests where the birds were waking and the trees were rustling," which contrasts with the subjects of the sunrises she has witnessed all of her life; she looks "down into the living grave on which the sun had
risen, with her father in it, three and twenty years, and [says] in a burst of sorrow and compassion, 'No, no, I have never seen him in my life!'" (p. 225). She laments his spending so many years of his life in prison, acknowledges to herself that such a life cannot help but have a deleterious effect on even the best of men, and bemoans not having known him in his "glory." She knows what her father is about in his suggestion that she be "nice" to young John, but as always, she forgives him and blames any faults that he may have on his prison environment.

Little Dorrit's brother and sister are equally selfish, particularly her sister, who constantly belittles Little Dorrit. After a visit to Mrs. Merdle's house, Fanny tells Little Dorrit, "if you don't feel for yourself because you go out to work, you might at least feel for him, I should think, knowing what he has undergone so long" (p. 239). Of course, Little Dorrit, who recognizes the remarks as unjust, feels more for him and everyone else than her sister ever will, and Fanny is not nearly so concerned for her father as she is for her own appearance in society. Later, when Fanny sees her sister walking with Old Nandy, she says to her, "the principal pleasure of your life is to remind your family of their misfortunes . . . you common-minded little Amy! you complete prison-child!" (p. 360). Fanny is totally unmindful of hurting
Nandy; she does not appear to acknowledge him as human. She is equally unmindful of hurting Little Dorrit, who with "her heart well-nigh broken," replies to her sister's harangue with "What I have been so unhappy as to do, I have done in mistake. I would not wilfully bring a tear to your eyes, dear love!" (p. 362). These incidents create further pity for Little Dorrit, who is obviously in the right and is unjustly being criticized by a selfish sister. While we might be tempted to agree with Fanny that her sister is a "little oddity" (p. 586), and in many ways find Fanny more interesting, we cannot accept her verbal abuse and would enjoy seeing Little Dorrit stand up to her sister and the rest. Little Dorrit would not confront her sister at this point, however, or ever, for abnegation, loyalty, and diligence are inherent in her character and self-assertion and combativeness are not.

One of the most telling incidents of her family's selfishness and neglect occurs when they actually "forget" her after they become wealthy and are allowed to leave the prison. Mr. Dorrit, Fanny, and Tip march out of the prison among cheers and are in the carriage before Fanny remembers Little Dorrit:

"Then, and not before, "Good Gracious!" cries Fanny all at once, "Where's Amy?"
Her father had thought she was with her sister. Her sister had thought she was 'somewhere or the other.' They had all trusted to finding her, as they had always done,
quietly in the right place at the right moment. This going away was perhaps the very first action of their joint lives that they had got through without her. (p. 417)

Immediately afterward, they see her still in her "ugly shabby dress" being carried by Arthur Clennam from her room, where she had fainted. "'She has been forgotten,' he [Arthur Clennam] said, in a tone of pity not free from reproach." But instead of feeling pity for Little Dorrit or even guilt for having forgotten her, all Fanny is concerned with is the way the incident looks to others and how it detracts from their "image" to have Little Dorrit dressed as she is and carried out by Arthur. Fanny labels the event "disgraceful" and "infamous," adjectives which aptly describes the family's forgetting Little Dorrit, although Fanny means only in terms of how the "offence" looks (pp. 417-18).

Only Arthur Clennam thinks of Little Dorrit or her feelings, and even he often hurts her, not through thoughtlessness as does her family, but because of his own blindness to her love for him. Again with melodramatic flurry, the narrator says, after Arthur Clennam has delivered his speech on how old he is and how his time for love has passed, "O! If he had known, if he had known! If he could have seen the dagger in his hand, and the cruel wounds it struck in the faithful bleeding breast of his Little Dorrit!" (p. 373). But he is too
selfish at this point to see beyond himself. She is the one who is always altruistic. She cares for Maggy as if she really were her "little mother," as Maggy calls her. She shows kindness towards Old Nandy and walks him through the streets, unconscious of his dress of poverty. Later, she is kind to Pet, not jealous of her rival for Clennam's love, as a more fallible nature might be. She is so good, quiet, and kind that she even touches one of the hardest hearts in the novel, that of Mrs. Clennam, who uncharacteristically shows affection for Little Dorrit by kissing her on the forehead (p. 336).

Little Dorrit, however, sees herself as inadequate and often belittles herself as does Esther Summerson, another one of Dickens "good" women. For instance, when she first meets Pet Meagles, she says to herself, "she is very pretty... I never saw so beautiful a face. O how unlike me!" (p. 431). Among the riches in the second half of the novel, she sees herself as "not being grand enough for her place in the ceremonies" that the rest of the family revels in (p. 452). In her letter to Arthur, she refers to herself as dull (p. 538) and as the "little shabby girl" (p. 457) and is apologetic ad nauseam for writing to him. She says in the first one, "but I know you cannot be so glad to hear from me, as I am to write to you; for everything about you is as you have been
accustomed to see it, and you miss nothing—unless it should be me, which can only be for a very little while together and very seldom—while every thing in my life is so strange, and I miss so much" (p. 455). Unquestionably sincere, she is pathetic, particularly so in that she loves Arthur Clennam and does not want to show it. Crying out from painful loneliness, she restrains her emotions as usual and minimizes herself. In her next letter, she says that she hopes that her "little letter can therefore give you no other trouble than the trouble of reading it (perhaps you may not find leisure for even that, though I hope you will some day)" (p. 534). Again, her sincerity could be questioned and she could be viewed as attempting to beguile, but the narrator wants to suggest that she thinks so little of herself and her own ideas that she cannot imagine anyone's being interested in hearing from her. She thinks that it might be too much trouble even to read her letters.  

Dickens could have used her letters to reveal Little Dorrit in the way that Miss Wade's autobiography reveals her, and maybe paradoxically he does, for by telling only a little about her misery and depression in her new surroundings, he reinforces her restraint and abnegation. She cannot blatantly tell Arthur Clennam that she loves him and misses him. Instead, she says,
Dear Mr. Clennam, I have written a great deal about myself, but I must write a little more still, or what I wanted most of all to say in this weak letter would be left out. In all these foolish thoughts of mine, which I have been so hardy as to confess to you because I know you will understand me if anybody can, and will make more allowance for me than anybody else would if you cannot—in all these thoughts, there is one thought scarcely ever—never—out of my memory, and that is that I hope you sometimes, in a quiet moment, have a thought for me. (p. 457)

She even begs that he remember her as she was and not as a "new character." Her motive in being circuitous instead of straightforward is her desire not to reveal her love for him to him, but her motive in wanting to be remembered as she was is more complex, as is her confession in her second letter about her dreams. In the first, she tells him, "it would break my heart to believe that you thought of me in any way that would make me stranger to you, than I was when you were so good to me. What I have to pray and entreat of you is, that you will never think of me as the daughter of a rich person; that you will never think of me as dressing any better, or living any better, than when you first knew me" (p. 457), and in her second letter, she tells him how she dreams of her childhood in the Marshalsea and the heart-ache over providing for her family, but she never dreams of "the change in our fortunes itself" or of Arthur's "coming back with me that memorable morning to break it" or of Arthur at all (p. 538). She seeks solace in her memories of the
past, the reality to her, and wants, in asking him to remember her as she was, to insure that their memories are shared and their closeness maintained. After confessing to not dreaming about him, she tells him that it must be because she thinks about him and "the others--so much by day, that I have had no thoughts left to wander round you by night" (p. 538). Then, with uncharacteristic directness she writes,

For I must now confess to you that I suffer from homesickness--that I long so ardently and earnestly for home, as sometimes, when no one sees me, to pine for it. I cannot bear to turn my face further away from it. My heart is a little lightened when we turn towards it, even for a few miles, and with the knowledge that we are soon to turn away again. So dearly do I love the scene of my poverty and your kindness. O so dearly, O so dearly! (p. 538)

Unlike Miss Wade, Little Dorrit has not only come to terms with her past, she pines for it. In the Marshalsea, she possessed a certain stature which she could use to help her family (pp. 71-72), and she also served a purpose and was needed. In her new surroundings, she has no function and is troubled by the facade of those around her.

Protecting and taking care of the others make up her lifeblood. When these chores are removed from her after her rise in fortune, she is lost: "to have no work to do was strange, but not half so strange as having glided into a corner where she had no one to think for, nothing to plan and contrive, no cares of others to load herself
with" (p. 451). She accepts the role that she plays, and once the role of mother is removed from her, and she is forced to do for herself, she does not know how; she tells Clennam in her first letter that when she tries to put her mind to learning the lessons which Mrs. General attempts to teach her, she finds that her "planning, thinking, and trying go in old directions" (p. 456). D. W. Jefferson says that "Amy's character has been so found in terms of role-playing--she is the Child of the Marshalsea, and her father's child--that when the exemplary story moves into its second stage, from Poverty to Riches, and these roles cease to be necessary, Dickens fails to make very effective use of her"; thus, "the Amy of the early part of the book has really disappeared, and the new Amy is a flatter creation."16 Little Dorrit is not just a "flatter creation," she is literally absent from seventeen of the thirty-five chapters in Book II. Dickens explains in his number plans, however, that after the "On the Road" section (the first few chapters of Book II), in which he wants to "bring out Little Dorrit's position" and show how once she is "removed from her old cares about her father [she is] quite displaced," he wants to hold her appearance in abeyance until she makes her climactic entry in Clennam's prison cell.17 Dickens' plans perhaps artistically justify Little Dorrit's fading into the background after the "On the Road" chapters, but her
"displacement" after her family becomes wealthy is inherent in her character as the "little mother." Kathleen Woodward says that her devotion to her family and her selflessness have so crippled her that she is unable to function in freedom. Edwin Barrett believes that her discontent arises out of "genteel uselessness," the "baffled idleness" that "is the cause and symptom of the sick evils in the novel." Both of these arguments are attempts to make more out of Little Dorrit's discontent than seems warranted; she needs to be needed and needs to have a duty to perform.

In addition, she is dissatisfied because of her separation from Arthur Clennam. He also causes much of her unhappiness in the first book. Only after his entrance into her previously closed world does she begin to express concern for the way others see her father and to reveal thoughts of a more normal existence. She does not want her family to take advantage of Arthur's kindness, and she also does not want Arthur to judge her father too harshly (pp. 92-93). She feels impelled that he of all people understand her father (pp. 164-65). After visiting Arthur the night that she and Maggy sleep on the street, she imagines what life would be like if her father were not a prisoner: "'If it really was a party!' she thought once, as she sat there [looking at the stars]. 'If it was light and warm and beautiful,
and it was our house, and my poor dear was its master, and had never been inside these walls. And if Mr. Clennam was one of the visitors, and we were dancing to delightful music, and were all as gay and light-hearted as ever we could be! I wonder--'" (p. 169). Fanny and the rest would be surprised to hear such ideas from Little Dorrit because no one imagines that she has any other life than that of the child of the Marshalsea. Her thoughts make her even more pathetic because they reveal not only how little anyone knows or cares about her but also show that she is not happy with her present life. Her thoughts also show how central Arthur Clennam is to her, how she wishes that he could come courting her as she imagines he would someone not trapped in a prison. She may be a "prison-child," as Fanny says, but she is certainly not content with her circumstances. She feels guilty for doing so, but she spends what little free time she has musing about life outside the prison (p. 252). Her thoughts also reveal just how hard and cruel she realizes the prison is: "Many combinations did those spikes upon the wall assume, many light shapes did the strong iron weave itself into, while Little Dorrit sat there musing. New zigzags spring into the cruel pattern sometimes, when she saw it through a burst of tears; but beautified or hardened still, always over it and under it and through it, she was fain to look in her solitude,
seeing everything with the ineffaceable brand" (pp. 282-83). As her love for Arthur grows, her discontent grows, and she begins to imagine that the world outside is a happier one, free from the prison shadows, the prison brand.

Before her father is released, Little Dorrit expresses her fears to Arthur that her father might not adjust well to the outside world (p. 94), yet she is the one who cannot be happy. Her loneliness for those at home, Arthur included, and her feelings of uselessness are the major reasons, but also she cannot accept her new surroundings as meaningful or real. According to Peter Christmas, "she knows better than anyone else what is real and what is not"; for Little Dorrit, the prison and poverty are the only realities. She recalls the old Marshalsea room and finds her present existence a dream:

call that she saw was new and wonderful, but it was not real; it seemed to her as if those visions of mountains and picturesque countries might melt away any moment, and the carriage, turning some abrupt corner, bring up with a jolt at the old Marshalsea gate . . . all that she saw appeared unreal; the more surprising the scenes, the more they resembled the unreality of her own inner life as she went through its vacant places all day long . . . a dream--only the Marshalsea a reality. Nay, even the old mean Marshalsea was shaken to its foundation, when she pictured it without her father. . . . With a remembrance of her father's old life in prison hanging about her like a burden of a sorrowful tune, Little Dorrit would wake from a dream of her birth-place into a whole day's dream. . . .  (pp. 451-52)
The dreams that she had while living in the prison have become the setting for her new life and still seem like dreams. Only the beggars appear real to her; "these miserable creatures would appear to her the only realities of the day" (p. 452). With them she can identify. In her new life, she becomes more solitary and thoughtful and longs for the former reality. In Venice, where she is known as the "little solitary girl," she sits and muses, looking at the water from her balcony and imagining that if the water were to run dry, she might see "the prison, again, and herself, and the old room, and the old inmates, and the old visitors: all lasting realities that had never changed" (p. 454). She views the ruins in Rome as the ruins of the Marshalsea—"ruins of her own old life—ruins of the faces and forms that of old peopled it—ruins of its loves, hopes, cares, and joys" (p. 591). The fragments that she views are like the fragments of her life, and she now has no loves, hopes, cares, or joys. For her, reality is being useful; it is also people like the beggars on the street. The beauty of the countries that she visits and the society that she withdraws from are outside her comprehension and are, therefore, unreal to her. Some critics have labelled Little Dorrit the only "real" character in the novel, and in the sense that she is the only sincere character, at least among the fashionably rich, this is a
valid label. Society is all surfaces and facades, which the collapse of Merdle underscores, and Little Dorrit perceives the falsity and represents the real.

Little Dorrit is the one who can see through appearances and perceive the reality, and she is the "norm by which we measure the other characters." Typically, however, she assumes that something is wrong with her when she perceptively recoils from Blandois, but she senses the evil in him (p. 443). She also realizes that Gowan mistreats Pet (pp. 480, 495), sees in Arthur what no one else does (p. 373), and discerns that the society in her new world "greatly resembled a superior sort of Marshalsea" (p. 497). The narrator says that Little Dorrit is "too earnest and watchful to fail in accurate observation" and that she has an "instinctive knowledge" about the truth in the Gowan situation (p. 497). In the one scene in which the narrator says that it is occasionally necessary to see through Little Dorrit's eyes, she reveals her acumen in judging Arthur Clennam. First, she is correct when she discerns in him a similar earnestness to that found in his mother but an earnestness tempered by gentleness. Then, she reads Arthur Clennam's face "so plainly" that she answers his question before he asks it (p. 162). Several critics question her judgment, however, when she tells Arthur that she does not understand why after spending twenty-three years in prison,
her father must still pay the money back as well (p. 409). We are told that "the prison, which could spoil so many things, had tainted Little Dorrit's mind no more than this. Engendered as the confusion was, in compassion for the poor prisoner, her father, it was the first speck Clennam had ever seen, it was the last speck Clennam ever saw, of the prison atmosphere upon her" (p. 409). Is this Clennam's judgment or the narrator's? If it is the narrator's, is it ironic? Angus Wilson says that the "corruption of the prison had touched even that perfect heroine in blinding her moral sense to her father's frauds"; but F. R. Leavis thinks that Arthur Clennam is wrong and Little Dorrit is right:

The speck, of course, is upon Clennam. I say, 'of course,' but I know from questions and discussion . . . that the irony can be missed. Yet who, on reflection, can conceive Dickens to have meant any but that judgement which is conveyed by Little Dorrit? Besides the cruelty, the offence against life, of imprisonment for debt (and it was society that had entailed indebtedness on the essentially innocent William Dorrit), there is the stultifying irrationality: the debtor in prison is debarred from setting about earning the means of repayment. 24

Although most of the critics seem to side with Wilson, I cannot help but agree with Leavis. The speck is not on Little Dorrit but on Arthur. Hers is the correct perception, for, as Leavis continues, "Little Dorrit is profoundly modest and not a person of intellectual force, and Clennam, she knows, is good. So she defers to him;
but she has seen—for her feeling is perception—that to acquiesce in the suggestion that life can be weighed against money is a sin against life."25 In this instance, as in most others, Little Dorrit is correct in her judgment and clear in her perception.

Her one breakdown in correctly judging others and their thoughts occurs in the same scene in which she has so astutely measured Arthur Clennam. When she sees Clennam attentively watching her, she thinks that he is judging her family harshly for her sacrifices for them, but "what was really on his mind, was the weak figure with its strong purpose, the thin worn shoes, the insufficient dress, and the pretense of recreation and enjoyment" (p. 162). She is so defensive about her desire always to protect her father and her family that she automatically assumes that Arthur accuses her of over-protecting them to her own neglect. Yet she does not think about her own appearance, only of how her family appears to him, and she does not want him to judge them harshly.

What she perceives about her family is one of the critical questions in the novel. F. R. Leavis compares Little Dorrit to James's Maisie in What Maisie Knew; he asks "incorruptible innocent and sincere, what does she know—really know?"26 Early in the novel, Dickens
writes of the child of the Marshalsea: "What her pitiful look saw, at that early time, in her father, her sister, in her brother, in the jail; how much, or how little of the wretched truth it pleased God to make visible to her lies hidden with many mysteries" (p. 70). Shortly afterward, he continues in the same vein: "worldly wise in hard and poor necessities, she was innocent in all things else. Innocent, in the mist through which she saw her father, the prison, and the turbid river that flowed through it and flowed on" (p. 76). This is the passage that Jerome Beaty uses to defend his thesis that Little Dorrit develops in the course of the novel; he argues that the mist indicates that "her moral vision [is] blurred by her narrow environment" in the first book of the novel, but that mist is lifted in the second, and she can see clearly.27 The crucial problem with his argument is that he never shows that she sees her family any differently, only that once on the Continent, "the mist rises, and the narrator can penetrate the mystery of her mind and see that she sees the wretched truth of expatriate and tourist English society."28 Beaty confuses issues in his argument. The mist is not the narrator's; it is Little Dorrit's. While the narrator does delve into her mind more in the second book, there is no textual evidence to support a change in the way that she sees her family nor
to indicate that she needs to have her "moral health" restored, as Beaty says. She is the only morally healthy character in the novel, and Dickens makes that clear throughout. It is understandable and in character for her to want to protect her family and appear to be blind to their faults.

She only "appears" to be blind, however, for she recognizes the faults of her family and often reveals that she knows her father well. She perceives the shadow of the Marshalsea on him better than anyone (p. 464). She even warns Arthur about her father and feels uncomfortable about his "testimonials" early in the novel (p. 92). Her "pride" is "innocent" when she boasts about him; it is her affection, compassion, and fidelity which govern her feelings and guide her in her attempts to get Arthur to understand and be careful in his efforts with the "sunken wreck he had a dream of raising" (p. 94).

She also knows that her family takes advantage of her. She thinks when she visits Arthur in his room that "he was blaming her in his mind, for so devising to contrive for them, think for them, and watch over them, without their knowledge or gratitude; perhaps even with their reproaches for supposed neglect" (p. 162). These are not the thoughts of someone blind to her family's shortcomings. She knows her family as a mother knows her children, aware
of their selfishness and lack of gratitude yet intent upon protecting and taking care of them. Arthur sees in her look at her father "pride," but he also sees that she is "half-ashamed for him"; however, most of all, he sees someone who is "devoted and loving" (p. 79). Thus, the mist is one of love not ignorance, and her innocence is "an innocence which knows and understands the wickedness of the world, and is able to accept and love even that," as J. Hillis Miller says. 30

In her verbal exchange with her sister over Fanny's plans to marry Edmund Sparkler, Little Dorrit reveals the motivation behind her role of mother by explaining her view of what love is or should be:

"O, my dear, dear Fanny!" Expostulated Little Dorrit, upon whom a kind of terror had been stealing as she perceived what her sister meant. "If you love anyone, all this feeling would change. If you loved anyone you would no more be yourself, but you would quite lose and forget yourself in your devotions to him. If you love him, Fanny--." (p. 572)

Fanny replies, "O, indeed . . . Really? Bless me, how much some people know of some subjects? They say everyone has a subject, and I certainly seem to have hit upon yours, Amy. There, you little thing, I was only in fun, . . . but, don't you be a silly puss . . ." (pp. 572-73).

Shortly afterward, Fanny announces her intention of marrying Sparkler, causing Little Dorrit to cry and even initiating tears from Fanny, who, the narrator says,
"cried too--a little. It was the last time Fanny even showed that there was any hidden, suppressed, or conquered feeling in her on that matter" (p. 578). Fanny does not actually want Little Dorrit's advice; the pretense of talking it over with Amy allows her to work out her own ideas: like a tennis player working out against a backboard, she is not really interested in the substance of the return only in the motion that allows her to strengthen her own moves. Again, Little Dorrit serves as the contrasting figure to the others, this time her sister, and as the corrective lens on the false world and its motives. Little Dorrit reveals her own romantic and idealistic side in this exchange. She feels—and Dickens expects the reader to do so also—that Fanny is marrying for all the wrong reasons. Moreover, Little Dorrit's speech on love illustrates the motivations behind her own actions; she believes that love for another requires abnegation in the devotion to the other. This is what directs her in her role as mother to her family and in her relationship with Arthur.

Little Dorrit plays another role just as important as her role of mother, that of child. In it, however, she is not motivated by an ideal concept of love but by a desire to protect herself. She is often troubled by her littleness, "that unfortunate defect of hers, which came so
often in her way" (p. 72), but she learns to use it to her advantage. For instance, when John Chivery surprises her on the iron bridge, where she stands "musing," he sees a side of her that he has not seen before. He has thought her avoidance of him was caused by her shyness, but here he perceives "something like dislike" and is shocked when "she flees in what appears to him great pain," crying "O, I don't know what to do." He is accustomed to seeing her always "so reliable and self-suppressed" and not "bereft of her self-command" (p. 211). John has caught her in one of her few vulnerable moments, and she is uncharacteristically close to losing control. Her agitation is probably due to her awareness of the "plot" to marry her to John Chivery, whom she does not love, and her growing love of Arthur. In his number plans, Dickens says that he wants to offer the "first suggestion of her being in love with Clennam" in this chapter and it is clear that Arthur is becoming more than "a friend and protector" when she acknowledges that his window has become a distant star to her (p. 163). However, what emerges from the scene with John Chivery is one of her ways of protecting herself. She tells him, "when you think of me at all, John, let it be as the child you have seen grown up in the prison, with one set of duties always occupying her; as a weak, retired, contented, unprotected girl. I
particularly want you to remember, that when I come outside the gate, I am unprotected and solitary" (p. 212). By asking John to recognize her only as a child, she forces him to retreat not only from the bridge but, she hopes, from future attempts to approach her. For him to do otherwise would be to violate her innocence and her vulnerability, and John, as a "gentleman," would never want to take advantage of her position.

In the scene with the prostitute Little Dorrit again seeks refuge in her childlike appearance. Having been locked out of the Marshalsea and forced to spend the night on the street, Little Dorrit is "happy for once in her youthful appearance, feigned to cling and rely upon Maggy" (p. 169). A prostitute, appearing genuinely concerned, asks Maggy what she is doing with the "child." Maggy is naturally confused, but Little Dorrit, instead of speaking up, keeps her head "dropped down" and "her form close to Maggy's side" (p. 169). The prostitute realizes her mistake and withdraws, but Little Dorrit asks her to let her speak to her as a child, which causes the prostitute to reply, "you can't do it, . . . you are kind and innocent, but you can't look at me out of child's eyes. I never should have touched you, but that I thought you were a child" (p. 169). What Little Dorrit does here is similar to what she does with John Chivery. In order
to protect herself, she hides in her smallness and pretends to be a child. The prostitute recognizes her for what she is, however, and flees because she believes that a woman would know her for what she is and might judge her. Critics have used this scene to argue that Little Dorrit feigns childhood in order to deny her sexuality. As a child, she is safer from sexual assault, certainly, but it is as difficult to imagine Little Dorrit's fear of being raped as it is to believe that she is protecting herself from John Chivery's sexual desires. Dickens would not allow his angelic heroine sexual thoughts. He would probably accept, as Kathleen Woodward says quoting from William Axton's *Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (1855): "'the best mothers, wives, managers of households, know little or nothing of sexual indulgence. Love of home, children, and domestic duties, are the only passions they feel.'" For Dickens, Little Dorrit is not a sexual being; she cares for others as a mother would, but as a child and a virgin, she maintains "the innocence and spontaneous love of childhood." She assumes the role of child as naturally as she assumes the role of mother because it gives direction to her activities and provides protection. She warms to the concern of the prostitute just as she does to the desire to help her after the truth is revealed. When the prostitute asks if Little
Dorrit has a mother and a father, she strikes the most important chord in the passage, because, of course, Little Dorrit has no mother, and essentially no father; he is too busy being the "father of the Marshalsea" to take care of her or anyone. The turnkey was more of a father to her than her own (pp. 69-71). Little Dorrit is drawn to the prostitute, as she is to Arthur Clennam at first, because they both indicate a desire to protect her or help her, and they both need her help.

Her motivations with Arthur Clennam, although more complicated, are based on the desire to protect and be protected. She is distressed at his so often calling her "child," but he explains, when he senses that it bothers her, that he is only seeking a "tender word" (p. 160). Yet in her first letter to him, she asks, "remember me only as the shabby girl you protected with such tenderness" and signs it, "your poor child, Little Dorrit" (p. 457). In her second, she refers to herself as "your unchanged poor child" and tells him that she always dreams of herself as a child (pp. 537-38). Janice Carlisle says that Little Dorrit uses the name "Little Dorrit" with Arthur in order "to conceal the human potentiality of her relationship" with him and refers to herself as "poor child" because it conceals the fact that she is old enough to love him, but her discomfort at his calling her
child suggests that her feelings are more ambiguous. She wants him to recognize that she is a woman and love her as such, yet she also enjoys having him as protector and, by calling herself "child," she places him firmly in that position. Also, as Butt and Tillotson point out, "Arthur Clennam's misunderstanding of his own feelings toward Little Dorrit is the result of his thinking of her as a child, so the diminutive is an essential part of the plot. It is also picturesque and symbolical—the small frail figure who is nevertheless the fount of moral strength; the protectress, the neglected, loved by all and until the end, understood by none." 36 The movement of the plot is towards his slow realization that she is not a child, but her own ambivalent desire to both protect herself, as well as others, and be protected slows the progress. He identifies himself as a sort of father to her, and so does she (p. 184). She says to herself in an early meeting between them, "what a good father he would be. How with such a look, he would counsel and cherish his daughter" (p. 161). Here, she could be thinking of children he might father, but more importantly, she reveals her own pathetic desire for a father who would "counsel" and "cherish" her, which suggests that she realizes that her relationship with her own father is inadequate. When Little Dorrit returns to Arthur after
his imprisonment, she calls herself his "own poor child come back!" and he takes the place of her father. She begins automatically to comfort and take care of him, just as she had done with her father when he occupied the same cell.

A parallel mechanism of self-protection that Little Dorrit uses is withdrawal. Being childlike helps her to be self-effacing; as a child among the elders, she can naturally hide in the shadows. Her shyness is an essential aspect of her nature in the first descriptions of her, but as the novel progresses, she becomes even more withdrawn. After Pancks begins his "fortune-telling" and when Arthur becomes a frequent visitor, the narrator says, "she had from her earliest years kept many heavier loads [than her wondering about Pancks, but] a change had stolen, and was stealing yet, over the patient heart. Everyday found her something more retiring than the day before. To pass in and out of the prison unnoticed, and elsewhere to be overlooked and forgotten, were for herself, her chief desires" (p. 282). In the relationship with Pancks, she feels threatened; she thinks Pancks is mad and distrusts his motives (p. 280). In her relationship with Arthur, she desires to protect her "secret" love for him, and she fears that she is losing control of herself; the encounter with John Chivery suggests that she is right. Several
times when Arthur visits, she refuses to see him, and her reactions with him reveal why; she is often reduced to tears and appears tremulous and agitated (pp. 83, 92, 159, 373). He stirs her emotions almost from their first meeting, and soon she is obviously in love with him. The narrator says at one point that her "quickened bosom . . . would have joyfully thrown itself before him to receive a mortal wound directed at his breast, with the dying cry, 'I love him!'" (p. 373). The only other person that she feels so strongly towards is her father, for whom she "would have laid down her own life to restore" (p. 630). She loves Arthur and her father with the total devotion with which she tells Fanny one should love someone, but she realizes that Arthur does not love her, or at least he does not realize that he does at this point; therefore, she wants to avoid him to keep her feelings hidden.

In the "Princess Story" that she tells Maggy, Little Dorrit is the "poor little tiny woman with a secret shadow." Her shadow of "Someone" is Arthur, who regards himself as "nobody," and she wants to protect her secret from everyone, most of all Arthur (p. 284). She is very uncomfortable when Maggy brings up the story in front of Arthur (p. 373), and, interestingly, she thinks of it when she is confused by the touch of Mrs. Clennam, suggesting that she may feel a kinship with Mrs. Clennam in possessing a secret and also that Little Dorrit may fear that
Mrs. Clennam, as Arthur's "mother," senses her secret (p. 336). Her "Princess Story" provides one rare means of escape for Little Dorrit; in it, she can allow her imagination free rein and symbolically cope with her feelings. It also reveals how alone she feels. She has no one to confide in, and her family is too selfish even to notice her discomfort or unhappiness. The one person who should be sensitive enough to recognize her feelings, Arthur Clennam, is too absorbed in his obsession with being old and his mother's secret to "see" her love for him. He, like all the others and like the characters in the fairy tale, looks without seeing (p. 285). He does, however, think that she might love someone after Mrs. Chivery tells him that John loves her and that she loves him but restrains from revealing her love because of her loyalty to her family. He finds Mrs. Chivery's notions "disappointing, disagreeable, and almost painful," and thinks to himself that "the Little Dorrit, trembling on his arm, was less in unison than ever with Mrs. Chivery's theory, and yet [it] was not irreconcilable with a new fancy which sprung up within him that there might be some one else, in the hopeless--newer fancy still--in the hopeless unattainable distance" (pp. 252-54). He is perceptive enough to realize that Little Dorrit does not love John Chivery, but not to realize that she loves him.
She tells him, "you have been so good to us, so delicately and truly good, that I want him [her father] to be better in your eyes than in anybody's, and I cannot bear to think . . . that you of all the world should see him in his only moments of degradation!" (pp. 164-65).

Earlier, she tells him that she speaks to him as she has not to anyone else (p. 93). That they share a deeper understanding than anyone else emerges even in his calling her "Little Dorrit": "'Little Dorrit,' said Clennam, and the phrase had already begun, between those two, to stand for a hundred gentle phrases, according to the varying tone and connexion in which it was used" (p. 164), but although he thinks of her often as she does of him (p. 257), he fails to realize the special significance of their relationship until he is imprisoned. Then, the "little mother" rescues him from his misdirected and impercipient life, lifts him out of his despair, causes him to finally see her as a woman, and frees him to love her.

What happens to Arthur Clennam is what we might expect to happen to a protagonist in a bildungsroman and it is to Arthur as a hero that I will now turn my attention. Since several critics have discussed Arthur's role in setting or maintaining the lugubrious mood of the novel, his dominance of point of view, his centrality and position as a early modern hero, all of which I agree with, I will
focus on his development, his relationship to Dickens and the reader, and his final conversion. 37

Arthur Clennam tells Little Dorrit, "I am like yourself," and she replies, "not like me" (p. 256). Clennam, however, is correct in that the two of them have had similar childhoods. Dickens reveals in his Number Plans that he wanted to draw a parallel between Arthur's early life and Little Dorrit's, particularly between the imprisonment of their parents. 38 Little Dorrit and Arthur are both "deprived children" brought up like orphans in homes which offered neither love nor protection nor the nurturing Dickens felt necessary for the imagination to flourish and the individual to grow to adulthood, the nurturing that Dickens often depicts as lacking in the early life of his protagonists. The inadequacy of Arthur's upbringing dominates much of the early chapters. His first twenty years were spent imprisoned by his mother and her Calvinistic teachings, empty of warmth and love; the second have been devoted to his father and the business. The picture of his early life that he paints for Mr. Meagles shows his awareness of the inadequacy and his despair over what it has done to him:

"I have no will. That is to say," he colored a little, "next to none that I can put in action now. Trained by main force; broken, not bent; heavily ironed with an object on which I was never consulted and which was never mine, shipped away to the other end of the world
before I was of age, and exiled there until my father's death there, a year ago, always grinding in a mill I always hated; what is to be expected from me in middle-life? Will, purpose, hope? All these lights were extinguished before I could sound the words . . . . I am the son, Mr. Meagles, of a hard father and mother. I am the only child of parents who weighed, measured, and priced everything: for whom what could not be weighed, measured, and priced, had no existence. Strict people as the phrase is, professors of a stern religion, their very religion was a gloomy sacrifice of tastes and sympathies that were never their own, offered up as a part of a bargain for the security of their possessions. Austere faces, inexorable disciplines, penance in this world and terror in the next--nothing graceful or gentle anywhere, the void in my cowed heart everywhere--this was my childhood, if I may so misuse the word as to apply it to such a beginning of life." (p. 20)

Arthur's childhood, as Little Dorrit's, has been deprived, but, unlike Little Dorrit, he expresses his resentment and anger. Little Dorrit would never so openly criticize her family, nor does Arthur usually speak so candidly. He is typically a passive character, who, as his verb choice suggests, has been acted upon rather than initiated action, and much of the description of his blighted early life comes from the narrator. The narrator says that "to review his life was like describing a green tree in fruit and flower and seeing all the branches wither and drop off one by one as he came down towards them" (p. 158). He is freed from his exile and the mill he hates, after his father's death, but he still has his mother to face.
His home to him is blank, and he fears his mother as he did when he was a child. He tells her that he would never set his will against her (p. 45); in fact, as he tells Meagles, he has little will left to "set against anyone." The little purpose or hope that he has is essentially destroyed when he finds that his one pleasant remembrance, Flora, is now fat and silly (p. 157). The Marshalsea is actually more of a home to Little Dorrit than Clennam's home is to him, although he asks that she not call it home (p. 256). Peter Christmas says that "Clennam, without a mother, a home, or any affection till early middle age, is not so much unhappy as empty." As a yet unformed, undirected man, he is recognizable as a middle-aged "young man from the provinces," and as a melancholy, unglamorous, inept, frustrated, and passive hero, he is a nineteenth-century Prufrock or anti-hero; thus, modern readers are naturally drawn to him as the protagonist of the novel. His dominance of point of view contributes to the reader's identification as well. F. R. Leavis gives one of the best descriptions of why readers tend to identify with Arthur as they do with Pip in Great Expectations in his comparison of the narration of the two novels:
Clennam is not 'I' in it, and not the ubiquitous immediate consciousness that registers and presents. Yet he too is felt as a pervasive presence, or something approaching it. He has been very early, with a subtlety of purpose and touch Dickens isn't as a rule credited with, established as that—established as the presence of what one may very well find oneself referring to as plain unassertive normality. And what that means is that we tend to be Clennam, as we obviously don't William Dorrit, Mr. Meagles, Daniel Doyce, Henry Gowan, Pancks—or any other character in the book. He is for us a person, the decently ordinary person among the dramatis personae . . . and he has at the same time a special status, unavowed but essential to his importance; it is implicit in his being, not a queer or unpleasant case, but the immediate focal presence of representative human sentience—ours (for ours, being our own, is that; it is the immediate concrete 'presence of life').

While Leavis' praise of Arthur may be exaggerated, he is the only character in a novel of skillfully depicted grotesques, such as Flora, Mr. F's Aunt, Pancks, Sparkler, and the Barnacles, and symbols, such as Little Dorrit and Rigaud, who is recognizable as a traditional protagonist and who allows identification.

And, of all the characters, Arthur Clennam is the closest to Dickens the man. Except for Leavis, critics equate Arthur with Dickens; Garis, for instance feels that in the characterization of Arthur, Dickens has registered "his deepest and most personal moral questioning," and Trilling says that in Arthur Clennam one can sense
"Dickens' deep personal involvement in *Little Dorrit* . . . by Clennam's consciousness that he has passed the summit of life and that the path from now on leads downward, by his belief that the pleasures of love are not for him, by his 'I want to know . . . , ' by his wish to negate the will in death. Arthur Clennam is that mode of Dickens' existence at the time of *Little Dorrit*. . . ."

Certainly, the fifties were a difficult time for Dickens. His marriage was deteriorating; he was becoming more freewheeling and perhaps becoming infatuated with Ellen Ternan. He also was very distressed and angry over current events in parliament and in England in general, and in particular over England's involvement in the Crimean War and the poverty and pollution in London. It was a time of questioning for him and a time when he, like Clennam, felt old and as if he had missed something in his life. He asks Forester in a letter he writes in January, 1855: "Why is it that as with poor David, a sense comes always crushing over me now when I fall into low spirits, as of one happiness I have missed in life, and one friend or companion I have never made?" He feels as if the something or someone who might bring happiness to him has permanently eluded him. He experiences great disappointment, as does Clennam, when his once beloved Maria Beadnell, whom he confesses to
reincarnating in Flora, turns out to be fat and ugly. A letter he writes to Macready could have easily been written by Clennam, for it expresses the same feelings that Clennam has about his age and about his long, refreshing walks: "Calm amidst the wreck, your aged friend glides away on the Dorrit stream, forgetting the uproar for a stretch of yours, refreshing himself with a 10 to 12 miles' walk." Other Dickens novels reflect the political climate and Dickens' dissatisfaction with it, *Bleak House* and *Hard Times* for instance, and others contain autobiographical elements, particularly *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*; therefore, it is not unusual that autobiography should enter into the writing of *Little Dorrit*. What is unusual is that the immediate emotional upheaval should so closely parallel that of his hero. The sadness of his childhood—the blacking warehouse incident, for example—and the feeling of being unloved and betrayed by his mother had found their way into his fiction from the beginning, but a middle-aged protagonist, going through a crisis of will and spirit, and ending up in the Marshalsea where Dickens' father had been incarcerated, was a first for Dickens. It is no wonder then that Arthur Clennam should live for us more than Little Dorrit and that many readers should come away from the novel with the sense that what they have read is
Arthur Clennam's story and not Little Dorrit's. Dickens the man felt Arthur's pain and identified with his view of the world.

This affinity of author for character often makes it difficult to separate the voice of the third-person omniscient narrator from the third-person limited of Arthur Clennam. I cannot agree, however, with T. N. Grove's statement that "Clennam's voice is never completely separated from the narrative voice of the author himself." The "Nobody" chapters serve as the best example of separation. In these chapters, the narrator is clearly making fun of Arthur, and the tone is ironic. Garis and Jefferson find these chapters inconsistent with the serious tone of the novel; Dickens is making fun of Arthur after having previously depicted his depression as serious and sympathetic. In other words, the sympathetic bond established between the reader and Arthur Clennam is broken and a bond between author and reader is established. Dickens is creating a sense of community with the reader; we join him in his superior knowledge of what is actually going on in Arthur's life. The result is that the reader is jarred into the awareness that Arthur may not know himself that well and may not be the most trustworthy judge of himself or the world around him. The passages also show Arthur's tendency to weigh and
balance as his mother does and Dickens' criticism of this. Dabney says that the tone of the chapters reveals Dickens' approval of Arthur Clennam's abnegation, but the ironic tone seems more likely to suggest Dickens' criticism of Arthur and his inability to follow his heart and act instead of just react. 47

The "Nobody" chapters resemble the early passage in which Arthur pours out his feelings to Meagles: they reveal how human, how desperate, and how lonely he is. They also illustrate how much of his mother and father's careful balancing of heart and head he has inherited. A struggle is taking place between his heart's desire to be permitted to love Pet and his head's attempts to reason him out of it. The irony of the narrator makes it clear that Arthur is a man largely governed by his heart no matter how desperately he fights it. He is after all "a dreamer in such wise, because he was a man who had deep-rooted in his nature, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without. Bred in meanness and hard dealing, this had rescued him to be a man of honorable mind and open hand. Bred in coldness and severity, this had rescued him to have a warm and sympathetic heart" (p. 158). Just as a "boy's love had found its way even into" his mother's house when he was young (p. 40), the love he feels for Pet, though decidedly
misdirected, triumphs over his rationalization for not loving her. In "Nobody's Weakness," Arthur talks to himself about falling in love with Pet and applies the balancing scale of his mother; he asks, "whether he should allow himself to fall in love with Pet?" (p. 190). The verb "allow" is a strange choice of words for a man thinking of loving someone. It is almost as if his heart, like a child, needs to ask permission to be "allowed" to go out to play. After weighing the pros and cons, he resolves to "not allow himself to fall in love with Pet" (p. 190).

His "resolve" proves empty since he continues to debate with himself:

suppose that a man . . . who had been of age some twenty years or so; who was a diffident man, from the circumstances of his youth, who was rather a grave man from the tenor of his life; who knew himself to be deficient in many little engaging qualities which he admired in others, from having been long in a distant region, with nothing softening near him; who had no kind sisters to present to her; who had no congenial home to make her known in; who was a stranger in the land; who had not a fortune to compensate, in any measure, for these defects; who had nothing in his favor but his honest love and his general wish to do right--suppose such a man were to come to his house, and were to yield to the captivation of this charming girl, and were to persuade himself that he could hope to win her: what a weakness it would be! (p. 194)

The narrator then adds, "why should he be vexed or sore at heart? It was not his weakness that he had imagined.
It was nobody's. Nobody's within his knowledge, why should it trouble him? And yet it did trouble him. And he thought—who has not thought for a moment, sometimes—that it might be better to flow monotonously, like the river, and to compound for its insensitivity to happiness with its insensitivity to pain" (pp. 194-97). Clennam is obviously not a man who can apply cold measurement to his feelings as his mother can. He feels too much and his heart betters him, allowing him to fall in love with Pet even though his reason says he should not. He does not know his deficiencies as well as he thinks, for his main ones are lack of self-confidence, lack of will, and lack of responsibility for making the moves necessary to bring him happiness. Though he thinks that he wants to drift aimlessly, he really wants a purpose in life, a home, occupation, and love.

He tells himself that he has everything under control, but the tone of the narrator makes it clear that Clennam does love Pet and does dislike his rival. The narrator says, "but for that resolution so often recalled, Clennam might have wished him in the crater of Mount Etna, in return for" Gowan's civility (p. 198), and "Clennam had been a little reserved since breakfast—that is to say would have been, if he had loved her" and if Gowan "had been his rival" (p. 203). And, of course,
the narrator and the reader know that Arthur does wish to see Gowan in the crater, does love Pet, and does see Gowan as a rival. And, if we have not gotten the point by now, the narrator continues, "if Clennam had not decided against falling in love with Pet; if he had had the weakness to do it; if he had, little by little, persuaded himself to set all the earnestness of his nature, all the might of his hope, and all the wealth of his matured character on that cast; if he had done this, and found that all was lost; he would have been miserable. As it was--As it was, the rain fell heavily, drearily," as do Clennam's tears (p. 204). "Nobody" does love Pet, and though he rather stoically accepts her announcement of marrying Gowan and agrees to attend the wedding and stand by the family, he is miserable. In short, he has "allowed" the "forbidden passion" to consume him (p. 301). When he realizes that he has lost and Gowan won, Clennam builds the wall that stubbornly keeps him from recognizing Little Dorrit's love until the two of them have suffered through much pain and hardship; he assumes the role of the "older man who had done with that part of his life" (pp. 326-27). He seeks refuge in assumed old age; it allows him to live with his failure in finding the love he seeks in Flora and in Pet.

From his position of self-created old age and
lovelessness, he can safely bury himself in other peoples' problems. One of his first causes is the freeing of the Dorrit family. He inquires at the Circulation Office, does some research but finally admits failure and quietly gives up (p. 137). It is through Pancks's efforts that the Dorrits are released though Clennam initiated the investigation and appears at the end to accept and obtain much of the credit. When he tells Little Dorrit about the money, Mr. F's aunt says that it is not his doing and "he needn't take no credit to himself for it!" (p. 404). Mr. F's aunt is noted for her apparent non sequiturs and biting remarks, many of them aimed at Clennam, and critics have disputed her role in the novel. Like a Shakespearean fool, she spouts riddles and apparent nonsense, but at the same time, she speaks a kind of truth. In this instance, her truth is more obvious than in others, for Arthur is not responsible for locating the Dorrit money; Pancks is. Arthur also takes up Meagles' cause with Tattycoram and fails. He visits Miss Wade but fails to get her charge to return to the Meagles' home; she later returns on her own. He attempts to find Blandois and fails, resulting in Blandois being brought to Arthur after he is helplessly imprisoned. He starts out fighting for Doyce and his invention, soon finds that he cannot do anything to bring deserved recognition, joins Doyce in business, but ruins
him with his investments in the Merdle enterprises. And, of course, the mystery he works to solve throughout the novel, that surrounding his home, mother, his father, and the watch, he never solves. Affery tells him at one point that if he ever would "get the better of them two clever ones" as he should, she would tell her dreams, but he never does (p. 671). Most critics identify Arthur's motivation in all of his causes as guilt, but much of what he does is brought on by a need "to know," to come to terms with his past, and to find some purpose and perhaps happiness in his present and future life. As Ross Dabney says, "we are much more involved in his suffering than in the suffering of those whose interests he champions. He means to help Doyce, Meagles, and Amy Dorrit, but proves consistently powerless to do so; they on the other hand combine to save him in the end."50 His causes are all attempts to alleviate his feelings of impotence and inadequacy, but he is often misdirected and unsuccessful. He fails to help the others in the way that he intends and fails to discover the mysteries of his family as he mistakenly thinks he must in order to gain peace, self-respect, and happiness.

Much of Clennam's development does depend, however, on his overcoming his painful memories of the past. Unlike the reminder that Mr. Clennam leaves his wife demanding that she not forget (which she, of course,
misconstrues), Arthur must forget. He is in the position that Kierkegaard describes in "Either/Or" where, if he "cannot forget, he will never amount to much."51 Arthur's chance for self-identity depends, as J. Hillis Miller asserts, on his "rejection of the past, the given, and exterior as sources of self-hood, and reorientation toward the future," a future of "concrete, forward-moving action."52 Arthur's early action is misguided. He places his future hopes in Flora and Pet and in his causes, none of which gives him what he needs.

The vision that he has when he is accidentally locked in the Marshalsea early in the novel provides the key to his past, present, and future:

And these involuntary starts of fancy were, after all, but the setting of a picture in which three people kept before him. His father, with the steadfast look with which he had died, prophetically darkened forth in the portrait; his mother, with her arm up, warding off his suspicion; Little Dorrit, with her hand on the degraded arm, and her dropping head turned away. (p. 85)

His mother and his father represent the past, with the unhappiness of his childhood and his conscription into the company. He in a way frees himself from his mother by not staying in her house and by breaking away from the business, but he cannot escape the "shadow of a supposed act of injustice, which had hung over him since his father's death" (p. 311). Little Dorrit, who will later
become his future, is the link between the past, present, and future. Fred Kaplan says that "in Little Dorrit . . ., Dickens suggests, as does Joyce in Ulysses, that the test of an individual's maturity is his ability to bring past, present, and future into some kind of geographical and temporal harmony."\(^{53}\) In Little Dorrit, Arthur hopes to find the key to the mysteries of his family, but what he finds instead is the "staff to bear him company upon his downward journey and cheer it" that he longs for near the beginning of the novel (p. 158). She is obviously the answer to his question, "what have I found?" from the start; he is just too obsessed with the past and her possible link to his questions about his family to realize it (pp. 158-59). Little Dorrit's burning of the codicil makes it clear that Clennam's happiness does not lie in the secret of his birth.\(^{54}\) The collapse of the Clennam house and the final impotency of his mother also suggest that Arthur's past is to be placed permanently behind him and the way prepared for him to live a harmonious future with Little Dorrit.

Before he can realize his future, however, he has to experience his complete downfall. Dickens notes that he plans in the Merdle chapters early in Book II to begin establishing "Clennam's course downward" and then continue it through to Little Dorrit's appearance and his eventual release.\(^{55}\) Getting infected by the Merdle
epidemic with Pancks, Arthur irresponsibly invests Doyce's money. After the collapse, he accepts the responsibility and the punishment:

"My course," said Clennam, brushing away some tears that had been dropping down his face, "must be taken at once. What wretched amends I can make must be made. I must clear my unfortunate partner's reputation. I must retain nothing for myself, I must resign to our creditors the power of management I have so much abused, and I must work out as much of my fault—or crime—as is susceptible of being worked out, in the rest of my days." (p. 693)

He admits early that he has no will, and in following Pancks, he illustrates how easily he can allow himself to be pulled along by a more powerful force; the "tug" tows the drifting Clennam into the drowning current (p. 153). Unlike the "nobody's faulters," however, he accepts full blame and not only makes his mistake public but also rejects his lawyer's advice to be "taken on a writ from one of the Superior Courts," which would have meant a more pleasant prison environment, and elects to be placed in the Marshalsea (p. 697). Since the "nobody" chapters are clearly Arthur's, it would seem that Dickens did identify Arthur with the failure to accept responsibility or a similar fault exhibited by the Circumlocution people. Two popular explanations for the original title of *Little Dorrit*, *Nobody's Fault*, are Dickens' anger over the failure of governmental officials to accept the responsibility for contemporary problems and Forster's offering
in his biography that the "book took its origin from the notion he [Dickens] had of a leading man for a story who should bring about all the mischief in it, lay it all on Providence, and say at every fresh calamity, 'Well, it's a mercy, however, nobody was to blame you know.'."\(^{56}\) Elaine Showalter believes that Arthur Clennam is the man who brings about the mischief but blames others, although most critics do not equate Arthur with such a man and do not find any such individual in the novel.\(^{57}\) He does possess an inability to act at times, he does fail in many of his causes, and he does suffer from a sickness of will which gives "nobody's fault" the additional meanings of "nobody's flaw," but he does not exhibit the lack of human feelings characteristic of the men in the Circumlocution Office with their science of "How Not to Do It."\(^{58}\) Although Arthur's actions are often inept and misguided, his intentions are good. In addition, he does not hesitate to step forward and accept the responsibility for ruining Doyce. He has sought to perform restitution for his father's wrongs and failed, but his mistake allows him to enforce the "code of morals" of his youth—"duty on earth, restitution on earth, and action on earth" (p. 310). Consequently, he finds himself in the Marshalsea in Dorrit's old room and in the depths of despair, with only his thoughts of Little Dorrit to comfort him.
Once in prison his thoughts naturally turn to Little Dorrit. She is more than the "one good and gentle creature who had sanctified" the Marshalsea room; she is also a "face of love and truth" (p. 699). Dickens remarks in the Number Plans that in "The Pupil of the Marshalsea" Clennam is to learn "imperfectly and vaguely—that he has loved Little Dorrit," and John Chivery is to complete "the lesson" with the information that Little Dorrit loves him.58 He recounts the mistakes of his life and his faults and finally realizes that Little Dorrit represents the "right perception" that comes in times of adversity (p. 700). Up to this point, he has been too absorbed in memories of the past, secrets of his family, obtaining a vocation, and loving Pet to acknowledge the possibility of loving Little Dorrit. Also, his retreat into the notion that he is too old for love, that she is a child and he an old man (pp. 711-12), has stood in the way. Now he acknowledges his love for her, dreams of the possibility that she does indeed love him, and she becomes the point that brings his life into focus:

Looking back upon his own poor story, she was its vanishing-point. Everything in its perspective led to her innocent figure. He had travelled thousands of miles towards it; previous unquiet hopes and doubts had worked themselves out before it; it was the centre of the interest of his life; it was the termination of everything that was good and pleasant in it; beyond there was nothing but mere waste, and darkened sky. (p. 714)
His loneliness, his disgust over ruining Doyce, and his feeling of helplessness with Blandois and his mother bring him to the bottom; he is "miserable" and "fallen" (p. 733), and the stage is set for the reappearance of Little Dorrit and her gift of "right perception."

With her father and uncle's death comes Little Dorrit's freedom to return "home" to the Marshalsea and to Clennam. The manner of her first appearance recalls Arthur's earlier semi-conscious dream state in which he envisions his father, mother, and Little Dorrit. Arthur is "dozing and dreaming" and is unsure of reality (p. 735). He thinks that he smells flowers, hears night-tunes, and sees Little Dorrit in the room (p. 735). Finally, he realizes that she is actually there and sees in her face how wretched he has become. Her tears fall like "rain from Heaven," and she reaches out "angelically" to comfort him (p. 736). She appears as that which can give life in the prison waste-land and as the angel of mercy. Easily and automatically, she assumes her role of mother, and Arthur takes her father's place:

drawing an arm softly round his neck, [she] laid his head upon her bosom, put a hand upon his head, and resting her cheek upon that hand, nursed him as lovingly, and GOD knows as innocently, as she had nursed her father in that room when she had been but a baby, needing all the care from others that she took of them. (p. 736)

Dickens stresses that the relationship is innocent, not
only to quiet any Victorian uneasiness over a sexual encounter but also to underscore what he has emphasized about Little Dorrit from the beginning; she remains pure, natural, and loving. In his "Memoranda," Dickens states that "Little Dorrit, out of all her wealth and changed station, comes back in her old dress, and devotes herself in the old way." She is going to care for Arthur in the same unselfish way that she cared for her father. Their roles are reversed from what they had been; he had been like a father to her, had attempted to protect and look after her, and she had been the child. Now, she has become the protector, the mother; he the child. She gives him what he has never known—love, comfort, and the sense of being nurtured.

At no Mother's knee but hers had he ever dwelt in his youth on hopeful promises, on playful fancies, on the harvests of tenderness and humility that lie hidden in the early-fostered seeds of the imagination; on the oaks of retreat from blighting winds, that have the germs of their strong roots in nursery acorns. But, in the tones of the voice that read to him, there were memories of an old feeling of such things, and echoes of every merciful and loving whisper that had ever stolen to him in his life. (p. 790)

She restores the chance for growth, for the fruit and flower to develop on the withered tree that has been his life. He has thought himself old; now his sense of youth is returned, and he experiences hope for the future. The scene above has been called "embarrassing Victorian
melodrama" and obviously Freudian, but it has also been labeled "artistically effective" and "among the most beautiful in the literature of love."60 While it is not a "beautiful" love scene and does tend towards the melodramatic, it is effective because it is consistent with Dickens' depiction of Little Dorrit throughout the novel. She is to be recognized as the angel of mercy, the source of life, and the mother to those who need her. She brings hope and life to the dying Clennam and gives him the love that he has sought but not found.

Freudians view their relationship as abnormal, and some critics question the reality of Arthur's beginning to see Little Dorrit as a woman after his continual reference to her as a child.61 However, Dickens presents May-December relationships in other novels; Jarndyce and Esther, Lady Dedlock and Sir Leicester in Bleak House, Louisa and Bounderly, Stephen and Rachel in Hard Times are examples. But perhaps the biographical explanations for Dickens' presenting such relationships are best left to the psychoanalytic critic. What is important in Little Dorrit is how natural the relationship appears in the context of the novel. That Arthur has loved Pet, who is much younger than he, prepares for his love of the youthful Little Dorrit. Also, Dickens makes it clear that she does appear more womanly after her return from the Continent;
however, he qualifies any change in her by stating that "the change was in his [Arthur's] perception, not in her" (p. 737). Until the Continent, she had always been the mother to the family and to Maggie and accepted responsibilities beyond her years, but Arthur had not identified her with that role as much as he had the poor little unprotected child of the Marshalsea. She was the strength of the family, held it together and protected it. She has not changed or grown up; Arthur has.

Jerome Beaty and Richard Barickman argue that Little Dorrit's development parallels Arthur's, that she moves from unconsciousness to consciousness as does he. Little Dorrit does confess that she has found in Arthur what she has never known before, happiness and reciprocal love (p. 792). But this in itself reveals that she was aware of the inadequacy of her relationship with her family. She knows throughout how selfish her family is, but she still protects them just as she will Arthur. The forthrightness and strength that she shows with Arthur, as well as with Mrs. Clennam when she listens to her story and goes with her through the streets, have been subdued but nevertheless evident. Situations and people have changed, but she remains the same. In burning the codicil, she keeps the truth from Arthur to protect him just as she kept truths from her father to protect him. Arthur is
brought to awareness and is changed from self-regard to an ability to love and be loved, from feelings of little self-worth to self-respect, from impotency to strength. 63 Little Dorrit "inspires" Arthur with "inward fortitude" and awakens in him hope and love (p. 737).

Once his debts are settled and he accepts Doyce's mandate that he forget the past and not reproach himself, he has found all that he sought when he first returned home—a profession, love, hope and peace. Arthur Clennam and Little Dorrit can leave the prison as equals. He can provide for her and care for her as her family should have, and she can give him her love and her care. They are free from their families and from the past and can now approach the future.

Little Dorrit and Arthur Clennam escape from their imprisoning childhoods and maintain an ability to grow and love despite their respective environments, but their union does not affect society. 64 They go "quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and in shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the forward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar" (p. 802). Their union is peaceful and quiet, but the streets continue as they have before, corrupt, harsh, and noisy. Mrs. Clennam and Blandois are banished, but others will take
their place and continue their evil. Little Dorrit has rescued but one lost soul and given purpose to one life, Arthur's. And even though they are blessed, their life will involve good, the sun, and bad, the shade, and their life will be "a modest life of usefulness and happiness" (p. 801).

This conclusion does not differ radically from the ending of any other Dickens' novel. It has the traditional Victorian trappings of summary, tying up the loose ends, and joining the hero and the heroine, but it is somewhat disquieting. The novel began as Nobody's Fault, an indictment of society's failure to do its duty and accept responsibility for its problems, and becomes a novel about individuals who do their duty even if society does not. In the conclusion and in the change of title, Dickens acknowledges that no one individual is responsible for all the wrongs and no one individual can change them. As Alan Wilde points out, in the conclusion, "Dickens affirms completely the values symbolized by his hero and heroine, but his belief in the redemptive power of those values remains tentative and incomplete." 65 That Little Dorrit and Arthur Clennam find each other and happiness is not meant to change society because it can not; their way is to serve as an example of how individuals in society should function. Their life of "usefulness" is the answer
to the question posed by Pancks: "What's a man made for?" (p. 153). Clennam is distressed at Pancks's answer that the "Duty of Man in a commercial country" is his profession, his job or work (p. 154). He seeks a more philosophical and perhaps spiritual answer. Forster wrote in his biography of Dickens that *Little Dorrit* is a novel that centers on "duty done and duty not done." That it is, but the "duty" meant is not simply the work that an individual mechanically performs every day, it is that duty held up as an example to Tattycoram, that represented by Little Dorrit; Meagles tells Tattycoram that Little Dorrit's "life has been one of active resignation, goodness, and noble service" and that her eyes have always been focused on "duty" (p. 788). The "moral center" of *Little Dorrit* is the importance of duty and responsibility represented by Little Dorrit. Tom Linehan in his defense of *Little Dorrit* says in a rebuttal to those who criticize the moral values expounded by Dickens in the novel that:

no writer of Dickens' stature, the argument runs, could proclaim (for over eight hundred pages) the moral supremacy of quiet industry, self-effacing duty, and personal responsibility, especially if such virtues are embodied in so angelic and passive a figure as Little Dorrit. No one would deny Dickens often said these virtues were preeminent, but by a strange logic some critics have begun to assume that Dickens really believed something quite different--probably just the opposite of what he said in his fiction, letters, journalism, even his will. Yet for Dickens himself the values and idea he
expressed in the plot of *Little Dorrit* were charged with intensely serious feeling and moral significance. The moral virtues may not be invested with the energies of Dickens' imagination but they are central to his mature vision of personal and social salvation.67

*Little Dorrit* obviously does embody the principles of duty and of responsibility, but Dickens equates her, towards the end of the novel, with even more strictly Christian virtues.

Dickens clearly links *Little Dorrit* to New Testament teachings and contrasts her beliefs and what she represents with Mrs. Clennam and her Old Testament preachings. He even says in his Number Plans that in the last chapters he plans to "set the darkness and vengeance against the New Testament."68 *Little Dorrit* appeals to Mrs. Clennam to

"be guided, only by the healer of the sick, the raiser of the dead, the friend of all who were afflicted and forlorn, the patient Master who shed tears of compassion for our infirmities. We cannot but be right if we put all the rest away, and do everything in remembrance of Him. There is no vengeance and no infliction of suffering in His life, I am sure. There can be no confusion in following Him, and seeking for no other footsteps, I am certain!" (p. 770)

Since *Little Dorrit* seldom delivers such a long speech and certainly has not revealed herself as such an ardent proponent of Christianity, the passage seems somewhat discordant and out of character. Instead of the quiet
little woman being good and doing good, she emerges here as an evangelist preaching someone's gospel; Dickens' perhaps. In a letter to his youngest son written in 1868, Dickens wrote, "I put a New Testament among your books, for the very same reasons, and with the very same hopes that made me write an easy account of it for you, when you were a little child; because it is the best book that ever was or will be known in the world, and because it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature who tries to be truthful and faithful to duty can possibly be guided." 69 Dickens' religious beliefs still remain in question, but to say as some critics do that Little Dorrit does not specifically represent Christian love or beliefs is to ignore Dickens' Number Plans and more importantly, the last few chapters of the novel. 70 Throughout the novel, Little Dorrit has represented the light, the good, and Mrs. Clennam, the dark, the evil, and here Dickens is obviously contrasting Little Dorrit's religion of love and forgiveness with Mrs. Clennam's of anger and vengeance. Little Dorrit has quietly lived what she now preaches, and even the churches reflect her influence:

As they [Little Dorrit and Mrs. Clennam] crossed the bridge, the clear steeplees of the many churches looked as if they had advanced out of the murk that usually enshrouded them and come much nearer. The smoke that rose into the sky had lost its dingy hue and taken a brightness upon it . . . great shoots of light streamed among the early stars, like signs of the
blessed later covenant of peace and hope that changed the crown of thorns into a glory. (p. 771)

This presents quite a contrast to the streets and churches, upon Arthur's return home, with their gloom and "penitential garb" (pp. 28-29). An apparent apocalypse has occurred, and the city has moved from darkness to light. Dickens seems to be saying that although Little Dorrit as an individual can only save one person, what she symbolizes, if followed, could perhaps save society. What saves Arthur Clennam is her love and her goodness, not the religious lesson that she delivers to Mrs. Clennam, and even though the streets reflect life and light in contrast to the opening chapter of the novel where the world appears a wasteland, it is clear in the conclusion that Arthur and Little Dorrit find only a separate peace. She heals his sick will and is the source of his redemption, but she is not the Paraclete or the Christ incarnate come to save the world.  

Little Dorrit is the thematic center of the novel. In titling the novel after her and in having her pictured in the lighted center of the cover, Dickens stresses her importance. She represents duty, responsibility, and love, the positive qualities found in the novel instead of the negative "Nobody's Fault." Dickens was fond of novels with thematic centers; *Bleak House* and *Hard Times* are
examples. In both of these novels, he wanted to emphasize a problem in society, and he made that the guiding principle in the imagery and characters. In *Little Dorrit*, he sought a different focus, a titular heroine to carry his theme, and thus puzzled critics and readers. As Janice Carlisle points out, *Little Dorrit* "is not at all a conventional heroine." The novel does not present her adventures as does *Moll Flanders*, her struggles with desire and life as does *Madame Bovary*, or her growth as does *Emma*. Her relationships with others, her role playing, her perceptions, her innocence, and her love for Arthur all make her too complex to be dismissed as another Dickensian "abstract ideal" or "caricature" without "substance," although it would be going too far to say that she is the "most Jamesian of Dickens' portraits." She is both archetypal in carrying the values of the novel, and human in much of her characterization. Thus, she is too important to be labeled a ficelle or background character. She is not, however, the protagonist; Arthur plays that part. He is the one with whom Dickens identified and the one to whom the reader feels closest, the one who not only narrates a good portion of the novel but occupies the action and changes in the way expected of a protagonist. As a character, he establishes a bond with the reader that *Little Dorrit*
never does and easily overshadows her. He is not that much more complicated; he is just more interesting because of his imperfections. Most of the dissatisfaction over Little Dorrit results from changes in taste and in Dickens' perhaps overzealousness in presenting her goodness, which probably does grow out of his idealization of his beloved sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth. Modern readers are no longer particularly attracted to such goodness and perfection. Coupled with this withdrawal is our tendency to expect some sort of gradual development of the heroine which Little Dorrit does not yield. While the attitude that Little Dorrit is simply "too good to be true" cannot easily be changed, the discomforting sense that Little Dorrit fails because of the inadequacies of the characterization of the heroine can be quieted if she is recognized as a heroine who instead of being the protagonist, initiates change in the protagonist and serves a thematic function at the same time that she maintains some touch of humanity or reality. As a symbol, she is by definition more abstract and more static than a traditional heroine and is better revealed through the eyes of the hero as she corrects his distorted vision. Little Dorrit remains somewhat obscure and somewhat nebulous. In short, she is not a conventional nor a traditional heroine but an oblique heroine whose very obliqueness is essential to her characterization.
ENDNOTES - CHAPTER II


4 Letters, II, 689. The change in title has elicited critical comment from many. Butt and Tillotson, who provide the most extensive explanation, say "it seems likely that Little Dorrit was not at first intended to be so important a character; indeed, in manuscripts, proofs, and letters we can trace the way she grew in importance and even see her acquiring her name," Dickens at Work, pp. 230-31; John C. Reid, Charles Dickens: Little Dorrit (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), p. 11, thinks that the title change shows that Dickens saw Little Dorrit emerging as a central character; John Lucas, The Melancholy Man: A Study of Dickens's Novels (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 247, sees the title change as an indication that Dickens wanted to emphasize her qualities and not social satire; Sucksmith, "Introduction," p. xxii, says that the title change shows "important development in the heroine's character and significance." For discussions of the cover design, see Butt and Tillotson, pp. 224-25, Reid, p. 14, and Sucksmith, p. xxii.

5 Many find her too weak and shallow to be the central interest. See particularly Janice Carlisle, "LD:


8 *Little Dorrit*, ed. Harvey Peter Sucksmith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 52. All subsequent references to *Little Dorrit* will be documented parenthetically in the text.

9 Carlisle, pp. 200-01, criticizes Little Dorrit for creating fictions and telling lies.


11 Hewitt, pp. 97-98.


13 Holock, p. 345.

14 Avrom Fleishman, "Master and Servant in *Little Dorrit*," *Studies in English Literature*, 14 (1974), 581, note 3, believes that Little Dorrit's letters are love letters and that they are calculatingly written to manipulate Arthur's feelings into loving her over Pet.
Little Dorrit has been called a novel of the past and memory with most of the principal characters involved in a struggle with memories and the need to come to terms with the past in order to develop a sense of self. Flora, for instance, remains trapped in her former relationship with Clennam until the end of the novel. Mrs. Clennam, like Mrs. Havisham, becomes an embittered old woman because she cannot forgive and forget. Miss Wade, whose autobiography Dickens defended as being essential to the novel, cannot overcome her blighted childhood and emerges as a vindictive and dangerous woman. William Dorrit becomes snobbish and selfish once imprisoned because of his former gentility and becomes even more so once released. Finally, however, he is overcome by his lengthy confinement and in the pathetic scene just before his death, he addresses the people at the dinner party as if he were addressing the collegians at the Marshalsea (p. 626). Little Dorrit accepts her past better than most and is the least harmed by it, though she is haunted by it and longs to return to it once she is outside. For discussions of the importance of the past in the novel and to Dickens, see K. J. Fielding, "Dickens and the Past: The Novelist of Memory," in Experience in the Novel: Selected Papers from the English Institute, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), pp. 108-30; Beaty, pp. 233-34; Mike Hollington, "Time in Little Dorrit," The English Novel in the Nineteenth-Century, ed. George Goodin (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), pp. 109-19. Also see Beaty, pp. 233-34; Holock, pp. 339-40; and Elaine Showalter, "Guilt, Authority, and the Shadows of Little Dorrit," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 34 (1979), 38-40.


Dickens, Number Plans, rpt. in Sucksmith, ed. of Little Dorrit, p. 817.

Reid, p. 20; Stoehr, p. 175.

Woodward, p. 143.


Christmas, p. 141.

23 Reid, p. 44.


25 Leavis, p. 296.

26 Leavis, pp. 299-300.

27 Beaty, p. 230.

28 Beaty, p. 230.

29 Beaty, p. 230.

30 Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 241. Randolph Sittert, "Guilt and the Trappings of Melodrama in Little Dorrit," Dickens Studies Annual, 6 (1977), 119-33, claims that Little Dorrit's innocence is similar to Christ's in that she is a child of society in being born in prison and in being conceived without sin.

31 Number Plans, p. 811.

33 Woodward, p. 144.
34 Miller, p. 241; also see Christmas, p. 142.
35 Carlisle, p. 201.
36 Butt and Tillotson, p. 232.
37 Avrom Fleishman, pp. 582-83, gives one of the best summaries of Arthur's role:

At the exact center of *Little Dorrit*—between the indignant portrait of a 'commercial society' and the transcendent loving-kindness of the heroine—stands the hero of the novel, Arthur Clennam. In his development lies a *modus vivendi* between the extremes of mastery and servitude, between domination and self-abnegation. Clennam has been slighted by most critics and he is admittedly an unlikely prospect to play the heroic role in so grand an ethical drama as this novel presents. Much of the action is, however, narrated from his point of view and his reflections on the world around him are closest to the informed observer's—that is to say, to Dickens' own. It is this very mediocrity that is his limitation and his strength as a hero; we have here to do with one of the first exemplars of a character-type that has come to dominate contemporary literature, the anti-hero. Clennam is to be sure, a mixture of two earlier Dickensian protagonists, the innocent fronting a mysterious and hostile adult world, and the good father-figure or benefactor who can obviate the innocent's difficulties with his money. Although he combines elements of Dickens' *stock-in-trade*, Clennam nevertheless initiates a new type of Dickensian hero: the melancholy searcher after a meaning in life—to be followed by Sidney Carton of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Pip of *Great Expectations*, and John Harmon of *Our Mutual Friend*. In their status as seekers, they can be seen as modifications of the typical nineteenth-century hero, "the young man from the provinces" who comes to
the metropolis to seek his fortune and is led through disillusioning experiences at all levels of society. Yet Dickens' disappointed middle-aged men represent a more advanced stage of the innocent youth's induction into the fallen world.


Number Plans, p. 808.

For discussions of Arthur's passivity, see Hobsbaum, p. 204; Barickman, p. 174; Reid, p. 38; Archibald Coolidge, Charles Dickens as Serial Novelist (Ames: The Iowa University Press, 1967), p. 142.

Christmas, p. 142.

Leavis, p. 290. Also see Alan Wilde, "Mr. F's Aunt and the Analogical Structure of Little Dorrit," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 20 (1965), p. 41, who argues that Arthur is a more "normal" character, and Man, p. 50, who sees Arthur as a "more representative everyman." Fielding, p. 129, says that "it probably becomes easier to identify with Arthur, since the story is more often told from his point of view." Along these lines, see Boege, Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), passim, Reid, p. 38; Richard Stang, The Theory of the Novel in England, 1850-70 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 102; Harry Stone, "Dickens and Interior Monologue," Philological Quarterly, 38 (1956), 52-65. William Burgan, "Little Dorrit in Italy," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 29 (1975), 398, says that Little Dorrit is the only mind that qualifies as a center of consciousness, but most critics see Arthur as the one closest to a Jamesian narrator.

Leavis, p. 291; Garis, p. 186; Trilling, p. 155.

Letters, II, 621.
Letters, II, 815.

Grove, p. 751.


Dabney, p. 105.

Wilde, pp. 33-44.


Dabney, p. 96.


Beaty, p. 233, erroneously writes that Arthur finds out the truth about his birth and DNF and grows because he learns this truth. Also see, Carlisle, pp. 202-03, who says that "only by withholding the reality of their legal relation--Clenam, through his 'mother,' stands in debt to Little Dorrit--can their emotional relation survive. Little Dorrit assumes that by burning the paper she can destroy the past."

Number Plans, pp. 820-27.

Hobsbaum, p. 190; Butt and Tilloston; Johnson; Forster, p. 485.
57 Showalter, p. 33.

58 Number Plans, p. 824.


60 Beaty, p. 231; Fleishman, p. 581.


62 Beaty, pp. 230-34; Barickman, pp. 163-89.

63 Dabney, p. 103. Barbara Hardy, "The Change of Heart in Dickens's Novels," Victorian Studies, 5 (1961-62), rpt. in Martin Price, ed., p. 40, says that the "typical conversion in the great Victorian novels is not a religious conversion but a turning from self-regard to love and social responsibility. . . . the hero is converted by seeing and understanding his defect and its origins." She also points out that the development is not gradual as it is in Eliot and James but is a quick or sudden vision. Arthur's vision occurs in "The Pupil of the Marshalsea" when he first recognizes her as the source of the "right perception" (p. 700) and shortly thereafter, as the "vanishing-point" (p. 714).

Wilde, p. 33.

Forster, p. 490.

Linehan, p. 117.

Number Plans, p. 827. See Librach, p. 545, and Angus Wilson, p. 297, for discussions of this contrast.

Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. his Sister-in-Law and His Eldest Daughter (London: Chapman & Hall, 1880), II, 402. The "easy account" to which he refers is "The Life of our Lord" written for his children c. 1846; it was not intended for publication but is available in the Nonesuch Dickens.

Holock, p. 343; Christmas, p. 141. For a recent and very complete discussion of Dickens' relationship to Christianity, see Karen Ann Kennett Hattaway, "Entering into the Kingdom: Charles Dickens and the Search for Spiritual Regeneration," Dissertation, Rice University, 1981.

Trilling, pp. 156-57, calls Little Dorrit "the Paraclete in female form" and says that Dickens' relation to Christianity is complicated "but we cannot speak of Little Dorrit without taking notice of its reference to Christian feeling." Fielding, p. 129, says that Clennam's "rebirth is done both in terms of his personal development and with religious overtones . . . . It is true that we may regard Little Dorrit as to some degree religious in feeling, and define it as 'a novel about the will and society'; but, comparatively, this leaves out too much. Indeed, in so far as we are meant to see Amy Dorrit as like the Holy Spirit, or our attention is directed to the crown of thorns which appears in the sky as she and Mrs. Clennam leave the Marshalsea, these have little to do even with Arthur's redemption. The Christian symbols are used here (as perhaps sometimes in the other novels) almost parasitically. It is true that a converted Christian should be able to forgive, and to begin a new life, but doubtful whether Arthur is enough of an everyman or vital enough in his redemption for the novel to be effectively read as both Christian and religious." Fleishman, p. 580, equates Little Dorrit's "grace"
with the "New Testament word *agape*, the love Christ had for man." Librach, p. 548, believes that Little Dorrit "personifies the redemptive agency of the Madonna, represents the Covenant of divine love with which the New Testament confronts the wrath of the God of the Old."

72 Carlisle, p. 196.


Chapter III

THE LITTLE AMERICAN GIRL, THE HOUSE
OF FICTION, AND INTEGRITY

The house of fiction has in short not one
window, but a million . . . at each of them
stands a figure with a pair of eyes . . . .
He and his neighbours are watching the same
show, but one seeing more where the other sees
less, one seeing black where the other sees
white, one seeing big where the other sees
small, one seeing coarse where the other sees
fine.

James, "Preface" to The Portrait of a Lady

The critical disagreement over The Wings of the
Dove is as great as that over Little Dorrit; it has been
judged a failure and a masterpiece, and a large amount of
the dissatisfaction rests with the heroine. ¹ As the
editors of the Norton Critical Edition of The Wings of
the Dove have pointed out, "the fundamental issue in any
assessment of his novel must come around to the success
or failure of James's treatment of his protagonist Milly
Theale." ² Much of what has been said about Little
Dorrit has been said with equal force about Milly Theale:
she is too saintly, too nebulous, too insipid, too un-
real, too much of an ideal, too much of a symbol, too
weak to carry the weight of the novel, and too often

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absent from her novel. Critics find Merton Densher and Kate Croy more interesting and complex than Milly and find Milly lacking the necessary complexity to be the center of the novel. For instance, John Goode says, "since the novel isn't about her [Milly] in the way The Portrait of a Lady is about Isabel, we are not given anything like the complexity necessary to dramatize her suffering and development," John Halverson, that "Kate is in many ways a more richly complex and interesting character than Milly," and R. P. Blackmur, that "under her [Kate's] impact we see the nominal heroine of the novel, Milly Theale, for what she is, a inspiration impossible of realization." Kate is an interesting character, and certainly, Merton develops as expected of a traditional protagonist, but Milly holds the novel together as a character and as a symbol. She has much greater complexity than often allowed. She, like Little Dorrit, is more perceptive than the others in the novel, she is the norm against which we should judge the others, she brings about the major change in the male protagonist, and she assumes roles in order to function in society, but unlike Little Dorrit, Milly is the center of consciousness for a good portion of her novel. Although she shares that position with Kate and Merton, we are allowed to get glimpses of the way that Milly sees the world. In fact, what is often ignored and what I
will spend several pages demonstrating, is that Milly is in many ways, in the early part of the novel in particular, a conventional heroine. James, however, never allows certainty about Milly; he keeps her ambiguous and distanced, and finally, removes her from the last part of the novel, except as she haunts the consciousness of Merton.

In creating Milly Theale, James illustrates what his house of fiction analogy suggests, that each individual's vision is limited by his point of view. We may look at the same show and see something quite different from another. His experimentation with different points of view in The Wings of the Dove demonstrates the limited and subjective perception of each character and by extension, of all people. What emerges are only "partial portraits" of Milly. In addition, keeping Milly distanced allows him to protect her and perhaps his memory of Minnie Temple. She represents an ideal of womanhood and for mankind that must not be tarnished in any way; she is a symbol of goodness and integrity.

Thus, Milly Theale serves a moral role in the novel and a formal role in James's aesthetics. As the second oblique heroine, she and her novel provide transition from the largely social and in many ways more objective world of Little Dorrit to the more personal and subjective world of The Sound and the Fury. Little Dorrit and The
Wings of the Dove contain social criticism, and both reveal the limitations of human perception, but with James the question of perception becomes more inherent in his method than in his message, thus anticipating the move to consciousness found in Faulkner.

James offers his artistic reasons for creating Milly as he does, and I will begin my discussion with these and with the critical explanations that I find most acceptable and unacceptable. Next, I will discuss Milly's physical description to show that even in it James promotes ambiguity. Third, I will illustrate Milly's perception, her early reticence over her love for Merton, her role-playing, and her exaltation by others in order to attempt to answer those critics who consider Milly stupid and too simple to be an interesting character. Finally, I will analyze Merton Densher's role in the novel, Milly's effect upon him and society, and conclude with her symbolic function in the novel and in James's epistemology and theories of art.

First, in his own comments on the novel, James confronts one of the central critical problems of the novel—his oblique treatment of Milly Theale. Why in a novel that tells the story of a "young person conscious of a great capacity for life, but early stricken and doomed" does he begin with Kate Croy, devote five books to Merton's consciousness, end with Merton, and allow
Milly to be the center of consciousness for only three of the ten? In the preface, James provides two reasons—one, the desire to protect the image of his heroine, and two, his interest in her effect on others. He wants her to remain an "unspotted princess" and does not want to chance sentimentality or disruption of her beauty by too vividly showing her suffering or pain; he says, his "tenderness of imagination about her . . . reduces him to watching her, as it were, through the successive windows of other people's interest in her" (P, p. 16). He repeats this idea in the novel when the narrator says that Milly is better viewed through other's eyes: "she worked—and seemingly quite without design—upon the sympathy, the curiosity, the fancy of her associates, and we shall really ourselves scarce otherwise come closer to her than by feeling their impression and sharing, if need be, their confusion" (p. 83). James's reticence is perhaps best understood if his methods are contrasted to those of other writers who have tackled the "formidable" theme as James calls the death of a young creature. For instance, he obviously lacked Poe's confessed fascination with what he called the most romantic subject, the death of a beautiful woman. To imagine James writing "Annabel Lee" or "Ligeia" is ludicrous; he simply did not share Poe's
rather morbid interest in such subjects. Equally, James would scorn Dickens' treatment of the death of a young person exemplified in his handling of the death of Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. His reasons for delicacy are not, as some critics have suggested, an inability to deal maturely with the once tabooed subjects of death and sex, because he handles both quite well elsewhere and particularly in *The Wings of the Dove*, in which he approaches almost a "Lawrencian" honestly in treating passion, as two recent critics have pointed out. James simply realized that illness and death were difficult subjects, that "it is still by the act of living" that the "sickest of the sick" appealed to him, and that any time an artist attempted a subject based on a "very old" motive, particularly when it is one as close and as painful as the death of his beloved cousin was to him, he must approach it with caution (P, p. 4). What better way to avoid sentimentality and protect the image of his heroine than to portray her predominantly through others' eyes and through the relationship of those who surround her.

As J. A. Ward explains, *The Wings of the Dove* is a novel of relationships: James "makes it clear that the book is not a 'portrait,' a novel of character. It is a novel in which 'relations' are the center. For Milly is
but half of the subject, and what James variously calls those drawn into her whirlpool, those constituting the other side of her coin, and those forming the circumference of her center . . . are implicit in the germ."8

James's second reason for "merciful indirection" in dealing with Milly, then, is his interest in the others and their relationships. In his preface he explains why he begins with Kate and her family, his "ticket" to board the train and his "compositional key":

If one had seen that her stricken state was but half her case, the correlative half being the state of others as affected by her (they too should have a 'case,' bless them, quite as much as she!) then I was free to choose, as it were, the half with which I should begin. If, as I fondly noted, the little world determined for her was to 'bristle'--I delighted in the term!--with meanings, so, by the same token, could I but make my medal hang free, its obverse and its reverse, its face and its back, would beautifully become optional for the spectator. I somehow wanted them correspondingly embossed, wanted them inscribed and figured with an equal salience; yet it was none the less visibly my 'key,' as I have said, that though my regenerate young New Yorker, and what might depend on her, should form my centre, my circumference was every whit as treatable. Therefore I must trust myself to know when to proceed from the one and when from the other. Preparatively and, as it were, yearningly--given the whole ground--one began, in the event, with the outer ring, approaching the centre thus by narrowing circumvalations. (P, p. 7)

Although Milly is but one side of the coin, she is clearly meant by James to be the most important side. He saw chapter five, her chapter, as the center of the novel, but he also recognized that the "whole actual
centre of the work" rested on a "misplaced pivot" (P, p. 16). In a letter to Mrs. Cadwalader Jones, October 23, 1902, he expresses a similar dissatisfaction with the structure of the novel; he says, "the centre, moreover, isn't in the middle, or the middle, rather, isn't in the centre, but ever so much too near the end, so that what was to come after it is truncated," and "the book, in fine, has too big a head for its body." In the preface, however, he explains that though he may have had to foreshorten more than he would have liked, he finds the "indirect presentation" of Milly "striking, charming and curious" as well as instinctive (P, p. 16). In other words, on perusal, he was pleased with it. His notebook entries reveal that though the story of the death of a young "creature" similar to his earlier "Georgina's Reasons" was the germ for The Wings of the Dove, the relations and reactions of those around her form an equal interest. He felt the necessity of introducing Kate and Merton very carefully in the early chapters in order to establish their motives and the background for Milly's entrance. Their treatment, as well as Susan's, he describes as "portentious"; all points of view lead to the center, Milly, then retreat from her as she retreats from life. F. O. Matthiessen is correct in his assessment that "the very nature of the theme, involving the fact that Milly is essentially
the sufferer rather than the actor, makes it imaginatively right that she should seem surrounded by the others, and that, at the close, because of her illness, she should have been long off stage."\textsuperscript{11} Matthiessen, too, however, questions whether or not Milly is strong enough to carry the weight of the novel and concludes that "her passive suffering is fitting for the deuteragonist rather than for the protagonist of a major tragedy."\textsuperscript{12} Thus, while James correctly handles Milly, he fails to establish her as the center of her drama; I assume that Matthiessen would relegate that position to Kate and Merton. Of course, Matthiessen also considers \textit{The Wings of the Dove} James's masterpiece, suggesting that he regards the novel a success despite problems with Milly. If we refer to J. A. Ward's statement that \textit{The Wings of the Dove} is a novel of relationships, and to James's own pronouncements, clearly \textit{The Wings of the Dove} is exactly what James intends it to be, and his treatment of Milly is unusual if she is expected to be a protagonist but appropriate if she is recognized as one side of the medal, though the more important. Unfortunately, because of her rather ambiguous position, Milly has not received the critical attention to the complexity of her character that a Jamesian heroine deserves. If she is given that attention, she is found to be interesting
and in many ways conventional.

Her physical appearance initiates conflicting responses from the other characters and from critics. H. Blair Rouse exemplifies typical critical reactions to Milly's physical qualities, as well as the tendencies to believe that she lacks presence:

Milly Theale should be clearly realized as a person by both author and readers. Yet for many she may lack vivid physical embodiment although clearly intended to exhibit as a fictional character some of the highest human qualities. One gets closer to Kate Croy and Merton Densher and understands them more completely as human beings. Yet James knew that Milly had to be comprehended as a person as well as a spirit. We are told too much about Milly rather than permitted to learn what we need to know from the girl herself.13

Although commenting upon more than Milly's physical description, Rouse emphasizes the deficiency of that aspect of Milly and identifies it as one reason why readers are drawn more to Kate and Merton. Rouse is correct in saying that we are told about Milly by others, but Percy Lubbock, the critic responsible for defining the terms "telling" and "showing" in relation to the novel did not object to James's methods in The Wings of the Dove, nor do I believe there is too much telling.14 Also, Milly possesses a greater "physical embodiment" than he apparently allows.

The first description of Milly, given by Susan, is
quite vivid:

the slim, constantly pale, delicately haggard, anomalously, agreeably angular young person, of not more than two- and twenty summers, in spite of her marks, whose hair was somehow exceptionally red even for the real thing, which it innocently confessed to being, and whose clothes were remarkably black even for robes of mourning, which was the meaning they expressed. (pp. 76-77)

Critics have repeatedly expounded upon Susan's tendency to romanticize, but this description of "the potential heiress of all the ages," as Susan later calls her, seems clear and undistorted. Why should it be otherwise? Susan is describing what she sees—a twenty-two year old pale and angular red head who is dressed in black. Susan's subsequent descriptions become more ambiguous and subjective, however, as she begins to focus more on Milly's personality. She recognizes that Milly is extravagantly wealthy but is starved for culture and experience; she is not beautiful, yet she is charming and touched by an element of pathos that attracts Susan: "it was rich, romantic, abysmal, to have as was evident, thousands and thousands a year, to have youth and intelligence and, if not beauty, at least in equal measure a high dim charming ambiguous oddity, which was even better, and then on top of all to enjoy boundless freedom, the freedom of the wind in the desert" (p. 79). Milly is a curiosity which, as Susan says,
reduces people to "a consenting bewilderment" (p. 83). Milly's beauty, which Susan at first says Milly does not have, is later explained as not an unequivocal beauty; in fact, Susan thinks that some "stupid" people might call her ugly or plain (p. 84). She is "awfully full of things," which is Susan's "way of describing a face that, thanks doubtless to rather too much mouth, together with too little mere conventional colour and conventional line, was expressive, irregular, exquisite, both for speech and for silence" (p. 84). Someone attempting to create a composite drawing of Milly from this description would have a difficult time and would probably draw a not too pleasing picture. Is Milly beautiful or homely? Fortunately, the novel yields more than Susan's pronouncements.

While no character gives the specific facial description provided by Susan, others do comment on Milly's beauty and charm, and the comparison of her with the Bronzino suggests greater support for seeing her as beautiful though sad. Merton says that Milly is "beautiful" (p. 209), her eyes "pretty and touching" (p. 234), and Kate finds her charming and queer (p. 114). The "white waistcoats," as Merton calls them, think Milly strange, weird, and magical (p. 207). When Milly sees the Bronzino, she describes the woman in the portrait as "handsome in sadness" (p. 137); since "handsome"
is the adjective most often used to describe Kate, who all agree is beautiful, Milly's use of it to describe the portrait, which all seem to concur looks like Milly, suggests that she too is attractive. Also, the portrait has been identified by Marian Allott as the portrait of the attractive Lucrezia Panciatichi.\textsuperscript{16} Milly's manner, sadness, and black dress subdue her beauty and make her a curiosity, as does her being an American, but when she appears as hostess in her white dress in the Veronese scene, she can even overshadow Kate and make her "wanting in lustre" (p. 303).\textsuperscript{17} By allowing the descriptions of Milly to remain rather ambiguous, James creates an aura of mystery around Milly that supports his intention of keeping her distanced and oblique. James presents enough facts about Milly to give her physical presence, such as her red hair, her angular features, her paleness, her sadness, and her charm, but his use of "queerness" and of "dim charming ambiguous oddity" to describe her keeps her from being completely understood or conventionalized.

Critics have questioned Milly's perception and intelligence as they have Little Dorrit's. What does she know or how much does he perceive about the "English gang"? About herself? She has been labelled stupid, ignorant, innocent, and intelligent.\textsuperscript{18} From her reaction to Lord Mark, Maud, and Kate, Milly appears to understand
them better than they understand her. The first insight into what Milly perceives comes in her lengthy conversation with Lord Mark at Lancaster Gate. She senses that "his line would be to be clever" and that he would not understand her initial reaction to the English group as "strange" (p. 98) nor would he be of much help in understanding them because he is as "wandering and lost" as she is at first (p. 100). She sees him as a type playing the part of being clever yet not quite revealing his "play of mind so much more than [he] advertised it." In other words, he appears to offer more than he gives and to be more clever than he actually is: "he would have affected her as the most intellectual person present if he had not affected her as the most frivolous" (p. 101). In addition, he is indifferent, insolent, vague, and unimaginative (pp. 101, 104). The first time that he even strikes a note of sincerity is when he admits to not understanding Kate (p. 108). She realizes that he thinks Kate is complex while he believes the little American girl to be "easy" (p. 109). Barbara Hardy says that this early conversation between Milly and Lord Mark demonstrates that Milly's consciousness is "both febrile and acute, marked by feelings of isolation, unreality, and by an obsession which makes her most plausibly read this stranger's polite remarks as double-entendres" and that the "scene establishes Milly's sick
susceptibilities. Milly is probably being too sensitive about her health, but she is not reading that much into Lord Mark's words. Her obvious paleness makes her appear ill, and Lord Mark is sharp enough to recognize that something may be amiss with Milly. He is also aware of the possibility that she may prove useful and that he should be careful how he handles her. By the end of their conversation, Milly clearly understands him better than he understands her; she has him, in James's word, "placed."

In the much later scene when Lord Mark proposes to Milly, she again reveals her imagination, sensibility, and superior understanding. He again does not understand her, but he at least appears "adequately human" (p. 267). Milly wonders why she is able "to let herself go" more with him than with Merton or the others and admits that it is "because she cared for him so little" (p. 267). She does not care to maintain the facade of health with him or in any way deceive him. She knows that he has come to propose and that she has absolutely no interest in him. She asks herself what her value might be to him and concludes:

wouldn't her value, for the man who should marry her, be precisely the ravage of her disease? She mightn't last, but her money would. For a man in whom the vision of her money should be intense, in whom it should be most of the ground for 'making up' to her, any prospective
failure on her part to be long for this world might easily count as a positive attraction. Such a man, proposing to please, persuade, secure her, appropriate her for such a time, shorter or longer, as nature and the doctors should allow, would make the best of her, ill, damaged, disagreeable though she might be, for the sake of eventual benefits. . . . (pp. 267-68)

She only drops her questioning of his motive because she is not interested in him, does not care what his motive is, and because she realizes that he is concerned about her not because she discounts it (p. 268). The "ugly motive" may not sit well in "Lord Mark's cool English eyes" and it may have only "showed to her imagination but briefly," but the suggestion of it is present, and Milly realizes it. That she even questions his motive and that she can so harshly state her circumstances and the possibility of someone taking advantage of her reveals her awareness of the depth, deception, and dangers of the English society. When Lord Mark asks her if she thinks "we should kill you in England," she honestly answers, "Well, I've seen you and I'm afraid" (p. 269). Her perception and fears are thus not limited to Lord Mark but involve the others as well.

She senses the "dangers" around Lancaster Gate (p. 118) and recognizes that they all think "tremendously of money" (p. 125). In particular, she sees both Maud and Kate as predatory and status-conscious. Milly
tells Susan at one point that if Densher had money, Maud would "do her best to swallow him"; she knows that Maud consumes those with wealth and destroys those without it, if they get in her way (p. 125). Also, she sees Maud as rather simple-minded, or single-minded to be more exact; she is "a person of whom the mind might in two or three days roughly make the circuit" (p. 99). Later, when Maud offers to take care of her, Milly feels enveloped in an "Eastern carpet for wishing-purposes of one's own" but she adds that an Eastern carpet was "a thing to be on rather than under" (p. 134). Milly senses that Maud is a "force" or power that can smother or destroy. Maud is simple or easily placed, but she is also dangerous, and Milly knows it.

Kate, although equally predatory, is more complex than Maud. Milly realizes that Kate "would indulge in incalculable movements that might interfere with one's tour" (p. 99). Being alone with Kate, Milly feels, is like being "alone with a creature who paced like a panther" (p. 171). She listens intently as Kate, "dealing" with her and performing as if in a "big drama," warns her that English society is similar to a "monster" that is "calculated to devour the unwary" (p. 168). Kate even tells Milly, "you may very well loath me yet!" (p. 171). Milly reacts with fear, but also she is possessed
by an overriding curiosity: "she had too much wanted to know" not to pursue Kate's meaning (p. 171). Milly realizes that Kate is a skillful performer who hides her "other" side, as Milly calls it (p. 122). In fact, a large part of the fascination that Kate holds for Milly is the suggestion of secrets or "abysses" (p. 120). Milly is willing to ignore the warnings in order to try to get closer to Kate and uncover her other side. She knows that although she has spent much time with Kate, she does not know her (p. 120). Her reason for asking Kate to accompany her on her first visit to Sir Luke is that she hopes to get Kate to confide in her if she shares one of her secrets with Kate (p. 142). Milly soon realizes that to tell Kate the truth would be to "surrender," to, in effect, take down her own protective shield and leave herself open for attack with little chance of Kate's ever allowing herself to be equally vulnerable (pp. 158-59). Milly knows that Kate will never be totally free with her; her deception is as instinctive as her brutality and as necessary for survival in this "world in which dangers abounded" (p. 117).

Although Kate's motivations and character have been discussed by critics, it is important in any argument of Milly's perception to recognize how complex Kate is and to question how clearly Milly understands her. 20 Milly is correct in labelling Kate's actions "instinctive" and in
believing that Kate cynically accepts her society. In the first two chapters, Kate appears as a woman motivated by concern and love for her family, and when she says that she has to give up "everything," these natural affections are part of what she has to sacrifice. In order to survive in Maud's domain, she accepts, although somewhat bitterly, Maud's values. She has no one to support any others; her father and her sister are both cold and detached, providing no "moral" and certainly no monetary support. She turns to Maud with just the strength that propels her in her plot against Milly and with the same excuse: she does what she has to do; she plays the game (p. 30). Early presented as a "kid" to be sacrificed to Maud (p. 37), she attempts to move from the used to the user, to regain the freedom that she had to give up in order to go to Maud, and to "square" Maud as she tells Densher several times. As Ernest Sandeen argues, "Kate's primary object is not to deceive her friend Milly but to outwit her Aunt Maud." This, of course, does not excuse her later actions. Kate uses Milly for her own ends, weakly justifying her actions by saying that it is good for Milly to think that someone loves her. She tells Merton before Milly enters their world that she "shall sacrifice nobody and nothing, and that's just my situation, that I will want and that I shall try for everything," and it is in trying for "everything" that
she later sacrifices Milly (p. 60). Kate's success, until Lord Mark alerts Milly, shows that though Milly correctly "places" Lord Mark and Aunt Maud and though she discerns much about Kate and her skill in playing roles and hiding her other side, Milly is fooled by Kate and Merton. Kate's plot is so skillfully executed that she even deceives Maud and has Merton doubting her love for him. Milly's acceptance of Kate's apparent lack of interest in Merton is further complicated by Milly's love for him. Milly, therefore, is not ignorant nor is she so innocent that she trusts Kate or cannot conceive of such a plot as Kate's; her intimation of Lord Mark's motives suggests otherwise. She is not so much taken in by Kate as she is by her own belief and love of Merton.

Milly's love for Merton causes her to be willing to accept Kate and Maud's denials of a relationship between Kate and Merton. This does not mean, however, that she is culpable or is in any way to blame for what happens. She trusts Merton, and she also trusts Susan. With his frequent visits and Susan's support for Maud's contentions, Milly cannot be blamed for believing that he might be interested in her. She also, of course, hopes that he is. Her circuitous responses to Susan's early questions about him suggest an interest in him that begins with their encounter in America. When Susan asks her if she did not
make "Mr. Densher something of a promise" to call on him if in London, it appears to Susan that Milly "was completely vague about the promise or that Mr. Densher's name itself started no train" (p. 94). She could hardly have not remembered him since he visited her three or four times, nor would she have likely forgotten her promise. She explains that he would still be in America and that she would not go to London if he were not because she would appear to be running after him (pp. 94-95). Susan correctly senses that there is more to Milly's feelings for Merton than she admits: when Susan again refers to Merton, "Milly had at first a little air of not knowing whom she meant, and the girl really kept as well, a certain control of herself while she remarked that the case [of Kate and Maud knowing Merton] was surprising, the chance one in a thousand" (p. 118). Then the narrator adds, "brush it over nervously as she might and with whatever simplifying hand, this abrupt extrusion of Mr. Densher altered all proportions, had an effect on all values. It was fantastic to her to let it make a difference that she couldn't in the least have defined and she was at least, even during these instants, rather proud of being able to hide, on the spot, the difference it did make" (p. 121). Merton's presence makes a difference because of Milly's interest in him and because
of her desire to hide that interest. It also suggests secrets about her new friend which stir her curiosity. Thus, part of the answer to why Milly remains in England though intelligent and cognizant of the dangers of English society, lies in her love for Merton which begins with his visits in America, and part of it rests in her desire to experience life with all of its labyrinths.

The early cliff scene offers the first view of Milly and of what she wants. Susan observes Milly and thinks, "if the girl was deeply and recklessly meditating there she wasn't meditating a jump; she was on the contrary, as she sat, much more in a state of uplifted and unlimited possession that had nothing to gain from violence" (p. 87). She is not contemplating suicide, and this passage certainly does not support Robert McLean's unique, to say the least, argument that Milly does later commit suicide; instead, she is choosing among the kingdoms of the earth and declaring to live life to the fullest, facing whatever comes without trepidation.

Milly wants to participate in life; she has had enough scenery, she tells Susan, and now wants people (p. 93). At the first dinner at Lancaster Gate, Milly senses the possible danger and is temporarily alarmed, but thinks that she has two options, "to leave London again the first thing in the morning, the other to do
nothing at all" (p. 104). She decides to give herself up and flow with the current. Shortly afterward, Milly tells Susan, "since I've lived all these years as if I were dead, I shall die, no doubt, as if I were alive" (p. 127). Her life has been sheltered, and she now wants to take advantage of the freedom that her money allows her despite possible dangers. Sir Luke's advice for her to live life and find love only enforces her chosen course; thus, she easily accepts his opinion and welcomes his decree (pp. 149-51). For her, the society of Maud and Kate represents life as she has never known it before. The "show," deception, and secrets intrigue her, and her goal involves an attempt to understand them, as well as a "quest for acceptance, for health, and for love."25 She finds acceptance in her "success," but health, she knows she will never find, making her dedication to life even more ardent, and love, she can only hope to find with Merton.

"Those critics who find Milly short in intelligence," as Edward Wagenknecht states, "are themselves undiscerning."26 He has a point. Milly recognizes society for what it is—conniving, rapacious, and deceptive. Although her hindsight might be better than her foresight ("Milly was for ever seeing things afterwards," p. 102), her "alertness of vision" and her sensibility are too
great to ever think her stupid or simple (p. 99). She thinks at one point

It almost appeared . . . that their fortune had been unduly precipitated—as if properly they were in the position of having ventured on a small joke and found the answer out of proportion grave. She couldn't at this moment for instance have said whether, with her quickened perceptions, she were more enlivened or oppressed; and the case might in fact have been serious hadn't she, by good fortune, from the moment the picture loomed, quickly made up her mind that what finally most concerned her was neither to seek nor to shirk, wasn't even to wonder too much, but was to let things come as they would, since there was little enough doubt of how they would go. (p. 97)

This passage reveals her uneasiness and reinforces her dedication to diving in no matter how deep the water. She is more perceptive than Strether and Isabel, to whom she is so often compared and found wanting, because she acknowledges the possible dangers and plunges in anyway.27 She is equally romantic and tends to measure life by the fiction that she has read, but she is not as idealistic nor as blind to society's flaws. Perhaps Kate is responsible for correcting some of her "'errors in vision,'" as Oscar Cargill points out, but Milly's own "quickened perceptions" and probing watchfulness of those around her contribute as much to her knowledge.28 Unfortunately, the "joke" does prove "grave" in a way that no one could have anticipated, and Milly, no less a victim in spite of her intelligence, learns that the values of the "English
gang" are even more corrupt than she realized. Thus, Milly's character combines "insight and good faith"; she is intelligent and perceptive, but she is also innocent.²⁹ Yet, though she is blameless and innocent in not suspecting Kate's plot, Milly is not above her own form of game playing and duplicity. Matthiessen writes that "she is not so innocent as she looks. She may be fooled by the new social complexity into which she has plunged, she may trustingly not suspect that Aunt Maud and Kate both have designs upon her. But in the scene where the dove-image is introduced, she has her own strategy of how to play the part."³⁰ Milly does some acting and role playing. She is dove, princess, or little American girl as the need arises. Milly as dove is her most important and most frequently discussed role in critical studies.³¹ When Kate calls her a dove, Milly studies being "dovelike" and thinks that "she should have to be clear as to how a dove would act" (p. 172). While the most accepted association of the dove is with Christianity and later Milly does become sacred or spiritual to Merton, and to Maud in a limited way, for Kate the dove signifies Milly's innocence at first. Later, at Milly's party, the dove suggests her status as a princess with wealth and freedom to Kate as she has been to Susan. When Kate introduces the dove-image, Milly muses over what it means to be a
dove and a princess:

she felt herself ever so delicately, so considerately, embraced; not with familiarity or as a liberty taken, but almost ceremonially and in the manner of an accolade; partly as if, though a dove who could perch on a finger, one were also a princess with whom forms were to be observed. . . .
She met it on the instant as she would have met revealed truth; it lighted up the strange dusk in which she lately had walked. That was what was the matter with her. She was a dove. (p. 171)

Milly's willingness to play the part of being a dove does not suggest that she lacks self-identity as some critics have argued nor does it suggest that she is responsible for others taking advantage of her; instead, it reveals an awareness of how much of the society which surrounds her is made up of acting and wearing masks for duplicity and for self protection and a recognition of her own need of a "general armour" (p. 263). 32 Milly's relationship with Kate takes on the characteristics of a Maeterlinck play:

we have positively the image, in the delicate dusk, of the figures so associated and yet so opposed, so mutually watchful: that of the angular pale princess, ostrich-plumed, black-robed, hung about with amulets, reminders, relics, mainly seated, mainly still, and that of the upright restless slow-circling lady of her court who exchanges with her, across the black water streaked with evening gleams, fitful questions and answers. (p. 262)

Milly and Kate are both "watchful" of each other and are equally conscious of the roles that they are playing;
"they flourished their masks, the independent pair, as they might have flourished Spanish fans" (p. 261). They find the times when they appear not to be pretending, the ones when "what they were keeping back was most in the air" (p. 261). Milly's masks, however, are more clearly worn for self-protection and because of pride. Milly realizes that "if she wasn't so proud she might be pitied with more comfort--more to the person pitying" (p. 262). Both are concealing their love for Merton, or in Milly's case attempting to, but Milly also has her illness to conceal, and again she is not successful, for soon Kate and the rest recognize that she is very ill.\(^33\)

When Milly becomes the "mistress of a grand old palace and the dispenser of hospitality" in her attempt to live and experience the little life that she has left, the "spectacle" and the "high style and state" are continuations of her role-playing and desire to be a part of the show (p. 286). "Acting as if, or playing a role, characterizes her conduct," as Lawrence Holland says, but is in many ways, childlike.\(^34\) She is like a little girl playing the part of the princess that Susie has written for her, who has "amusements of thought that were like the securities of a little girl playing with dolls when conventionally 'too big'" (p. 132). In addition, she is as J. A. Ward has described her, a princess who "reigns in a morally
bankrupt empire." Milly has observed the social milieu and realized that role-playing is an important part; thus, she accepts the roles of dove and princess. Also, she acknowledges the importance of spectacle and presents her own form of "style and state." The empire that she rules is sadly lacking, but Milly, for a time at least, enjoys her success.

Milly assumes the role of little American girl as easily as she accepts the roles of dove and princess. For instance, with Lord Mark, she realizes that to his eyes she is "a mere little American, a cheap exotic, imported almost wholesale," and she is content to be just that because it allows her to "keep herself, with Lord Mark, in abeyance" (pp. 108-09). It is with Merton, however, that she makes the most extensive use of the role. When she encounters Kate and Merton in the National Gallery, she "became as spontaneous as possible and as American as it might conveniently appeal to Mr. Densher, after his travels, to find her" because she perceives that "what would be of most service" would be her "own native woodnote" (pp. 178-79). Milly has been thought both a failure and a success in this scene, but although she controls the scene, she does not manage to conceal her interest in Merton from Kate. Milly, however, is not as interested in hiding her interest in Merton as she is in
trying to determine what his relationship is with Kate. She realizes that "Merton Densher was in love and Kate couldn't help it—could only be sorry and kind; wouldn't that, without wild flurries, cover everything? Milly at all events tried it as a cover, tried it hard, for the time; pulled it over her, in the front, the larger room, drew it up to her chin with energy," and she also admits to herself that "she liked him . . . as much as ever" (p. 180). Kate succeeds in hiding her interest in Merton; Merton on his part fails to conceal his love of her, and Milly succeeds in finding the tone to assume with him which puts him most at ease. Although she somewhat laments his sharing "the view" of her kept by the others, that of simple little American girl, she recognizes that if that is one way to maintain a friendship with him, then she will play the expected part (p. 181). In her last public appearance, Milly is again the American girl, and Densher realizes that "by choice or by instinctive affinity" Milly is able to "keep down or to display" her American character at will and shares Kate's talent for maintaining "surfaces" (p. 302). In this scene, all of her roles combine, and she succeeds in even overshadowing Kate and making her appear as the one dressed in "the little black frock, superficially indistinguishable, that Milly had laid aside" (p. 303). Thus, as Dorothea Krook writes, Milly "is the American Girl grown conscious of
herself acting out the character of the American Girl" with "the capacity at once for 'being' and 'seeing'" which can be applied to all of her roles.\(^\text{37}\) She plays her roles, watches herself doing so, and even enjoys fooling Susan about her illness (p. 156) and enjoys the "new sort of fun" that she experiences in matching her silence against Kate's (p. 121).

What separates Milly's role-playing from the others', however, is that she takes advantage of no one and harms no one and that beneath it all is a sincere recognition of shared humanity that would never allow her purposely to hurt another person. She cannot accept a world, as she tells Susan, in which "nobody matters" (p. 241). Milly is similar to Little Dorrit in feeling a kinship with the people on the street. She does not identify with their poverty, but she does identify with their desire for life and their mortality. As Jean Kinball points out, Milly realizes that "all men are mortal; she differs from most men simply in her intense awareness that the old syllogism states a personal, as well as universal, fact."\(^\text{38}\) As Milly sits watching the people in Regent's Park, Milly thinks that

\begin{quote}
this was the real thing; the real thing was to be quite away from the pompous well within the centre and on the stretches of shabby grass. Here were benches and smutty sheep; here were idle lads at games of ball; with their cries mild in thick air; here were wanderers anxious
and tired like herself; here doubtless were hundreds of others just in the same box. The box, their great common anxiety, what was it, in the grim breath-space, but the practical question of life? (p. 153)

Milly realizes that this is life; this is humanity, and she is part of it. All the money in the world could not prevent the inevitable even if it is as premature as Milly's quickly approaching death.

Milly's experience at Matcham, often described as the climax of *The Wings of the Dove*, is similar to the later one at Regent's Park in that it too is a point of recognition for her. The atmosphere at Matcham is that of a carnival, and, as such, it is a microcosm of wealthy London society as she perceives it (p. 136). Milly walks with Lord Mark to see the Bronzino portrait, meeting people along the way, accepting Lord Mark's presenting her because it was "easier," and marveling at how she "could simply give back the particular bland stare that appeared in such cases to mark civilisation at its highest" (p. 136). Milly feels part of a side show and does not like the sensation, but she decides to play along and follow Lord Mark into the "mystic circle" of Matcham to the Bronzino which "was, it appeared, deep within" (p. 136). Lord Mark wishes, as did Maud, to take care of her, and Milly begins to sense that all the "kind eyes were wishing" the same (p. 137). What the eyes signal and the portrait
underscores is Milly's own approaching death. She thinks that the portrait is "dead, dead, dead" and says to Lord Mark, "I shall never be better than this." He, and many critics too, mistakenly believe that Milly means better than the portrait, but she more likely means better than she is at that moment. Not even trying to hide her tears, Milly explains, when she realizes that he does not understand, that "everything this afternoon has been too beautiful, and that perhaps everything will never be so right again" (p. 137). The portrait appears pale and green, obviously sickly, and Milly does not see the resemblance at first, but after Kate reinforces the similarity, Milly realizes that she must appear so to others and begins to understand the "kind" eyes as eyes of pity and sympathy. Confronting the portrait causes Milly to face herself and admit to her illness; thus, she turns immediately to Kate after the others leave with her request that she accompany her to see Sir Luke (p. 140).

Milly's illness has been one of her secrets up to this point and the exact nature of it remains a mystery throughout the novel. Her illness is most often thought to be consumption because of the frequency of the disease in the nineteenth century and because it was Minnie Temple's illness. One critic, however, has said that Milly probably has cancer since it would be treated with secrecy and since Kate denies to Merton that Milly has
consumption; and another critic has suggested that Milly was not physically ill at all just neurotic, "a sexually frustrated . . . victim of her own warped mind." It is probably safest to accept that Milly dies of consumption, but the exact diagnosis is not important to the novel. What is important is that Milly is dying and that she wants to live. While it may be interesting to speculate on the original of Sir Luke, it too is not necessary to an understanding of the novel. Their relationship, however, is important in understanding some of Milly's actions. With Sir Luke, she can be completely honest in a way that she cannot be with Susan, Kate, or the others. He knows what is wrong with her and that she is dying, but he does not pity her. He realizes that pity is unacceptable to Milly. She wants to live as normal a life as possible, and she knows that pity hampers normal relationships. Her friendship with Sir Luke is unique and very important to her. She trusts him and eagerly follows his advice to live life. Milly's illness is essential to the plot of the novel and to her character, as is her relationship with Sir Luke. Both influence her actions and others' reactions to her. That both remain somewhat mysterious does not detract from the novel but only reinforces James intention of keeping Milly distanced and ambiguous.

Milly is obviously more complicated than the other
characters believe. Milly tells Susan, "you'll never really know where I am. Except indeed when I'm gone; then you'll only know where I'm not" (p. 127). She too has her abysses. Milly is complex and human, and the mysteries surrounding her illustrate what James stressed often in his short stories and his novels, the ambiguities of life. We can never know all the facts, nor can we reduce people to the point of understanding everything about them. As J. A. Ward says, "James is tasteful and tactful in keeping us removed from Milly not solely because it would be indecorous to handle illness and death directly, but because he feels it both brutal and presumptuous to handle a character in totality. To do so would be to indulge 'the mere muffled majesty of irresponsible "authorship"'--the illusion that the novelist has an absolute vision of things."\(^4\) People and situations are always too complicated for easy reduction. Thus, Susan, Kate, and Merton all observe Milly, but they cannot "place" her. They can only provide "partial portraits" to combine with the little that she reveals about herself.

Milly is dove, princess, or American girl, depending upon the point of view, or she is one of these observing herself playing the role. The icons associated with Milly and the exaltation of her causes an aversion to her
similar to that readers have for Little Dorrit's perfection and Dickens' praise of her. James does not intrude to praise Milly; the other characters exalt her. Susan makes her a princess, claims that her smile brightens the whole world, and exclaims her perfection. Kate labels her the dove and tells her that she is "impossibly without sin" (p. 140), and Maud and Merton proclaim her an angel and make her memory sacred. Not until the second half of the novel does Milly move from the very human, although exalted, American girl, playing her roles and attempting to experience as much of life as she can before her premature death, to the ethereal, the memory or symbol, that saves Merton. Merton plays the primary role in the shift, and it is to him that I will now turn.

Like Arthur Clennam, Merton Densher has received favorable and unfavorable criticism, been called the central character and the forerunner of the modern anti-hero, a man of thought instead of action, and been recognized as the predominant center of consciousness and the developing hero. James's description of Merton when he is first introduced establishes his character in the first of the novel. It contains so much important information about him that it must be quoted at length:

He was a longish, leanish, fairish young Englishman, not unamenable, on certain sides,
to classification—as for instance by being a gentleman, by being rather specifically one of the educated, one of the generally sound and generally civil; yet, though to that degree neither extraordinary nor abnormal, he would have failed to play straight into an observer's hands. He was young for the House of Commons, he was loose for the Army. He was refined, as might have been said, for the City and, quite apart from the cut of his cloth, sceptical, it might have been felt, for the Church. On the other hand he was credulous for diplomacy, or perhaps even for science, while he was perhaps at the same time too much in his mere senses for poetry and yet too little in them for art. You would have got fairly near him by making out in his eyes the potential recognition of ideas; but you would have quite fallen away again on the question of the ideas themselves. The difficulty with Densher was that he looked vague without looking weak—idle without looking empty. It was the accident, possibly, of his long legs, which were apt to stretch themselves; of his straight hair and his well-shaped head, never, the latter, neatly smooth, and apt into the bargain, at the time of quite other calls upon it, to throw itself suddenly back and, supported behind by his uplifted arms and interlocked hands, place him for unconsiderable periods in communion with the ceiling, the tree-tops, the sky. He was in short visibly absent-minded, irregularly clever, liable to drop what was near and to take up what was far; he was more a prompt critic than a prompt follower of custom. He suggested above all, however, that wondrous state of youth in which the elements, the metals more or less precious, are so in fusion and fermentation that the question of the final stamp, the pressure that fixes the value, must wait for comparative coolness. And it was a mark of his interesting mixture that if he was irritable it was by a law of considerable subtlety—a law that in intercourse with him it might be of profit, though not easy, to master. One of the effects of it was
that he had for you surprises of tolerance
as well as of temper. (p. 46)

Merton is young, attractive, restless, nondescript, not
quite poetic, individualistic, pensive, easy-going, and
most important, as yet not formed into a set mold. Merton
is a man in stasis, an existential waiting, with no
particular goal or purpose. Thus, Kate can pull him along
in her move to match Maud and obtain money and freedom.

Merton recognizes his passivity and his subservient
role with Kate. He thinks at one point:

He was acting for Kate—-not, by the deviation
of an inch, for her friend. He was accord-
ingly not interested, for had he been
interested he would have cared, and had he
cared he would have wanted to know. Had he
wanted to know he wouldn't have been purely
passive, and it was the passivity that had
to represent his dignity and his honour.
(p. 269)

He uses his passivity as an excuse or in an attempt to
rationalize his actions or lack of action throughout the
implementation of Kate's plot. He also uses his love for
her in a similar way, allowing the passion he feels to
blind and later sustain him and allow him to carry out
his role. He appears a star-struck supporting actor who
stumbles into a leading role, while Kate is the star of
the show who manages to deceive everybody. Merton even
thinks of Kate as an actress:

in his purchased stall at the play, the watch-
ful manager was in the depths of the box and
the poor actress [Kate] in the glare of the footlights. But she passed; her wig, her paint, her jewels, every mark of her expression impeccable, and her entrance accordingly greeted with the proper round of applause. (p. 204)

He is fascinated, almost bewitched, by Kate's elaborate performances, and he senses that he is caught up in a "big drama" (p. 167). He is attracted to Kate for what he lacks, a vitality and lust for life, and she to him for what she feels that she lacks, the "mind" (pp. 48, 47). They are drawn to each other as opposites.

Merton's cosmopolitan education makes him an outsider, as does his lack of wealth. His coming to London is presented as a "plunge," a "descent to English earth" during which "he had passed, by the way, through zones of air that had left their ruffle on his wings" and "probably spoiled" him "for native, for insular use" (p. 71). He does not quite fit in and realizes that a discrepancy exists between the way that this "society" acts and the way that a civilization should:

He had supposed himself civilised; but if this was civilisation--! One could smoke one's pipe outside when twaddle was within. He had rather avoided, as we have remarked, Kate's eyes, but there came a moment when he would fairly have liked to put it, across the table to her: 'I say, light of my life, is this the great world?' (p. 210)

Merton expresses what a sensitive, intelligent individual would feel in such an artificial society, and he also reveals that he is removed enough from that society to
criticize it. He even senses a closer affinity to Susan than to the others (p. 208). He observes Susan studying the others as they discuss Milly, and he thinks that she watches "very much as some spectator in an old-time circus might have watched the oddity of a Christian maiden, in the arena, mildly, caressingly, martyred. It was the nosing and fumbling not of lions and tigers but of domestic animals let loose as if for the joke" (p. 209). His use of the word "joke" and his description of the others as animals in a show echo Milly's response to a similar social gathering. He experiences some discomfort in observing the "huddled herd" that drifts blindly to Milly, the "wonderful creature" that Merton "caught" and brought from her "native jungle," because of the "absence of a larger lion" (p. 209). Even though Merton is not yet aware of Kate's plot, the rapacity of the group makes him think of Milly as a sacrificial victim, as well as an animal on display. His communion with Susan and his obvious distaste for English society separate him from them. Though English, he feels closer in temperament to the Americans.

Once alone with Kate, however, his alliance shifts to her again as he tries to define exactly what is going on. Typically though, he finds himself inadequate in understanding Kate and realizes that she has "indeed perceptive flights he couldn't hope to match" (p. 213).
In their discussion of Milly, Kate begins to pull him into her plot; she tells him that Milly is an angel with money who can make "the very greatest marriage" and who is deathly ill. She claims to want to make "things pleasant for" Milly and explains that since he is her most previous possession, she will use him (p. 214). All of the elements of Kate's plan are revealed; Milly has money and needs love, and he and Kate have love and need money. Living up to his name, Densher does not understand at this point. Even though Kate tells him that he and Milly are a pair of victims in their relationship with her and he senses a "queerness" about it all, he "was in a wondrous silken web, and it was amusing" (p. 221). He is similar to Milly in being caught up in the "fun"; the plot of fooling Maud and Kate's apparent interest in Milly amuse him. In addition, he "likes" them all, particularly Milly (p. 225).

Merton is, in many ways, more like Milly than he realizes. He is entangled in a web, and she is immersed in a current. Also, passion drives them both: Merton's passion for Kate, Milly's passion for life. Both are manipulated and both, though uneasy about society's show and possible motives, tend to trust in others' basic humanity and integrity. Merton also thinks of Kate in terms of fiction, just as Susan and Milly do; to him she is a heroine and also an uncut book (p. 220). Merton's
similarity to the Americans and his idealism have even gained him the title of the most American of James's European characters. He is not wholly admirable, however, for unlike Christopher Newman and Lambert Strether, or any other Jamesian hero for that matter, he does not maintain moral purity. His blackmailing of Kate and his remaining in Venice to deceive Milly are questionable acts to say the least. His arrangement with Kate grows out of his passion, his desire for a conquest that he has not known before, his need to know that Kate loves him, and his sense that he is surrounded by petticoats and must exert his will to regain his self respect (p. 299). His remaining behind in Venice rests on complex motives as well. He has struck a bargain with Kate, her body for his continued cooperation in deceiving Milly, and he has no choice as a relatively "ethical" man but to keep his end of the deal. He loves her and wants to please her, and he also recognizes that she is correct in her argument that they have gone too far to stop their "game" without hurting Milly.

That Merton's actions are understandable does not exonerate him. He is as responsible for Milly's "turning her face to the wall" as Kate. As Leo Bersani says, "however great the pressures on Densher may be all along, it is nevertheless true that he shows himself incapable of dealing in any active way with a situation he finds
moralis unacceptable, both in its implications for his character and in its possible effect on Milly. He sees, at least intermittently, that his failure to tell Milly about the love between Kate and himself, is, in effect, a way of agreeing actively to Kate's plan."47 But, when Kate says to him, "we have told too many lies" to stop their deception now, and Merton replies, "I, my dear, have told none!" (p. 294), he is telling the truth. He does not lie to Milly and cannot even understand Kate's expecting him to. Even after Lord Mark's revelation and Milly's giving up, he cannot abide Susan's appeal to him to deny his relationship with Kate to save Milly nor can he understand Kate's questioning him after he returns to London:

"Wouldn't it have been possible then to deny the truth of the information? I mean of Lord Mark's," [asks Kate].
Densher wondered, "Possible for whom?"
"Why for you."
"To tell her he lied?"
"To tell her he's mistaken."
Densher stared—he was stupefied; the 'possible' thus glanced at by Kate being exactly the alternative he had to face in Venice and to put utterly away from him. Nothing was stranger than such a difference in their view of it. "And to lie myself, you mean, to do it? We are, my dear child," he said, "I suppose, still engaged."
"Of course we're still engaged. But to save her life—!"

"Well, if you must know—and I want you to be clear about it—I didn't even seriously think of a denial to her face." (p. 358)
Merton does not lie, but he does act on a lie and by doing so does deceive Milly; therefore, he must accept equal blame with Kate, and he knows it. With Merton, James illustrates that "not even a keen moral sense can guarantee that a person will be unwaveringly ethical."48 The complexity of life prevents simple black or white choices and often clouds perception and moral sense. Thus, with the characterization of Merton, and Kate too to some extent, James underscores what his indirection in the treatment of Milly also enforces, the ambiguities of life. Merton cannot be reduced to a simple label; his actions are not admirable nor unequivocally condemnable. He differs from Kate and the others in that he "knows" that he has done something wrong, suffers for it, and grows because of it.

Merton experiences a growth that could be termed moral, spiritual, or religious. Merton goes through a conversion experience not unlike that of Strether's as described by J. A. Ward. Merton is not the imaginative protagonist introduced to a new environment, upset by what he sees, and finally made more aware or saved by a "confidente or ficelle who performs for the central figure the kind of sacrificial act that he himself must eventually perform for others"; instead, Milly is the innocent victim introduced to the deception and manipulation of English society and Merton the one "saved"
by her. Yet "Strether is really faced with the same kind of problem as Merton Densher. He chooses between marriage and a kind of spiritual possession" and what he undergoes as a "result of Milly Theale's 'spreading her wings' is psychologically intelligible and yet invested with a religious aura that transcends 'the strict human order.'" In fact, "of all James's novels, The Wings of the Dove is the most explicitly and emphatically religious--both in the sense of rendering a spiritual order and in the sense of using certain important Christian symbols and doctrine." The Christian symbolism is obviously present in The Wings of the Dove: Milly's choosing her kingdom in the beginning, her being the dove, her letter arriving on Christmas, Merton's visit to the church, and Milly's forgiveness of those who have wronged her.

Merton describes what he experiences after returning to London as "sacred" and "immense" and finds that it causes a schism within himself and in his relationship with Kate. When Merton confronts his "alter ego,"

He saw a young man far off and in a relation inconceivable, saw him hushed, passive, staying his breath, but half understanding, yet dimly conscious of something immense and holding himself painfully together not to lose it. The young man at these moments so seen was too distant and too strange for the right identity; and yet, outside, afterwards, it was his own face Densher had known. (p. 369)
Merton's confrontation resembles that of Spencer Brydon in "The Jolly Corner" and is to a similar purpose; he has reached a point of "crisis of dilemma, isolation, or decision to which the necessity of moral choice brings a man, so defining the restrictive necessity in his personal fate and imposing on him the test of recognition or acceptance." Merton is torn between Kate and the body and Milly and the spirit and is moving more towards Milly.

The gulf grows daily between Merton and Kate. He discusses Milly with Maud, as he cannot with Kate, in an attempt to understand what he feels. He continues passive as before, but now the sense of barely holding himself together joins his feeling of holding his breath to keep from disturbing the delicate balance of his own sanity in a way similar to Susan's fear of Milly's precarious balance on a precipice above abysses. The "essence" of his experience with Milly is "too beautiful and too sacred to describe," and he feels that he has been "forgiven, dedicated, blessed; but this he couldn't coherently express" (p. 370). His "variety of religious experience" causes the distance between him and Kate to widen to unmanageable limits. She cannot understand it and suggests to him that he must be in love with Milly's memory (p. 403). They have "played" their "dreadful game" and lost, and he feels broken, and Kate can only
ask, "My dear man, what has happened to you?" and stare at him immovable with her "strange significant smile" (pp. 372-73). He seeks refuge and peace and finds it temporarily in the Brompton Oratory (p. 380). There, he feels "right" and is again prepared to face Kate (p. 380). Seeing her so out of place in the Condrip poverty increases his sense of separation from her, but he gives her Milly's letter, her Christmas message, to try to bring a reconciliation by exhibiting his loyalty to her (p. 393). By burning the letter, Kate shows how little she understands Milly or Densher. Kate tells him that he will "have it all . . . from New York," underscoring that what is most important to her is the money; whereas, for Densher, the money is least important (p. 394). He does not express regret immediately, but he later laments not knowing what Milly's letter said:

Then he took to himself at such hours, in other words, that he should never, never know what had been in Milly's letter. The intention announced in it he should but too probably know; only that would have been, but for the depths of his spirit, the least part of it. The part of it missed forever was the turn she would have given her act. This turn had possibilities that, somehow, by wondering about them, his imagination had extraordinarily filled out and refined. It had made of them a revelation the loss of which was like the sight of a priceless pearl cast before his eyes--his pledge given not to save it--into the fathomless sea, or rather even it was like the sacrifice of something sentient and throbbing, something that, for the spiritual ear, might have been audible as a faint far wail. This was the sound he cherished when
alone in the stillness of his rooms. He sought and guarded this stillness, so that it might prevail there till the inevitable sounds of life, once more, comparatively coarse and harsh, should smother and deaden it—doubtless by the same process with which they would officiously heal the ache in his soul that was somehow one with it. It moreover deepened the sacred hush that he couldn't complain. He had given poor Kate her freedom. (pp. 398-99)

His imagination has "filled out and refined" the essence of Milly's letter much as the reader's imagination has to fill out the substance of Merton and Milly's last meeting. Both remain mysteries, but their effects are observable in Densher. Milly's letter has become "priceless" to him and the symbol for their last meeting and the changes in him. The "priceless pearl" has replaced the "something rare" between him and Kate (p. 398), and he feels that she is the one with whom he can least share his thoughts. Kate has become "poor Kate" to him as Milly had been "poor Milly" to them all. Although Kate fails his test by opening the letter from New York and he knows that their relationship has changed, he still feels in her power, as he tells her, until the final moment of choice between her, Densher, and the money or her and Densher as they were. As she concludes, they will never be again as they were, and one can almost hear Densher sigh as he renounces the life of the flesh for the life of the spirit, and Kate returns alone and empty-handed to her sister's or to Aunt Maud. Milly has
unintentionally and innocently separated them forever by her act of forgiveness and love, and she has unquestionably changed Densher.53

But has Milly changed society or is her influence limited to one person as is Little Dorrit's? John Carlos Rowe says that "the effect of Milly's sacrifice on Lancaster Gate is by no means 'salvatory,' but rather a revelation of the hollowness at the center of such social games. At the end of The Wings of the Dove, we are left with a shattered, fallen world become conscious of itself. Aunt Maud's tears at the end are as much for her own loss as they are selfless expressions of love for Milly."54 That the "fallen world" is even made conscious of itself is more hopeful than true. Densher is changed, obviously, but Kate, Maud, Lord Mark, and certainly the rest of the "English gang" will probably assume their prior position as manipulative, predatory, and as unconsciously selfish as before. The "English gang" provides a background to which Milly is to be contrasted. Her life and death accentuate their misplaced values but do not change them. John Goode says that "the title illustrates her role--it is not a story about a dove but about its wings, wings which act as an agent of evaluation for the other characters."55 This is just the point that Kate and Densher make at the end of the novel. Kate says that Milly has "stretched out her wings, and it was to that they
reach. They cover us," and Densher replies "They cover us" (p. 403). For Merton, the dove had been transformed into a spiritual symbol that casts a shadow on him and causes him to evaluate his life, but for Kate and the others, Milly is simply the rich, little American girl.

Milly, like Little Dorrit, serves a dual function in her novel; she is the symbol of goodness and all that is admirable in man against which society is contrasted and evaluated, and she is also an individual attempting to live in that society. She has been called a Christ figure, Beatrice, the exemplary American girl, an ideal woman, the symbol of truth, charity, moral beauty, and the spirit. For F. O. Matthiessen, she is "the resonant symbol for what he [James] had to say about humanity," and for Dorothea Krook, "Milly is at once the most heroic, most legendary, element in this heroic and legendary tale and also the most real and exemplary for exhibiting one of the deepest aspects of James's mature vision of the human condition" and the "impact of the worldly world upon the unworldly."56 The "worldly world" consists of empty values and misplaced morality. The people of Lancaster Gate illustrate what, ironically, Lionel Croy says to Kate; he asks her, "Do you know what you're a proof of, all you hard hollow people put together?" and answers his own question with, "the deplorable superficial morality of the age" (p. 29). The superficiality is not
limited to English society but applies to the age as well.
As J. A. Ward says, "society and civilization collapse
together when Strether sees the duplicity of Mme de
Vionnet and Chad, and when Lord Mark reveals Densher's
plot to Milly," and that collapse is initiated by the
greed and deceit characteristic of the time, not a par-
ticular country. The microcosm of *The Wings of the Dove*
is a world like the macrocosm it depicts, where, as
Milly sadly and correctly observes, "nobody matters."
The characters behave like animals, assume roles, put on
shows to hide their ugly reality, and play games with
other people as if an individual life were inconsequential.
Milly's entrance into this world brings forth the base-
ness of modern society just as Little Dorrit's goodness
underscores the flaws of her world. Thus, with the
creation of Milly, James makes her a symbol in that she
represents man's finer qualities, and he resembles
Dickens in being critical of society. He does not, how-
ever, hold Milly up as a model of virtue; he would never
be that Victorian nor would he be that reductive.

Milly is not a simple character, an ideal heroine
who can be dismissed as "too good to be true." After
summarizing the numerous objections to Milly, Oscar
Cargill asks, "is it because of a fundamental skepticism
about the virtues of a Beatrice or a Laura, or is it be-
cause we insist on dismissing Milly as 'other-worldly,'
'aethereal,' and 'unreal,' and refuse to examine the actual character presented to us?" and he concludes that "the impatience with James's method suggests the latter" since Milly "is better realized as a human being than either Laura or Beatrice." It is probably a combination of skepticism and an impatience with James's method. It is difficult for some readers to accept the dove, the princess, or the saint even though it is the other characters who assign these epithets and exaggerate Milly's goodness. More important, however, is the dissatisfaction with James's use of indirection. Even James's brother expresses some discomfort in a letter to him:

You've reversed every traditional canon of story-telling (especially the fundamental one of telling the story, which you carefully avoid) and have created a new genre litteraire which I can't help thinking perverse, but in which you nevertheless succeed, for I read with interest to the end (many pages, and innumerable sentences twice over to see what the dickens they could possibly mean) and all the unflagging curiosity to know what the upshot might become.

The Wings of the Dove is not a traditional novel; it cannot be placed with the novels of plot nor of character, and it does not fall between them as does Little Dorrit. It certainly has plot as well as character; as Cargill points out, "never was there such a gallery of full-length portraits." Merton, Kate, and Milly are
sufficiently complex to warrant being considered centers of any novel. Not to include Milly as a fully-realized, fully-human character would be to ignore how "self-conscious and self-analytical" Milly is, in other words, to ignore, as is often the case, the sections in which Milly is the center of consciousness. Milly is similar to Little Dorrit in her perception, her assumption of roles when advantageous, and her humanity, but she is different in that as a character, she is given a greater inner life and depth by James than is Little Dorrit by Dickens. The Wings of the Dove, however, is not a portrait of Milly, nor Kate, nor Merton, even though they are all carefully presented; it is, as discussed earlier, a novel of relationships.

No one character dominates the novel. No Strether nor Isabel emerges. Milly, like Little Dorrit, is the thematic center, serving to bring out the flaws in society as well as the ambiguities and complexities of human relations and individuals, and she is also "quite real at the core of the cloudy integument with which James has swathed her about," as Edmund Wilson says. She remains distanced and enigmatic. Her reaction to the truth about Kate and Merton and her final meeting with Merton are forever mysteries, as James wisely knew that they should be. Again, it is Milly's effect, not Milly herself, which forms the final focus of the novel, and
that effect is manifest in the development of Merton Densher: "it is he who is really the central dramatic character of The Wings of the Dove . . . because it is the state of Densher's soul, 'the question of the final stamp' to his personality, . . . around which the moral action of the novel is built."63 He, like Arthur Clennam, is the protagonist as defined by Harvey. He is the one who enters the novel unformed, confronts the weakness of society and himself, and develops a new sense of purpose because of the actions of the heroine. Also, he is probably the character closest to the reader and to James himself, although the identification is not as strong or clear as it is with Arthur Clennam. 64

Finally, Merton dominates the last half of the novel; he is the center of consciousness, and his last impressions of Milly result in the apotheosis of her. The little American girl is transformed into a savior. James obviously intends for Milly to be an agent of redemption and for her to have symbolic associations, but he also wants her to be recognized as human. That he treats her indirectly reveals his strong belief that man's perception is limited and that a novelist who desired to be a realist must acknowledge ambiguities and not present himself as omniscient. He has, as his brother told him, created a "new genre litteraire" in writing The Wings of the Dove,
as he did in creating many of his masterpieces. In the case of *The Wings of the Dove*, James has chosen to present a novel whose thematic center rests on the heroine and the central characterization on the hero. Thus, though the reason behind Dickens' creation of *Little Dorrit* lies in his struggle to be social critic and artist and James's in artistic experimentation and purpose, the end is the same, a novel with a heroine no one seems sure how to deal with, an oblique heroine.


3 Matthiessen asks "whether a character like Milly's is of sufficient emotional force to carry a great work": Bewley, in his Complex Fate, considers Milly "stupid"; Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957), p. 137, finds Milly "diaphanous"; William Dean Howells, "Mr. Henry James's Later Works," rpt. in The Question of Henry James:
A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. F. W. Dupee (New York: Holt, 1945), p. 9, writes that Milly is "too good, too pure, too generous, too magnificently unselfish"; Robert Reilly, "Henry James and the Morality of Fiction," American Literature, 39 (1967), 18, says that if we accept James's "people as dramatic presentations" then "we are free to be . . . infinitely bored with Milly Theale"; and Parker Tyler, "Milly and Billy as Proto-Pinnegans," in Every Artist His Own Scandal: A Study of the Real and Fictive Heroes (New York: Horizon Press, 1964), p. 247, that the "complaint has been made by critics that Milly is too abstract a creation, that she is hardly even a character, that she does not act through will. Precisely, she is passive. . . . In view of James's treatment, Milly emerges as the extremest idealization of the type of young woman. . . .


5"Preface," The Wings of the Dove, Norton Critical Edition, p. 3, hereafter cited in the text and designated by "P." Quotations from the novel will also be to this edition and will be documented parenthetically.


11Matthiessen, p. 55.

12Matthiessen, p. 79.


See Holland, *The Expense of Vision*, for a thorough discussion of the Veronese scene; he argues that it is in this scene that Milly is transformed into sacrament.

Cargill asks, "Did Milly understand Susan Stringham, or for that matter, anyone else of those among whom her lot is cast? In addition to being the 'heiress of all the ages' is she the greatest innocent of those ages, too? in a word, is she the perfect object for deceit and therefore partly culpable through stupidity?" and concludes, as I do, that Milly is innocent but intelligent, pp. 354-61. Also, see, Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962); she, according to Cargill, is the "first critic really to appreciate Milly's intelligence."


21 Sandeen, p. 1067; also, see Cargill, p. 363.


23 For interpretations of the cliff scene, see Bell, p. 103; Graham, p. 183; John Hagan, "A Note on the Symbolic Pattern in The Wings of the Dove," College Language Association Journal, 10 (March 1967), 256-62; Matthiessen, p. 62; and Samuels, p. 65.


28 Cargill, p. 358.


30 Matthiessen, p. 69.

32 See particularly, Fowler, who says that Milly assumes roles because she lacks a self-identity and because she feels inadequate in comparison to Kate, and McLean, p. 138, who says that the roles "serve as distorting mirrors to reflect her various views of herself and her various relations with others."


34 Holland, p. 297.


36 Rowe, p. 158, implies that since Milly felt herself "dealt with" (p. 177) on first seeing Kate and Merton, Kate controls the entire scene, but I agree with Graham, p. 200, who says that Milly "steers them through."

37 Krook, p. 211.


39 The Matcham scene has received considerable attention; see in particular, Bradbury, pp. 97-100; Edwin T. Bowden, The Themes of Henry James: A System of Observation Through the Visual Arts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), pp. 95-96; Rowe, pp. 152-53; Snow, p. 328; and Ward, Search for Form, pp. 180-81.


43 Samuels, p. 576, says that James's intrusions in the novel "suggest the fervor of his admiration, which attains a volume exceeding even the governess's hosannas," and Leo Bersani, "The Narrator as Center in The Wings of the Dove," Modern Fiction Studies (Summer 1960), 131-44, argues that the center of consciousness for the majority of the novel is James as narrator and that towards the end it is impossible to separate James from Densher.

Densher soars from the abyss, too late to save Milly, but not too late to be saved by her; he embraces spirit over flesh."

45 Although some critics have commented on the strangeness of Merton Densher's name, the only critic that I found who actually states the obvious "Densher-Dense" equation is Judith Fryer in her *The Faces of Eve: Women in the Nineteenth-Century American Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 102. The OED gives the 1820's definition of "dense" as including profound, intense, and stupid or thick headed. "Denshire," an alternate spelling of "densher," is a type of harvesting in which the land is cleaned by paring off the turf, burning it, and then spreading the ashes on the land. Also, "densher" suggests "denture" meaning teeth and servant. Interestingly, the name "Merton" comes from Merton Abbey in Surrey and is a kind of church bell. Discussions of the meanings of names often becomes farfetched, but it seems likely that James, who carefully selected the names of his characters, had the possible connotations in mind when he dubbed Merton. Merton is rather thick headed at first, and he is certainly a servant of Kate's wishes. To go any further would be perhaps to read too much into the choice of name; thus, I will leave it to the reader's imagination.


47 Bersani, p. 137. Also see Firebaugh, Kornfield and Samuels, who feel that Merton is equally responsible with Kate.

48 Conger, p. 158.


54. Rowe, p. 136. Also see Matthiessen, pp. 77-78 and Cargill, pp. 356-66.

55. Goode, p. 146.

56. Matthiessen, p. 43; Krook, p. 200.


60. Cargill, p. 373. Also, see Hamblen, p. 60.

61. Cargill, p. 356. Bellringer, pp. 12, 24, says that "the defence of Milly has to begin on other territory than characterization" and that "Milly [is not] a rounded character in the conventional sense."


63. Bersani, p. 137.
64 Again, see Bersani's discussion of the closeness of Merton and James. Also, see Sicker, p. 141, and Robert J. Reilly, "Henry James and the Morality of Fiction," American Literature, 39 (1967), p. 16.
CHAPTER IV

A "FLESH-AND-BLOOD CHARACTER,"

SUBJECTIVITY AND LOSS

I believe that what drives anyone to write is the discovery of some truth that had been in existence all the time, but he discovered it. It seems so moving to him, so necessary that it be told to everyone else in such a way that it would move them to the same extent that it moved him. He is trying to tell that truth in the best way he can. He may know that he will probably fail, that he cannot tell that truth in a way that will seem as true, as moving, as beautiful, as passionate, as terrible to anyone else as it seemed to him, but he will try.

Faulkner in Manila (1955)

With The Sound and the Fury, William Faulkner created yet another genre littéraire, as Henry James's brother said that he had done with The Wings of the Dove. The Sound and the Fury, clearly a product of the twentieth century, belongs with Ulysses, Nostromo, and The Waves and the other novels of consciousness, but it owes much to the tradition that preceded it, particularly to Henry James and his experimentation with character and point of view. In The Wings of the Dove, James chose indirection in his presentation of Milly Theale, and in The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner employs a similar method in his characterization of Caddy Compson. Faulkner, however, extends the method

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to such an extent that Caddy becomes the most indirectly presented of the oblique heroines. She is never even physically present in the novel and exists only in the memories of her brothers and, except for an occasional mentioning of her name, fades out almost completely in the last fourth of the novel. Early critics hardly even acknowledged Caddy as a character in the novel, much less as the heroine or the center that Faulkner claimed her to be.¹ More recent critics have questioned the success of Faulkner's characterization of Caddy as well; Michael Millgate, for instance, says that "although Caddy is the core of the book, she is not herself a wholly successful creation."² Catherine Baum offers one of the best studies of Caddy in an attempt to defend her as a character, but she goes too far in arguing that Caddy is a central tragic protagonist.³ Caddy does not have the presence of Anna Karenina, Madame Bovary, or even Moll Flanders. Caddy's brother Quentin is closer to a tragic protagonist than Caddy, although John Longley is perhaps most accurate in saying that in The Sound and the Fury, "we have the apparently contradictory situation of tragic effect without an individual tragic protagonist."⁴ But, as Longley says elsewhere, the "central focus" of The Sound and the Fury is the beautiful and doomed Candance Compson."⁵ Caddy, like Little Dorrit and Milly Theale, is at the heart
of her novel without being a traditional protagonist. Faulkner never allows Caddy to be the center of consciousness of the novel as does James with Milly, nor does he even give the glimpses of her thoughts provided by Dickens in *Little Dorrit*. Caddy is not physically described. She is not shown assuming roles, revealed as perceptive, nor presented as a moral touchstone or emblem of goodness, forgiveness, or some other angelic or Christian quality. Despite the lack of any of the methods used by Dickens and James to characterize their heroines, however, Caddy emerges as more human in being fallible and passionate than is either *Little Dorrit* or Milly Theale; Caddy is not idealized in the ways that they are, but she is idolized by Quentin and by Faulkner and is often equated with Eve and mythical goddesses by critics. Thus, Caddy, the "dark" sister of *Little Dorrit* and Milly Theale, is, as they are, an amphibious creation, occupying two worlds, the ideal and the real, and is another example of an oblique heroine.

Like James's comments on *The Wings of the Dove*, Faulkner's answers to interviewers' questions and his introductions to *The Sound and the Fury* reveal his heroine's importance to him and to the origination of the novel. Since Faulkner's remarks are important in establishing his intention and his reasons for using indirection in presenting Caddy, I will begin my
discussion of Caddy as an oblique heroine with them. Next, I will show that Caddy is a character with more depth and reality than critics acknowledge by interpreting the key scenes that delineate Caddy's individuality and by answering some of the critical questions most often asked about Caddy and about her novel. Third, I will briefly analyze the character of the heroes; however, instead of exploring the hero's personality before, during and after his change or conversion, as I did with Arthur Clennam and Merton Densher, I will reveal the essence of Benjy, Quentin, and Jason as it relates to what Caddy means to them; the crux of this section will be devoted to Quentin, the hero most often singled out as protagonist. I will then conclude with Caddy's symbolic function and her nexus with the metaphysics of her creator and with her novel.

Faulkner, notorious for misleading and contradictory statements about his work, was very consistent in his comments on The Sound and the Fury. He repeatedly stated that Caddy was the catalyst for the writing of the novel, that the novel grew from a short story, that the novel was his favorite, his best, and yet a failure, and that he loved Caddy. In an interview with Jean Stein in 1955, he gives one of his most complete statements of the novel's genesis and its significance to him:
It began with a mental picture. I didn't realize at the time it was symbolical. The picture of the muddy seat of a little girl's drawers in a pear tree where she could see through a window where her grandmother's funeral was taking place and report what was happening to her brothers on the ground below. By the time I explained who they were and what they were doing and how her pants got muddy, I realized it would be impossible to get all of it into a short story and that it would have to be a book. And then I realized the symbolism of the soiled pants, and that image was replaced by the one of the fatherless and motherless girl climbing down the rainpipe to escape from the only home she had, where she had never been offered love or affection or understanding. I had already begun to tell it through the eyes of the idiot child since I felt that it would be more effective as told by someone capable only of knowing what happened, but not why. I saw that I had not told the story that time. I tried to tell it again, the same story through the eyes of another brother. That was still not it. I told it for the third time through the eyes of the third brother. That was still not it. I tried to gather the pieces together and fill in the gaps by making myself the spokesman. It was still not complete, not until 15 years after the book was published when I wrote as an appendix to another book the final effort to get the story told and off my mind, so that I myself could have some peace from it. It's the book I feel tenderest towards. I couldn't leave it alone, and I never could tell it right, though I tried hard and would like to try again, though I'd probably fail again.8

Sounding very much like James, Faulkner replied, when asked how his stories usually began, that "the story can come from an anecdote, it can come from a character. With me it never comes from an idea because I don't know too much about ideas and ain't really interested in ideas.
I'm interested in people."9 Clearly, The Sound and the Fury began in just that way. Faulkner was interested in the little girl, the courage that she revealed in climbing the tree, and her brothers' versions of the event, and he was not thinking about the obvious symbolism of the muddy drawers, the tree, and death until the short story, "Twilight," had grown into the novel The Sound and the Fury, and become, as he says in one interview, "the tragedy of two lost women: Caddy and her daughter."10 As Faulkner revealed elsewhere, however, it is Caddy alone whose story he was trying to tell; she is the controlling image and the one for whom he felt tremendous affection. "To me, she was the beautiful one, she was my heart's darling. That's what I wrote the book about and I used the tools which seemed to me the proper tools to try to tell, try to draw the picture of Caddy," he tells an interviewer in 1957, and he tells Maurice Coindreau in 1938, "I fell in love with one of my characters, Caddy. I loved her so much I couldn't decide to give her life just for the duration of a short story. She deserved more than that. So my novel was created almost in spite of myself."11 For Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury is Caddy's novel and the brothers are windows through which to view her—Benjy, the innocent frozen in time, presenting the objective view, Quentin, the adolescent, and Jason, the "sane" adult, presenting their
subjective views. With the "authorial" version and the later appendix, Faulkner tried again and felt that he had still failed to successfully capture Caddy; for him, The Sound and the Fury remained his "best" book, but also "the one that failed the most tragically and the most splendidly."\textsuperscript{13}

A brief survey of typical critical opinions of the novel suggests that many would agree with Faulkner that he fails in The Sound and the Fury, and that the failure, as is the case with Little Dorrit and The Wings of the Dove, rests with the inadequacy of the characterization of the heroine. One common complaint, as it is with Little Dorrit and The Wings of the Dove, is that the heroine is absent from too much of her novel. For instance, David Williams says, "the defect in The Sound and the Fury is the absence of Caddy throughout its later portions; ostensibly begun as the story of the sister and her numinous influence upon her brothers, the novel in conclusion becomes the story of the negro servant"; and Michael Millgate states, "Caddy emerges incompletely from the first two sections, and in the last two attention shifts progressively from her to her daughter, Quentin . . . The novel revolves around Caddy, but Caddy herself escapes satisfactory definition."\textsuperscript{14} Others feel, again as critics did with Little Dorrit and The Wings of
the Dove, that the novel does not cohere, that the heroine
is not strong enough to hold it together. Donald
Kartiganer writes, "neither in the figure of Caddy, for
some an organizing center of the novel, nor in the well-
wrought fourth narrative do we find an adequate basis of
unity in the work . . . rather than a means of binding the
fragments together, the image [of Caddy] is itself compli-
cated by the fragmentation"; and Joseph W. Reed, Jr.:

The novel lies beyond what any of the
individual sections can give us. If it is the
story of Caddy (the little girl with the
muddy drawers), then Benjy's section is a
draft, Quentin's a revision, Jason's a
sequel, section 4 an anticlimax, and the
1946 appendix an anti-anticlimax. If it is
the story Faulkner says he was trying to
tell, "of two lost women: Caddy and her
daughter," then the protagonists are always
beyond the limelight--Caddy only seen as
what her brothers' affections and hatreds
make of her, Quentin a shadow crawling
through a window, hating one brother and
being annoyed by another. The sections do
not add up to a narrative whole, nor are
they equivalents as Faulkner suggests:
. . . the narratives of all four do not
trace the story that emerges on the edges
of each of the narratives. The parts are
not enough to make the whole.15

Few could argue against the view that Caddy fades out in
the last half of the novel or that our view of her is
fragmented. Even the central image of Caddy climbing the
tree, though important in Benjy's section, is only
mentioned in Quentin's section twice and not at all in
Jason's or in the fourth section. Faulkner said that he
felt the indirect presentation of Caddy to be more
"passionate," but does it prevent the reader from ever getting a sense of Caddy as a character? Eileen Gregory says that "Caddy Compson has been inexplicable to most critics of The Sound and the Fury and it is not easy to focus into a single impression the many fragmented glimpses we are given of her." From the fragmented images, however, Caddy as a character does emerge and she, like Little Dorrit and Milly Theale, "is indeed more complex than has been generally acknowledged." In the following character sketch, I hope to capture the paradoxically "real" side of the oblique heroine, Caddy Compson.

A discussion of Caddy as a character has to differ from an analysis of Little Dorrit or Milly. She is never physically described. She is not revealed as perceptive, nor shown in consciously assumed roles, nor pictured contemplating her existence or her relationship to her family or society. We never see her poised above the waters of Venice, thinking, or sitting in the streets, musing. She is not equated with classical heroines nor princesses. She does, however, appear in different guises according to the brother who is viewing her. For Benjy, she is a mother substitute, supplying much needed affection and protection. For Quentin, she is "Little Sister Death," stirring thoughts of sexuality and death. For Jason, she is nemesis, preventing him from having his way and
succeeding. We see her only from the outside as her brothers present her, and what we get are isolated almost still-life portraits or slides of a distant figure whose features are never clear, but whose outline or silhouette becomes clearer as the different slides of her are flashed upon the screen or as her actions are described in key scenes—Caddy in the creek, climbing a tree, putting mittens on Benjy, fleeing up the stairs after losing her virginity, sitting in a creek with Quentin, getting married, standing in the rain after her father's funeral, arguing with Jason, watching him drive off with her baby, and finally, pictured in a photograph with a Nazi officer. The key scenes follow Caddy from childhood to middle age and suggest definite patterns in her personality.

The most important scene, the one that stirred Faulkner to write *The Sound and the Fury*, is the scene in which Caddy climbs the tree. The scene begins at the creek and ends with the children going to sleep in the "measle" room. The dominant scene in Benjy's section, it reveals Caddy's early spirit, courage, and defiance. The creek incident capsulizes the children's relationship and their personalities, and it foreshadows what is to come. Jason, Quentin, Caddy, Benjy, and Versh are all at the creek, but significantly Jason is separate from the others and plays a little apart from the rest. Described as playing "by himself further down the branch," he is not
mentioned again until they are on the way home. Quentin and Caddy are in the center of the frame:

We were playing in the branch and Caddy squatted down and got her dress wet and Versh said,
"Your momma going to whip you for getting your dress wet."
"She's not going to do any such thing,"
Caddy said.
"How do you know." Quentin said.
"That's all right how I know." Caddy said. "How do you know."
"She said she was." Quentin said.

"You know she whip you when you get your dress wet." Versh said.
"It's not wet." Caddy said. She stood up in the water and looked at her dress. "I'll take it off." she said.
"Then it'll dry."
"I bet you won't." Quentin said.
"I bet I will." Caddy said.
"I bet you better not." Quentin said.

"You unbutton it, Versh." Caddy said, "Or I'll tell Dilsey what you did yesterday." So Versh unbuttoned it.

"You just take your dress off." Quentin said. Caddy took her dress off and threw it on the bank. Then she didn't have on anything but her bodice and drawers, and Quentin slapped her and she slipped and fell down in the water. When she got up she began to splash water on Quentin, and Quentin splashed water on Caddy.

"Now I guess you're satisfied."
Quentin said. "We'll both get whipped now."
"I don't care." Caddy said. "I'll run away."
"Yes you will." Quentin said.
"I'll run away and never come back."

(pp. 19-21)

Caddy asserts that she knows more than the others, a trait that she continues to manifest until the end of the scene. She tells Versh that he is wrong in thinking that
because the Compson's have the lights on that they are having a party, argues with Frony about funerals, and here claims that her mother is not going to whip her. She, typical seven-year old that she is, thinks that she knows it all, does not want to appear ignorant, and is wrong, except about the whipping. She wants to be the leader and would not dare back down from Quentin's challenge that she take off her dress. By taking off her dress, she maintains her sense of superiority and her independence. When Quentin slaps Caddy, he is lashing out at her because he resents her spirit and thinks of himself as the defender of the family's honor. Her actions are innocent, but he exaggerates them and reacts extravagantly just as his mother does when she wears a black dress after catching Caddy kissing a boy (p. 286). Quentin is the opposite of Caddy, who claims to not care, for he cares too much. Her repeated "I don't cares" are childish attempts to assert her will and not expressions of any lack of morality. It is Quentin, typically, who makes everything a moral issue. Caddy simply sees a creek and wants to play in it, does, gets wet, knows that she is breaking a rule, and when reminded of that fact, reacts with defiance and denial of the possibility of punishment, which it turns out she is correct in stating will never come. About the creek incident, Eileen Gregory writes,
Caddy's earliest action in the novel is an act of disobedience; her reaction to the first threat of punishment is a disconcerting self-assurance; Quentin's earliest response to her combines jealousy of her spirit, affirmation of parental authority, and condemnation of the forbidden act. From the beginning Caddy's behavior is unconventional, and her defiance is at odds with the rigid, unnatural moral concern of Quentin—the true heir of his parents' prohibitive and pessimistic moral beliefs. . . . It is essentially an affirmative spirit which causes Caddy to question and to disobey her parents. She is not deliberately perverse in her disobedience but on the contrary is quite simple in her motivation. She decides during the incident at the branch to take off her dress so that it will dry. It is Quentin who makes a moral issue out of this practical gesture, who characteristically insinuates her guilt and antagonism to authority and takes it upon himself to punish her.20

While I do not find Caddy's self-assurance "disconcerting," for it seems most likely motivated by childish defiance; and do not think her behavior that "unconventional" since it too originates from childish emotions not that unexpected from a seven-year-old, I find Gregory's comments important in suggesting how different Caddy is from Quentin and, by implication, from the rest of the Compsons.

The next incident in the scene, Caddy's climbing the tree, further underscores the contrast and illustrates Caddy's assertiveness and daring, as well as a natural curiosity. The blacks have told the children that there is a funeral going on in the Compson house for their
grandmother, Damuddy, and Caddy does not believe them. She wants to see for herself. Her mother’s crying, which Caddy mistakes for singing, and the disruption of their normal routine make her desire to know overwhelming. She does not like having anything kept from her and leads the others to the tree to find out what is going on:

We looked up into the tree where she was.

"What she seeing, Versh." Frony whispered.
"Shhhhhh." Caddy said in the tree. Dilsey said,
"You come on here." She came around the corner of the house. "Whyn't you all go on up stairs, like your paw said, stead of slipping out behind my back. Where's Caddy and Quentin."
"I told her not to climb up that trec." Jason said. "I'm going to tell on her."
"Who in what tree." Dilsey said. She came and looked up into the tree. "Caddy."
Dilsey said. The branches began to shake again.
"You, Satan." Dilsey said. "Come down from there."
"Hush," Caddy said, "Don't you know Father said to be quiet." Her legs came in sight and Dilsey reached up and lifted her out of the tree.
"Aint you got any better sense than to let them come around here." Dilsey said.
"I couldn't do nothing with her." Versh said.
"What you all doing here." Dilsey said.
"Who told you to come up to the house."
"She did." Frony said. "She told us to come."
"Who told you you got to do what she say." (pp. 54-55)

Caddy, as in the creek incident, is the leader. Quentin says in his section that Caddy was never content to be the queen; she always wanted to be the king (p. 215), and in
both the creek and the tree scenes, she exhibits a desire to lead, and she does. When the children first returned from the creek, Caddy tells her father to make the others mind her, and their following her to the tree shows them doing just that, even the servants. Jason follows along with the rest, but when authority arrives, in the figure of Dilsey, he is quick to say that he has had no part in Caddy's action. Here, as elsewhere, he is the tattletale. Although Faulkner refers to the brothers watching Caddy as if all of them are present, Quentin is in the barn, pouting, Caddy says, because "he had to mind me tonight" (p. 55). Quentin's slapping Caddy earlier and his absence here suggest that he wants to be in control and that he does not like for rules to be broken, again showing his contrast to Caddy, who wants to be in control and is, and who is not concerned with the rules. Dilsey's calling Caddy "Satan" makes Edenic associations of Caddy as the temptress or the one who defies or questions authority obvious. As Walter Brylowski writes, "it would seem that for Faulkner, Caddy in this crucial scene shares a role similar to Milton's Satan in the Romantics' eyes--courage of defiance."21 She is, as Faulkner said in an interview, "the only one that was brave enough to climb that tree to look at the forbidden window."22 The little girl with the muddy drawers climbs the tree, symbolically reaching for what the others draw back from--experience,
death, and sexuality.

In the next important scene, again largely presented by Benjy, Caddy has figuratively fallen from the tree and made the move from innocence to experience. After the creek incident, Caddy tells Versh that she does not care if she is wet nor fear confronting her parents; she says, "I'll walk right into the parlor" (p. 27), but after losing her virginity, she enters with trepidation and cries when Benjy confronts her. The apparent self-reliance and confidence of the child have been replaced with the anxiety and self-consciousness of a young woman who knows that she has broken a rule and who cares:

We could hear Caddy walking fast. Father and mother looked at the door. Caddy passed it, walking fast. She didn't look. She walked fast.
"Candace." Mother said. Caddy stopped walking.
"Yes, Mother." she said.
"Hush, Caroline." Father said.
"Come here." Mother said.
"Hush, Caroline." Father said. "Let her alone."

Caddy came to the door and stood there, looking at Father and Mother. Her eyes flew at me, and away. I began to cry. It went loud and I got up. Caddy came in and stood with her back to the wall, looking at me. I went toward her, crying, and she shrank against the wall and I saw her eyes and I cried louder and pulled at her dress. She put her hands out but I pulled at her dress. Her eyes ran.

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

We were in the hall. Caddy was still looking at me. Her hand was against her mouth and I saw her eyes and I cried. We went up the stairs. She stopped again,
against the wall, looking at me and I cried
and she went on and I came on, crying, and
she shrank against the wall, looking at me.
She opened the door to her room, but I
pulled at her dress and we went to the bath-
room and she stood against the door, looking
at me. Then she put her arm across her face
and I pushed at her, crying. (pp. 84-85)

As Quentin says in his section, Benjy "looked at Caddy
and knew" (p. 124). Benjy senses the change in Caddy;
she no longer smells like trees, and he wants her to wash
it away as she did the perfume and the kisses. She, how-
ever, knows that she cannot and wants to flee. Her eyes
express her feelings and her situation here as they do
elsewhere. Her mother says that she could look at
Caddy's eyes and "tell" (p. 127), and Quentin says that
when Benjy confronts her, her eyes looked like "cornered
rats" (p. 185). When Jason faces her after he has driven
off with her child, he says that he feels "her eyes like
they were touching my face" (p. 261). With Benjy and with
Jason, her eyes reach out for understanding and reflect
her desperation. The narrator of the appendix to The
Sound and the Fury says that Caddy placed "no value what-
ever" on her virginity, but Caddy's reaction to Benjy's
affront is not the "I don't care" of the little girl who
got her dress wet. She is disturbed; her eyes "ran," as
Benjy says, and she wishes to run away from him and the
truth of her actions. Eileen Gregory says that "in the
painful encounter with Benjy after the loss of her
virginity, Caddy's grief stems not so much from a sense of shame over her lost innocence as from her awareness that Benjy's happiness must eventually be destroyed," but it seems more likely that her tears are not a reaction to Benjy's loss as much as an indication of her awareness of what she has lost. She can no longer return to childhood nor to simplicity. She has taken the first step towards moving away from her family and can never go back. She is, as Mrs. Compson coldly puts it, "either a lady or not" (p. 127).

Caddy is not, however, as the *Oxford Companion to American Literature* and many critics state, a nymphomaniac. A passionate young woman, she seeks the love and warmth that she and her brothers have gotten very little of at home. Dalton Ames stirs emotions so deep that they are beyond words; she cannot answer Quentin when he asks her if she loves Dalton, she can only place his hand upon her pounding heart (p. 187). Also, just as Quentin's saying to her that he bets she will not take her dress off in the creek when they are children challenges her to break the rules, her mother's having Jason spy on her does as well. She does so out of a spirit of rebelliousness, out of love for Dalton, out of a search for love and affection, and out of natural desire. Her later promiscuity just as likely results from her loss of Dalton
and her continuous search for affection as it does from an abnormal sexual appetite. As John W. Hunt says, "her experiments in sex are 'natural,' if foolish. She is capable of compassion and love, as her relationship with Benjy and her love for Dalton Ames illustrate." The Caddy who emerges from the Ames affair is very different from the little girl who gets her dress wet in a creek and climbs a tree.

When Dalton leaves her, she tries to replace him but finds only emptiness and terror. She tells Quentin, "there was something terrible in me sometimes at night and I could see it through them grinning at me through their faces" (p. 138). She apparently begins to accept Quentin's suggestion that her "femininity is corrupt at the source," as Eileen Gregory says. Caddy says to Quentin, "I'm bad anyway you can't help it" (p. 196). The fruit of the tree of knowledge that she sought has become bitter, and the experience of sexuality has become overshadowed by the knowledge of loss and of death. On her wedding day, she says to Quentin, "I died last year I told you I had but I didn't know then what I meant" (p. 153). These are not the words of a woman who places little value on her virginity; instead, they are the words of a young woman who gave herself to a man whom she loved and then lost. Along with Dalton, she loses her love of life, her spirit, and her self-confidence.
In the next extended scene, presented in Quentin's section, Caddy faces Quentin after fleeing Benjy, and the recalcitrance of the little girl is gone. She cooperates with Quentin, even allowing him to hold a knife to her throat and apparently willing to commit incest with him. She knows, however, that Quentin can do neither one. He is another Prufrock, shouting "do I dare" and deciding that he does not. Quentin finds Caddy sitting in the creek and is reminded of the incident at the creek on the day Damuddy died. He tells her to get out, and she does (p. 186). He asks her about Dalton, whether or not he made her have sex with him and whether she loves him or hates him (pp. 186-87). She answers by placing his hand on her pounding heart, saying "poor Quentin," and finally, "yes I hate him, I would die for him, I've already died for him, I die for him over and over again every time this goes" (p. 188). Then, he denies his virginity and puts the knife to her throat:

youve never done that have you
what done what
that what I have what I did
yes yes lots of times with lots of girls
then I was crying her hand touched me
again and I was crying against her damp
blouse then she lying on her back looking
past my head into the sky I could see a rim
of white under her irises I opened my knife
do you remember the day damuddy died
when you sat down in the water in you drawers
yes
I held the point of the knife at her
throat
it wont take but a second just a second then I can do mine I can do mine
then
all right can you do yours by your-
self
...yes the blades long enough Benjys in bed by now
yes (pp. 188-89)

His pathetic impotence moves Caddy. She tolerates his insane and weak attempt to kill her and himself. After he loses the knife in the grass, she calmly leaves and tells him to come on (p. 190). As they move towards the house, Caddy breaks away and heads toward the trees, and Quentin tries to stop her:

I got in front of her again
Caddy
stop it
I held her
Im stronger than you
she was motionless hard unyielding
but still
I wont fight stop youd better stop
Caddy dont Caddy
it wont do any good dont you know it
wont let me go (p. 191)

Caddy knows that she cannot go back to innocence. She has quietly accepted experience, and she has taken the step that will move her forever away from her family, the step that she knows Quentin will never take, and Benjy is unable to. For Quentin, Caddy's eyes now reflect emptiness and serenity: "she looked at me then every-
thing emptied out of her eyes and they looked like the eyes in the statues blank and unseeing and serene" (p. 202). Her fight and her spirit appear to have been
tamed. She knows that Dalton Ames is lost to her, and she faces the rest of her life with a sense of inevitability.

Months later, after "too many" men, Caddy faces her approaching marriage to a man that she does not love with resignation. Some of the courage of the little girl shows through as she does what she has to do and what will result in her final separation from Quentin, Benjy, and her father. When Quentin begs her to not marry Herbert Head, she tells him over and over again not to touch her (p. 139). Caddy cannot tolerate physical contact with her brother any longer; he, the self-appointed moral judge of her since she was a child, stirs guilt and despair. She has moved too far beyond him. In his adolescent way, Quentin imagines that he and Caddy can take Benjy and run away together, but she knows that she has to have a father for her child. She tries to make him understand, telling him that she has to marry someone and asking that he look after Benjy and their father (p. 143). With the loss of her virginity and the loss of Dalton Ames, she tells Quentin that she is "dead" and cannot even cry anymore (p. 153). The recalcitrant little girl has been replaced by a young woman who is willing to do what she must to provide her child a father and attempt to hold her family together. Quentin asks her, "can you think of
Benjy and Father and do it," and she replies, "What else can I think about what else have I thought about. . . .

Father will be dead in a year they say if he doesn't stop drinking and he won't stop he can't stop since I since last summer and then they'll send Benjy to Jackson I can't cry I can't even cry . . . (pp. 153-54). She hopes that her marriage will make everything right again: "afterward it will be all right it won't matter" (p. 139). It will not matter if she is pregnant. She will be respectably married, and her family's dignity will be restored. The little girl who would never be queen but always wanted to be "a king or a giant or a general" has grasped the last straw before her final defeat.

Her innocence gone, her spirit reduced to impotency, Caddy appears in her last important scenes, in Jason's section, defeated. Her father and Quentin are dead, her husband has left her, and her name cannot even be spoken in her former home in which her daughter is being raised. In her first altercation with Jason, she loses as she does in the subsequent ones. Caddy comes to town to attend her father's funeral, which she has just happened to have seen announced in the paper, and to see her daughter. After paying Jason a hundred dollars to allow her to see her daughter, she pathetically, then helplessly watches and runs after him when he holds Quentin up to the car window and speeds away (p. 255). The next day as
she confronts him, she is "shaking like an ague-fit, her hands clenched and kind of jerking," but she backs down when Jason, the tattle-tale that he still is, threatens to tell her mother that she has come to town (p. 256).

Shortly afterward, when Jason finds out that Caddy has sneak ed in to see Benjy, Quentin, and Dilsey and again threatens to tell his mother, it becomes clear what she fears: Jason tells her that if she tries to visit again, he will tell his mother, and she will "fire Dilsey, and send Ben to Jackson and take Quentin and go away" (p. 258).

In this final scene in which we see Caddy, she expresses impotent rage and bitter acceptance of her separation from her daughter:

"I could hear her whispering Damn you oh damn you oh damn you.  
"Say it out," I says, "I dont reckon it's any secret what you and I think of one another. Maybe you want the money back," I says.  
"Listen, Jason," she says, "Dont lie to me now. About her. I wont ask to see anything. If that isn't enough, I'll send more each month. Just promise that she'll—that she—You can do that. Things for her. Be kind to her. Little things that I cant, they wont let. . . . But you wont. You never had a drop of warm blood in you. Listen," she said. "If you'll get Mother to let me have her back, I'll give you a thousand dollars."  
"You haven't got a thousand dollars," I says, "I know you're lying now."  
"Yes I have. I will have. I can get it."

"And I know how you'll get it," I says, "You'll get it the same way you got her. And when she gets big enough—" Then I thought she really was going to hit at me, and then I didn't know what she was going to do. She acted for a minute like some kind of a toy
that's wound up too tight and about to burst all to pieces.
"Oh, I'm crazy," she says, "I'm insane. I can't take her. Keep her. What am I thinking of. Jason, she says, grabbing my arm. Her hands were hot as fever. "You'll have to promise to take care of her..."
(pp. 259-60)

If Caddy does obtain her money through prostitution, and there is no indication of any other source, then she has little choice but to leave Quentin with Jason and her mother and hope for a better life for her daughter. As Catherine Baum says, "when Mrs. Compson coldly refused to let Caddy come home in spite of Mr. Compson's plea that she be allowed to do so (p. 228), she practically determined Caddy's fate. Thrown entirely on her own, Caddy could do little but become a mistress or a prostitute, and she did not want her daughter to become part of such a life"; also, "Caddy is so hamstrung by the maneuverings of Jason and the unforgivingness of Mrs. Compson that she is powerless to do anything more for Quentin than send her money."26 Caddy's broken speech and her obvious emotional state suggest her anger, desperation, and helplessness. In giving up Quentin, as in her marrying Herbert Head, she does what she feels that she has to do despite her misgivings and unhappiness.

The final picture of Caddy comes outside the novel proper in the appendix, and is not very pleasing. After divorcing Herbert Head, she "married [in] 1920 to a minor
moving picture magnate, Hollywood, California. Divorced by mutual agreement, Mexico 1925. Vanished in Paris with the German occupation, 1940, still beautiful and probably still wealthy too since she did not look within fifteen years of her actual forty-eight and was not heard of again. Except there was a woman in Jefferson, the country librarian" who finds what she thinks is a picture of Caddy in a "slick magazine"; in the picture is a woman standing next to an "expensive chromium-trimmed sports car," looking "ageless and beautiful, cold serene and damned" (pp. 413-15). The serenity Caddy has shown before with Quentin in the second creek scene, but the coldness is new. In the wedding scene with Quentin and in the last scene with Jason, she is described as feverish. She had been a warm, emotional little girl and young woman, and now she appears to have become cold and unfeeling. The appendix, however, has to be taken in the spirit in which it was written. A separate work from the novel, Faulkner wrote it several years after The Sound and the Fury was published and intended it to accompany the "Dilsey" section to be published in The Portable Faulkner. The "Compson Appendix" is full of inconsistencies which Faulkner refused to correct. When Malcolm Cowley, the man responsible for The Portable Faulkner, pointed out the inconsistencies, Faulkner explained that "the inconsistencies in the appendix prove that to me the book is still alive after 15 years, and
being still alive is growing, changing; the appendix was
done at the same heart as the book, even though 15 years
later, and so it is the book itself which is inconsistent:
not the appendix."27 Thus, the appendix was published
with the inconsistencies at the end of The Portable
Faulkner, and later printed as a forward to one edition of
the novel, which Faulkner never intended. "It is impor-
tant," as Andre Bleikasten writes, "to remember that the
'Compson Appendix' is no organic part of it."28 To rely
on the appendix too much results in misreading Caddy's
character; as Eileen Gregory says, "Caddy's later 'cold-
ness' and 'damnation' are assumed by irresponsible critics
to be present in the Caddy of the novel; such misreading
considerably distorts this lovely, passionate young
woman."29 It is also important to acknowledge the persona
Faulkner says he assumed when writing the appendix. He
wrote to Cowley explaining. "(In fact, the purpose of this
genealogy is to give a sort of bloodless bibliophile's
point of view. I was a sort of Garter King-at-Arms, heat-
less, not very moved, cleaning up 'Compson' before going
on to the next 'C-o' or 'C-r')" and also the Garter K/A
"knew only what the town could have told him. . . ."30
Two of this narrator's descriptions which are important in
understanding Caddy's character but which do not seem to
coincide with the Caddy of the novel are first, his stat-
ing that she placed no more value on her virginity than on
a hangnail and that she "accepted the doom without either seeking or fleeing it" (p. 412). As I have shown, Caddy did value her virginity and she possessed too much spirit and love of life to have seen herself as doomed. It is only after losing Dalton Ames that a sense of her having given in to fate occurs.

Even if the novel is read without the appendix as it must be in the French edition, an edition which Faulkner said that he admired and one which has never included the appendix, however, enough evidence exists in the novel to project Caddy's future coldness and damnation. As a child, she possessed courage and a willingness to take chances even to the point of being rather cavalier about rules. Also, she had self-confidence and was combative. Most important, she was warm, affectionate, and selfless. She was the only one to treat Benjy like a human being with feelings, for instance, rather than just a burden or a nuisance. She attempts to take care of his needs and to keep him happy. As Lawrence Thompson says, Caddy gives Ben "motherly attention previously denied to him because of his own mother's inadequacies. Tenderly, solicitously, Caddy has discovered ways of appealing to Benjy's limited responses, to satisfy his instinctive and unreasoning hunger for orderliness, peacefulness, serenity." She was very close to Quentin, tolerating his outbursts and
attempting to appease his demands on her time and attention. With Benjy and Quentin, as later with Dalton Ames, she acts out of love and selflessness; when she marries Herbert, she does the same. She does not love him, but she loves her family and hopes her marriage will keep them together, as well as provide her unborn child a father. Paradoxically, as some critics have noted, it is Caddy's selflessness that causes her downfall. When she gives herself completely to Dalton Ames then loses him and claims to have died, it is her natural and emotional side that is being destroyed. The terror that she sees at night suggests that her Compson conscience haunts her, perhaps revealing to her her damnation in Quentin's presbyterian hell (p. 411). Marrying without love furthers her destruction by killing even more of her warmth. Her father's and then Quentin's death contribute to this progression downward. After the temporary intense anger caused by Jason's actions, she leaves her daughter to be raised in what she must know will be a loveless home, and apparently never tries again to claim her. At this point, Caddy has reached bottom. Severed from contact with all that is left that matters to her, Benjy, Quentin, and possibly Dilsey, all her emotions are gone, and she is left to survive alone at all costs. The major cost is the final destruction of the natural, affectionate, courageous little girl who is replaced by a hard young
woman who has been forced to adopt the stoicism of her father and the coldness of her mother.

These key scenes in the novel chronicle Caddy's development and her downfall, and although she is presented indirectly and in some cases extrapolation is required, enough characteristics emerge to suggest the reality and the complexity of her character. Although the key scenes have also revealed much about her brothers, I want to turn to them individually, particularly Quentin, in order to complete her portrait by discussing what she means to them and finally to Faulkner himself.

Since Benjy, Quentin, and Jason have received considerable attention, it is not necessary to go into a lengthy discussion of their characters; however, as Sally Page argues, "the full importance and complexity of Caddy's character are revealed completely only by an examination of her relationship to the two brothers who love her," and to the brother who hates her, I might add. As already pointed out, in Benjy's limited world, Caddy provides the only comfort he ever knows, the comfort and the care which should have been supplied by his mother. For his mother, Benjy is a source of embarrassment, the child of her "sorrow," whose name she changes because she cannot abide having an idiot named after her brother (pp. 211 & 213). His father and Jason when young hardly appear to acknowledge his existence, and Quentin
is not as concerned for Benjy as he is in using Caddy's concern for him to get his way or make Caddy feel guilty. Benjy's care falls primarily on Caddy and Dilsey. All of his pleasant memories are of her—unsnagging him from the fence, putting his mittens on his cold hands, taking him with her into the pasture, hugging him, comforting him when Jason mistreats him, holding him until he falls asleep, and smelling like trees. Her absence or any suggestion of her change is a source of pain for him. Her wearing perfume, putting on lipstick, and sitting in the swing with Charlie are all signs of her growing up and away from Benjy that she rectifies when Benjy is upset, but Caddy's growing up cannot be stopped. He wants and expects her to remain the same, and when her loss of virginity cannot be washed away as were the perfume, lipstick, and kisses, the order and peace of his world are destroyed. When Caddy leaves home, he is unhappy and probably neglected, but he would have been just as upset if she had married under normal circumstances and left. For Benjy not to have been miserable, time would have had to stop and everything remain the same, which is impossible. The last scene in the novel of Luster taking Benjy the wrong way around the town square captures poignantly Benjy's situation. When he realizes the mistake, "he bellowed. Bellow on bellow, his voice mounted, with scarce interval for breath. There was more than
astonishment in it, it was horror; shock; agony eyeless, tongueless; just sound . . ." (p. 400). Once Luster turns around and heads the right direction, "Ben hushed. Luster looked quickly back over his shoulder, then he drove on. The broken flower drooped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and facade flowed smoothly once more from left to right; post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard, each in its ordered place" (p. 401). By moving to the left of the monument, Benjy is going with time and by moving to the right, he is going counterclockwise, thus against time. Of course to him, it is a disruption of his routine but symbolically it suggests Benjy's predicament and his pain at the loss of Caddy. He will forever be five years old and unchanged, but Caddy has to grow up and leave, thus moving out of her "ordered place" and leaving Benjy to moan everytime that he hears "caddie."

For Quentin too, time is a problem, as just about every critic writing on him has observed. His section begins, "When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch" (p. 93). His father says that he is giving him the watch in order that he might forget time "now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it" (p. 93). Unfortunately for Quentin and for Caddy, he cannot forget
time, and like Benjy, he wishes to freeze Caddy forever as she was before she lost her virginity. Like Benjy, Quentin is frozen in time; instead of a five-year-old, he is the perpetual adolescent. He is obsessed with Caddy, sex, and death, and when he fails to obtain the first two, he chooses suicide as the only way to escape his obsessions and as the only way to stop time.

On the last day of his life, his thoughts center on his relationship with his sister, her loss of virginity, and her marriage, on his father's advice to him and imagined conversations with him on Caddy and women. Variations of "never had a sister" run throughout his section like a refrain. As her brother, he appoints himself her protector thinking, "Father and I protect women" (p. 119). Part of what he must protect her from is herself, for his father has taught him that women have "an affinity for evil" (p. 119). Thus, when Caddy violates what he has established as a moral standard even as a child innocently removing her wet dress, he punishes her, and when she later does not care when he feels that he is doing something wrong by "dancing sitting down" with Natalie, he tells Caddy, "I'll make you give a damn" (pp. 166-70). He is attempting to corral Caddy's natural spirit and teach her right and wrong as he perceives them.

When they become adolescents and Caddy begins to go
with boys, Quentin's moral strictrures combine with his jealousy. He and his sister have always been extremely close. When Quentin meets with Herbert Head just before he and Caddy marry, Herbert tells him that he has heard "so much about him from Candace" (p. 116) and that Caddy "couldnt have talked about you any more if you'd been the only man in the world" (p. 133). And Mrs. Compson tells Jason,

"They deliberately shut me out of their lives, ... it was always her and Quentin ... I always told your father that they were allowed too much freedom, to be together too much. When Quentin started to school we had to let her go the next year, so she could be with him. She couldn't bear for any of you to do anything she couldn't. It was vanity in her, vanity and false pride. And then when her troubles began I knew that Quentin would feel that he had to do something just as bad. But I didn't believe that he would have been so selfish as to--I didn't dream that he--"

"He could have controlled her," she says. "He seemed to be the only person she had any consideration for. But that is a part of the judgment too, I suppose." (p. 326)

Quentin and Caddy are devoted to each other. They turn to each other for the love and affection that they do not get from Mrs. Compson. Caddy's bragging to Herbert about her big brother suggests that she admires him in much the way expected of a little sister, but although she wants to appease him when young, she could not resist the desire to grow up and to learn. Her desire to go to school with him
grows out of the desire not to be left out or not to miss
out on experience as much as out of vanity or a need to
be close to him. Caddy grows up and away from Quentin,
but he does not grow away from her. He continues to want
to maintain the relationship that they had as children and
even more, as he sees her become a woman, he wants to
possess her, keep her his own.

Quentin's desire to completely possess Caddy causes
him to become obsessed with incest. It is not the act
itself that interests him; it is the result. It would
make him Caddy's equal in that they would then both be
"unvirgin." That Caddy is not a virgin and he still is
torments him:

In the South you are ashamed of being virgin.
Boys. Men. They lie about it. Because it
means less to women, Father said. He said it
was men invented virginity not women. Father
said it's like death: only a state in which
the others are left and I said, But to believe
it doesn't matter and he said, That's what's
so sad about anything: not only virginity, and
I said, Why couldn't it have been me and not
her who is unvirgin. (p. 96)

That he is still a virgin is an affront to his idea of
manhood and that Caddy is not disrupts his notion of what
is natural and "right." She should remain chaste, and he
have experiences. He, however, could never experience
sexual intercourse, because in his mind every girl is
someone's sister and should remain a virginal princess
protected by a chivalrous knight.
Having failed to protect his sister, he feels that he has lost her and that the only way to insure that they will always be together would be to commit incest. Then, he would possess her body and soul; they would both be damned and subjected to the purifying flames of hell. He thinks that if they could do "something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us" (p. 97), then Caddy "will have only me then only me then the two of us amid the pointing and the horror beyond the clean flame" (p. 144). He thinks of trying to convince Caddy that he was the one not Dalton Ames: "we did you thought it was them but it was me listen I fooled you all the time it was me" (p. 185). He imagines saying to his father, "I have committed incest I said Father it was I it was not Dalton Ames" (pp. 97-98), and envisions the resulting conversation:

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i i wasnt lying i wasnt lying and he you wanted to sublimate a piece of natural human folly into a horror and then exorcise it with truth and i i: was to isolate her out of the loud world so that it would have to flee us of necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it had never been and he did you try to make her do it and i i was afraid to i was afraid she might and then it wouldnt have done any good but if i could tell you we did it would have been so and then the others wouldnt be so... (pp. 220-21)
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Quentin is attempting to do what he says the young boys are doing in imagining what they would do with the twenty-five dollars for catching the old trout, "making of
unreality a possibility, then a probability, then an incontrovertible fact, as people will when their desires become words" (p. 145), and also what Caddy says he is trying to do in making her say that she is pregnant: "Do you want me to say it do you think that if I say it it wont be" (p. 151). Words for Quentin can make reality and can change reality, or at least that is his one last hope. When he faces the "saddest word of all"—"temporary"—he knows that he cannot stop time nor change reality (pp. 221-22). Since he cannot face the mutability of life, he chooses death, "silence darkness sleep the water peaceful and swift" (p. 214).

Although Quentin is just one of the three brothers who narrate the novel, he is most often chosen as the central protagonist and even called the "novel's center of consciousness." Faulkner himself called Quentin the novel's protagonist, explaining that after conceiving of Benjy and Jason, he needed a protagonist, "someone to tell the story." Obviously, Benjy and Jason tell the story as well. What is it then that makes Quentin the protagonist? The answer lies in Quentin's personality, the reader's identification with him, and Faulkner's own affinity with Quentin. Quentin most resembles the modern introspective and troubled hero. He is another Stephen Dedalus and Prufrock. He is similar to Merton Densher and Arthur Clennam; he shares their passivity, sense of
impotence, and propensity for thinking instead of doing. He struggles with the problems a protagonist typically faces—self-identification, moral values, sexuality, existence, and death. He is introduced in Benjy's section as a child, as are Benjy and Jason, but since Benjy remains a child in mind, and Jason is not introspective, we experience Quentin's growing up, at least to adolescence. Quentin "calls up all of our conventional responses to the confession" and "offers the most of the hard-core 'meaning';" thus, "readers are drawn to make him the center of the book..."40 While the issue of "meaning" in the novel is something to which I will return below in my discussion of Dilsey and return to Caddy, I think it important to note here the tendency for critics to posit the "meaning" and "center" of a novel in a narrator, in this case in Quentin, who is one of four narrators. Also, it is important to acknowledge that although Quentin is the character with whom it is the most natural to identify since he resembles other modern heroes and is "literary," who else is there? Caddy is too removed; Benjy is an idiot; Jason is too much the villain, although his lively tone and sardonic humor certainly catch our attention; and finally, the narrator of the fourth section is too anonymous. In addition, I cannot help but wonder if Quentin's importance as narrator of Absalom, Absalom! does not contribute to the tendency to
want to make him the narrator of *The Sound and the Fury*. Perhaps the most significant and also the most intangible reason for focusing on Quentin as the protagonist in *The Sound and the Fury* is the sense that of all the characters, Quentin is closest to his creator. Faulkner said in a letter to Cowley in which he warns him not to read too much of Faulkner into the Quentin of *Absalom, Absalom!* that he was telling a story and he believed that Quentin could tell it better, but as he said elsewhere, "any writer, to begin with, is writing his own biography...". Perhaps Quentin does bear "the burden of the author's anguish," but his importance in the novel should not be exaggerated. He, as were Benjy and Jason, was created to tell Caddy's story. Quentin's section, though a few pages longer than the others, occupies only a fourth of the novel. Quentin is certainly a complex and interesting character, but what is most important about him for the cumulative effect of the novel is his obsessive love of Caddy.

Jason, too, has his obsessions, but instead of love of Caddy, he is motivated by hate. She represents to him his lost chance in life. He thinks, after taking her money and then allowing her a glimpse of Quentin, "I says I reckon that'ill show you. I reckon you'ill know now that you cant beat me out of a job and get away with it" (p. 255). He resents his father and Quentin also, thinking,
"I never had time to go to Harvard like Quentin or drink myself into the ground like Father" (p. 224), and "I never heard of him offering to sell anything to send me to Harvard" (p. 245). From his childhood, he has been separate from Caddy and Quentin and his mother's ally, but he is not kind to her either. He lies to her and mistreats her:

"I know I'm just a trouble and a burden to you," she says, crying on the pillow.
"I ought to know it," I says. "You've been telling me that for thirty years. Even Ben ought to know it now. . . ." (pp. 224-25)

He is unsympathetic towards Benjy, and he is unkind to Dilsey, to the other servants, and most of all to Quentin. Quentin asks her grandmother why he is so mean to her and says that it is his fault that she is the way she is (pp. 323-24). Jason is making Quentin pay for Caddy's actions. When he goes to the sheriff to try to get him to help him capture Quentin and the sheriff asks him what he plans to do to Quentin, Jason replies,

"I wouldn't lay my hand on her. The bitch that cost me a job, the one chance I ever had to get ahead, that killed my father and is shortening my mother's life every day and made my name a laughing stock in the town. I won't do anything to her," he said. "Not anything."
"You drove that girl into running off, Jason," the sheriff said. (p. 379)

Quentin is, of course, not to blame for being born, which causes the arrangement with Herbert to collapse, Caddy is, but since Caddy is out of reach of Jason's wrath,
he punishes Quentin and causes her to run off. Faulkner called Jason, the "most vicious character" that he had ever thought of.43 He is cold, vindictive, bitter, and cruel, and although Caddy is behind much of his anger, his primary victim is Quentin, Caddy's offspring, and the last Compson (p. 424).

A popular critical question is who is to blame for Caddy's downfall and the rest of the Compsons as well. Many critics posit the blame firmly upon Caddy's shoulders for her fall and for her family's decline. Michel Gresset says, "Caddy works evil within the family because she objectively starts a process that will eventually prevent all members from living together on good terms ever again," and Maxwell Geismar that it is Caddy, "the object of such intense devotion, on the part of Benjy and Quentin, whose sexual weakness is nevertheless the direct cause of their destruction."44 Others take the other point of view, placing the blame for Caddy's fall on Quentin.45 To a large extent, the stance taken depends upon how sympathetic the critic is with Caddy. There can be no easy answer to this question since Caddy definitely has an effect on Quentin and he on her, and her actions do set up the chain of events--her promiscuity leads to her unhappy marriage, both of which contribute to Quentin's suicide and to their father's dipsomania, although Quentin's suicide certainly
contributes also, and her premarital sex results in the birth of Quentin, whose existence allows Jason to blackmail his sister and steal from his niece. The fall of the Compson clan, however, originates further back than Caddy. As Robert Penn Warren says, "the father and mother, each in a characteristic way, collaborate to doom the children." Their mother has a detrimental effect upon them all, causing the father to turn more inward, Benjy and Quentin to focus obsessive love on Caddy, and Jason obsessive hate. Their mother's coldness and selfishness "paralyzes normal family relationships" and "is ultimately responsible for Caddy's promiscuity," says Cleanth Brooks. Mrs. Compson, like Jason after her, is more concerned with how things look than with the well-being of her daughter or Miss Quentin. Although Mrs. Compson claims that Quentin and Caddy closed her and Jason out, it seems more likely that she closed them out. Quentin thinks neither he nor Caddy has a mother: "My little sister had no. If I could say Mother, Mother" (p. 117), and "if I'd just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother . . ." (p. 213). He obviously feels that his mother neglected them and that they are as motherless as Miss Quentin actually is. Their father, although more loving than Mrs. Compson, appears weak and ineffectual. Quentin apparently has a comfortable relationship with him, or he would not have been able to even imagine
telling him that he had committed incest. Caddy also seems fond of him, and he of her. He goes to her when Herbert leaves and wants to bring her home with him and does bring Quentin (p. 245). The scene in which he gathers all of the children into his lap suggests much greater affection than ever shown by Mrs. Compson, but in a way similar to Quentin, Mr. Compson is too weak to deal with Mrs. Compson or to overcome her coldness. He mouths the words of a Southern stoic and modern cynic, but his inability to stand up under Mrs. Compson's complaining, Caddy's disgrace, and Quentin's suicide suggests he is a man of feeling akin to Quentin. Instead of rapid suicide by drowning, he slowly drinks himself to death. Mrs. Compson's extreme morality and Mr. Compson's distorted view of women and the world cause Quentin's confusion which through Quentin contributes to Caddy's downfall. Faulkner says in an interview that "there was a basic failure" before Mr. Compson in their ancestors which Quentin inherits from his father. The Compson's decline may have originated generations back, but Mr. and Mrs. Compson's inadequacies as parents hasten the collapse. The blame rests with them not Caddy. The anomaly in the Compson world, she possesses a normal capacity for love and a willingness to accept growth and change and becomes their scapegoat.
Caddy, however, does share in the responsibility for Miss Quentin's deficiencies and her promiscuity. She does not inherit Caddy's "bad" blood, as Mrs. Compson says; she inherits the cold, unloving Compson world and Jason's meanness. The money that Caddy sends her cannot substitute for the love and the nurturing that Miss Quentin needs. Quentin does not appear to love anyone, least of all her mother. When her mother's letter arrives, Quentin is not at all interested in what it says only in the money it accompanies (pp. 264-65). She is unkind to Benjy and Dilsey. Also, she exhibits a commonness and cheapness never associated with Caddy, and her room reveals an emptiness and vulgarity totally uncharacteristic of her mother:

It was not a girl's room. It was not anybody's room, and the faint scent of cheap cosmetics and the few feminine objects and the other evidences of crude and hopeless efforts to feminize it but added to its anonymity, giving it that dead and stereotyped transience of rooms in assignation houses. The bed had not been disturbed. On the floor lay a soiled undergarment of cheap silk a little too pink; from a half open bureau drawer dangled a single stocking. (p. 352)

She does not possess the class or style of her mother; no chromium Mercedes or general awaits her (p. 426). Fatherless before she is even born and motherless soon afterward, her life is to be one of anonymity. Presented directly in contrast to the indirect presentation of Caddy, Quentin is doomed from birth, or at least from the
moment Caddy leaves her with the Compsons, and she is
the other of the two lost women that Faulkner claimed the
novel to be about. Quentin, however, arouses less
interest or sympathy than Caddy. One reason may be that
Faulkner "continues to cling to Caddy," but another
reason is Dilsey.

Although she does not narrate it, Dilsey dominates
the fourth section of the novel. Faulkner often con-
fessed admiration for Dilsey; he felt that she stood
"above the fallen ruin of the family like a ruined
chimney, gaunt, patient, and indomitable." Dilsey
represents the Christian elements in The Sound and the
Fury. She is to the novel what Little Dorrit and Milly
Theale are to their novels in embodying the Christian
virtues of charity, sacrifice, love, and duty. Hyatt
Waggoner says that Dilsey is the only "completely sympa-
thetic character . . . despite Faulkner's stated inten-
tion that the work be considered Caddy and her daughter's
story," and Albert Guerard feels that Faulkner created
"only one character for whom strong moral approval and
intense sympathy coincide" and that character is
Dilsey. Dilsey diffuses the sympathy for Quentin in
the fourth section and overshadows Caddy, who is hardly
even mentioned in the last section. Yet even though
Dilsey is unequivocally sympathetic, The Sound and the
Fury is not her novel any more than it is Quentin's
because he most resembles a traditional protagonist or modern hero nor Benjy's because he begins and ends the novel and is most directly related to the title. 56 To overemphasize Dilsey and to underemphasize Caddy is to distort the novel. Dilsey functions more to underscore what the Compsons lack and what they lost when Caddy left than as a panacea for making this the best of all possible worlds. As Walter Brlowsk says, "Once Caddy, who had this [the agapeic] ability to love, is exiled, the scene is a waste land of activity signifying nothing, until the final chapter when Dilsey's pilgrimage to the church with Frony, Luster, and Benjy is offered as an action of endurance." 57 Dilsey and Caddy share a capacity for love and acceptance of growth and change not found in the rest of the Compsons. In her church, Dilsey finds continuity, community, and meaning; thus, she stays and endures. Caddy, however, finds solace nowhere; thus, she flees and dissolves. Caddy fades out, as Faulkner said the blood of the Compsons "good and brave once" has done. 58 Dilsey has "seed de first en de last" (p. 375), but for her, life continues, and Spring always comes. For Faulkner, "life is motion," and the inability to love, change, and grow destroys the Compsons; and they the best of Caddy. 59 By assigning the Christian virtues to Dilsey, Faulkner is able to allow Caddy's susceptibility to human frailties, and by shifting the emphasis to Dilsey, he
paradoxically maintains Caddy as ideal. What most interested him about Caddy and what he most wanted remembered is what Caddy was, not what she had become.

Some critics consider Caddy's absence from the last of the novel one reason that the novel fails, but Faulkner's treatment of Caddy, just as Matthiessen said of James's treatment of Milly in the last of *The Wings of the Dove*, is "imaginatively right." It is by the "act of living" that character interests us, and it is the "living" Caddy that captured Faulkner's love and that Faulkner most wanted to immortalize. Also, Caddy's disappearance in the end is most consistent with the indirection used throughout the novel. As Olga Vickery points out, Caddy is central in the first three sections and not the fourth because "we are prevented from sharing in the consciousness and memories of the characters."^60^ Throughout the first three sections, Caddy is an image, a memory filtered through her brothers' imagination, and since the last section is presented by an omniscient narrator, Faulkner would have had to step forward and describe Caddy directly as he does the house, Jason, Benjy, Mrs. Compson, and Dilsey in the last section. He did not want to give her a voice in the novel: "Caddy was still to me too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going on, that it would be more passionate to see her through somebody else's eyes, I thought."^61^
Also, as Faulkner explains elsewhere when asked to describe his ideal woman:

Well, I couldn't describe her by color of hair, color of eyes, because once she is described, then somehow she vanishes. That the ideal woman is in every man's mind is evoked by a word or phrase or the shape of her wrist, her hand. Just like the most beautiful description of anyone, a woman, since we are speaking of women, is by understatement. Remember, all Tolstoy said about Anna Karenina was that she was beautiful and could see in the dark like a cat. That's all he ever said to describe her. And every man has a different idea of what's beautiful. And it's best to take the gesture, the shadow of the branch, and let the mind create the tree. So, that's why I couldn't begin to describe my ideal woman, which of course I have.  

Thus, Caddy is the odor of trees or honeysuckle and the image of a young woman presented in her brothers' vignettes. Even in the appendix, the woman in the photograph is not described and may not even be Caddy. David Minter says that "in the figure of Dilsey Faulkner recreated a haven of love he had learned early to count on; in the figure of Caddy he created one he had learned to long for. . . ." From the hyperbole that Faulkner used to describe his "heart's darling" there can be little doubt that to him Caddy represented an ideal woman, or at least the closest that he ever came in his fiction to creating one, and she also remained the little girl climbing the pear tree and not the woman who goes off and becomes someone's mistress. She is loving, warm, natural.
courageous, and destined to grow up. She possesses the power to create and the power to destroy. "Like the pre-Olympians, Caddy has no face, no voice; since she is too beautiful and too moving to be reduced to the ordinary stature of human spokesman, she in turn becomes larger than life, dwelling at the back of life as the significant agent of all response and change."65 Apparently, for Faulkner, Caddy was also that mysterious force which provided the impetus that made him the artist that could go on to create such works as Go, Down Moses, Absalom, Absalom!, and Light in August. With The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner wrote what Emerson called for in "The American Scholar," his "own" book:

One day I seemed to shut a door between me and all publishers' addresses and book lists. I said to myself, Now I can write. Now I can make myself a vase like that which the old Romah kept at his bedside and wore the rim slowly away with kissing it. So I, who had never had a sister and was fated to lose my daughter in infancy, set out to make myself a beautiful and tragic little girl.66

Mosquitoes and Soldier's Pay were written for the public and to please publishers, but The Sound and the Fury was written to please Faulkner. This is not to say that he was not concerned with public response; it was very important to him that the public be able to read the novel, but it was also important to him that no one tamper with it.67 Obviously, The Sound and the Fury occupies a special place in Faulkner's canon, and it and Caddy as
well in his heart. Whether Caddy is labelled the White Goddess, Diana, Eve, the anima, or any other similar title, it seems clear that to Faulkner she represented an ideal and functioned as a muse. She is that forever sought for and never achieved—perfection in life and art, and it was perhaps in this way that *The Sound and the Fury*, the novel that he worked on "the longest, the hardest" and that he most loved, was the "most splendid failure."69

Caddy, however, is more than myth, symbol, or some sought after perfection or ideal. Andre Bleikasten best summarizes Caddy's role:

Faulkner's triumph in creating Caddy is that her elusive figure eventually transcends the abstract categories and rigid patterns in which her brothers attempt to imprison her, just as she escapes any facile sentimentalizing or demonizing on the author's part. Not that the reader is enabled to infer a 'true' picture of Caddy from the information he is given in the novel. There is little doubt, of course, that she possesses the vitality, the courage, the capacity for love and compassion which her self-centered brothers and parents so sadly lack. It is quite obvious, too, that she is both the tragic victim of her family and the unwitting agent of its doom. But to focus exclusively on Caddy's assumed psychology or to dwell at length on her moral significance is to miss the point. Caddy was elusive to her creator; so she is to her brothers in the novel, and so she must remain to the reader. She cannot be assessed according to the same criteria as the other characters. However complex her characterization (and it is indeed more complex than has been generally acknowledged), Caddy belongs in the last resort to another space, to what might be called the novel's utopia. 'The true life
is absent,' Rimbaud wrote. In The Sound and the Fury Caddy is a pathetic emblem of that desired other life, while her fate poignantly confirms its impossibility in a world of alienation and disease.70

Not only can Caddy not be judged by the same criteria as the other characters in the novel, she, like Little Dorrit and Milly Theale, cannot be measured against other characters in general. She is a different type of character, and hers is a different type of novel. James said that a reader should do "his share of the task," and certainly, The Sound and the Fury requires the reader's close attention and participation. The Compson world is a fragmented one, and the picture of Caddy is fragmented as well. "Faulkner's works," as Arthur Kinney says, "remain mysterious, open, suspended in final significations."71 Caddy does as well. Perhaps, as Vickery says about The Sound and the Fury and Robbe-Grillet and others about the "new novel" in general, we make of the novel and of Caddy what we bring to them: we make our own order and our own meaning.72 Quentin and Benjy's image of Caddy running out of the mirror evokes Stendhal's statement about the novel being a mirror carried along the road. When Caddy runs out of the mirror, she runs out of reality into memory, the world of symbols, images, and ideals, just as her novel runs out of the mimetic tradition into the symbolic, fragmented, subjective "reality" of the modern world and the modern
novel. The Compson world is an empty, desolate, and in many ways, even a nihilistic world, but clearly in their world and to Faulkner her presence and even her absence "signified something." She carries as much meaning to him and his world as did Little Dorrit and Milly Theale to their creators and their world. Although Caddy remains more obscure and shadowy than Little Dorrit and Milly Theale, enough of the human emerges from her brothers' memories of her to allow her to be the "authentic, credible, flesh-and-blood character" that Faulkner said every writer sought to create. The reader can make enough of a composite of Caddy to assign her the status of "real"; at the same time, he can read enough meaning into her obscurity to make her a symbol. That she succeeds at both makes her yet another example of an oblique heroine. She, then, joins Little Dorrit and Milly Theale. Her obliqueness, as is theirs, is essential for the kind of heroine here achieved. Thus, all three heroines are oblique by necessity and by intention, and all three are successful and significant creations.
ENDNOTES - CHAPTER IV


9 Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-1958 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), p. 19. James, of course, would never say "ain't," but he often emphasized the importance of character.

11. Maurice Coindreau, "Preface to The Sound and the Fury," trans. George M. Reeves, Mississippi Quarterly, 19 (1966), 109. The original reads as follows:

je me suis épris d'un de mes personnages, Caddy. Je l'ai tant aimée que je n'ai pu me décider à ne la faire vivre que l'espace d'un conte. Elle méritait plus que cela. Et mon roman s'est achevé, je ne dirais pas malgré moi, mais pour.


12. In addition to the passage quoted above, Faulkner discusses the creation of the points of view in the novel in Lion, p. 147; Faulkner in the University, p. 84; Faulkner at Nagano, ed. Robert A. Jelliffe, pp. 103-105; Faulkner at West Point, ed., Joseph L. Fant and Robert Ashley (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 109. Also see Faulkner's two introductions to the novel, rpt. in The Southern Review, N.S., 8 (1972), 705-710 and in Mississippi Quarterly, 26 (1973), 410-15. Faulkner refers to Jason as "sane" in the appendix to the novel, p. 420 and in Faulkner in the University, p. 95.

13. Faulkner in the University, pp. 76-77. He also discusses the novel as a failure in Faulkner at West Point, pp. 48-49.


16. Faulkner in the University, p. 1.

17. Gregory, p. 89. Also see Susan Gallagher, "To Love and to Honor: Brothers and Sisters in Faulkner's
Yoknapatawpha Country," *Essays in Literature* (Macomb, Illinois), 7 (1980), 217-18, who says that Caddy's character was frequently misunderstood by the critics of the 50's and 60's. Page, p. 49, refers to the fragmented glimpses of Caddy as "dramatic pictures," and Millgate, *The Achievement*, p. 98, as photographs superimposed upon one another.

18Bleikasten, p. 66.

19*The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Random House; the Modern Library, 1956), reproduced photographically from a copy of the first printing, 1929, pp. 21-22. Subsequent references to the novel will be to this edition.

20Gregory, p. 91.


22Faulkner in the University, p. 3.

23Gregory, pp. 94-95.

24Hunt, William Faulkner: Art in Theological Tension (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965), p. 57. Longley, p. 222, and Charles Anderson, "Faulkner’s Moral Center," *Etudes Anglaises*, 7 (1954), 57, call Caddy a "nymphomaniac." Carvel Collins, "A Conscious Literary Use of Freud," *Literature and Psychology*, 3 (1953), 3, says that Caddy represents the libido; also see his article "The Interior Monologues of The Sound and the Fury," *English Institute Essays*, 1952, in which he discusses Benjy as the id, Quentin as the ego, and Jason as the superego. Ceanth Brooks quotes the following letter from Faulkner to one of Brooks's students in his "Notes" to William Faulkner: *The Yoknapatawpha*: "'Caddy was highly sexed but no nymphomaniac, was monogamous and even moral in her fashion.'"
25 Gregory, p. 100.

26 Baum, pp. 42-43.

27 The Faulkner-Cowley File: Letters and Memories, 1944-1962 (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 90. This is a wonderful collection of letters between the two men which reveals much about Faulkner, the man and the artist. For more on the appendix, also see Bleikasten, p. 243; Mary Jane Dickerson, "'The Magician's Wand': Faulkner's Compson Appendix," The Mississippi Quarterly, 28 (1975), 317-37; James B. Meriwether, Merrill Studies, pp. 25-29 and his "A Prefatory Note by Faulkner for the Compson Appendix," American Literature, 43 (1971), 281-84.

28 Bleikasten, p. 243.

29 Gregory, pp. 90-91.

30 Faulkner-Cowley File, p. 44.

31 Meriwether, Merrill Studies, p. 25. Also see Coindreau's introduction.


33 See particularly, Baum, Gallagher, and Gregory.

34 Page, p. 49.


38 *Faulkner at Nagano*, p. 104.


40 Reed, pp. 79 & 78. Also see O'Connor, p. 15, who says that in Quentin "one finds the central issue of the novel," and Bleikasten, p. 148, "in Quentin's monologue our first response is identification, and it is only on second thoughts that we come to view the character critically."

41 *Faulkner in the University*, p. 103.

42 Benson, p. 143. Blotner, Cowan, and Minter discuss the possible close identification of Faulkner with Quentin and the biographical similarities of the novel, such as "Danuddy," the name Faulkner called his own grandmother, Faulkner's sense of the decline of the Faulkner family, and his disappointments with women.
Faulkner at Nagano, p. 103.


Gregory, p. 96; Hunt, p. 57; Swiggart, p. 91; and Thompson, p. 100.


Quentin's realistic rendering of the incest conversation with his father (see pp. 219-20 in particular) has led many to believe that Quentin and his father actually had the conversation, but Faulkner says in Faulkner in the University, that the conversation never took place except in Quentin's imagination, p. 262. I accept Faulkner's statement in this because Quentin is too weak and too shy about sexuality to ever come right out and say such a thing to his father; however, for my purposes, his just imagining the conversation suggests that he and his father were close, or as close as any of the Compsons could be.

Faulkner in the University, pp. 2-3.

Miss Quentin has received less critical attention than any of the other major characters. Two critics who discuss Quentin take an opposing view to mine. Millgate, Achievement of William Faulkner, p. 98, says that Quentin's "tragedy, simply because it is more directly presented, is in some ways more moving," and Brylowski, "Dark Vision," pp. 40-41, says, "the reader almost feels cheated when Quentin, who has become a fully realized character, triumphs over Jason but is immediately and forever dismissed by Faulkner who continues to cling to Caddy." Quentin is a rather one-dimensional character, and even though she is a victim of a pathetic environment, she does not garner the sympathy that Caddy, Dilsey, and even Benjy do. Most readers probably do not even experience any feeling of gratification that she "triumphs"
over Jason. Her victory seems empty and rather meaningless.

51 Brylowski, p. 41.

52 Faulkner refers to the fourth section as "the Dilsey one" in a letter to Cowley, The Faulkner-Cowley File, p. 31.


54 Most any of the critics who take a theological approach to The Sound and the Fury or who want to read a positive theme in the novel discuss Dilsey's Christianity. See particularly, Brylowski, "Dark Vision," pp. 33-58; Brooks, "Faulkner's Vision of Good and Evil," Massachusetts Review, 3 (1962), 692-712, included in his The Hidden God; Sumner C. Powell, "William Faulkner Celebrates Easter, 1928," Perspective, 2 (1949), 195-218; and Amos N. Wilder, "Faulkner and Vestigial Moralities," in Theology and Modern Literature (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 113-31. Also see John V. Hagopian, "Nihilism in Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury," Modern Fiction Studies, 13 (1967), 45-55, rpt. in Merrill Studies, pp. 102-113, who reviews the others who have discussed Dilsey as a center of the novel and as the representative of Christian morality and then refutes them, arguing that "it is therefore Mr. Compson, and not Dilsey, whose values finally prevail."


56 Arthur F. Kinney, Faulkner's Narrative Poetics: Style as Vision (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), p. 139, says "The Sound and the Fury is Benjy's book: his consciousness begins and closes the novel, and it is to his memorialization of death at the small graveyard . . . that we first and last attend."


58 Faulkner in the University, p. 197.
Lion, p. 253; Faulkner in the University, p. 267. Gregory, p. 104, says, "In the Wasteland of *The Sound and the Fury*, Caddy Compson cannot fulfill her natural feminine role. Her tragedy, like that of Emma Bovary and Anna Karenina, is that her fine spirit and femininity are doomed to be victimized and destroyed. Her world is one in which there is no man worthy of her--a brutalized, secular world, in which her great spiritual vitality and capacity for love are spoiled and wasted." Also see, Longley, "Who Never Had A Sister," who says, "Caddy's tragedy is that she will never find anyone commensurate with her own capacity to love. . . ."

Vickery, p. 30.

Faulkner in the University, p. 1. Also see Millgate, "The Problem of Point of View," p. 130, who says that perhaps Faulkner considered the novel a failure because he realized that he should have given Caddy a voice in the novel. This statement from Faulkner, however, makes it clear that he did not want to give Caddy's point of view and suggests that he was satisfied with keeping her distanced.

Lion, pp. 127-28.

Dickerson, pp. 321-22, says, the "image of Caddy . . . remains central to the action of the Compson Appendix just as it had been a controlling focus of the novel," and Faulkner "continues to portray Caddy indirectly--is the woman in the picture really Caddy?"

Minter, William Faulkner, p. 103.

Williams, p. 64. Also, see Brylowski, "The Dark Vision," p. 40.


Minter, William Faulkner, pp. 100-105.

See particularly, Bleikasten, Jackson, Minter, and Williams.
69 Faulkner in the University, p. 77.

70 Bleškasten, p. 66.

71 Kinney, p. 34.


73 Faulkner in the University, p. 47.
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