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Article

The Littleness of Little Dorrit

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This essay challenges prevailing interpretations of Amy Dorrit's petiteness as a symbol of her abstemious self-sacrifice or of women's infantilized position in Victorian culture. Examining *Little Dorrit* literally rather than symptomatically shows that Charles Dickens highlights the protagonist Amy's small size on a spectrum of human variation, rendering in detail corporeal experiences in a physical world built for taller people. While the plentiful critical readings interpreting Amy as symbolic are illuminating, they depend on the unreliable points of view of other characters. Aware of others' misperception of her in contrast to her understanding of herself, Amy develops a painful double consciousness that nonetheless gives her a capacity to see from more than one viewpoint. Shifting readers away from seeing Amy through the eyes of her misperceiving friends and family, Dickens critiques symptomatic reading and links Amy's compassionate capacity for comprehending multiple perspectives to the omniscient narrator's expansive point of view.

Charles Dickens's novel *Little Dorrit* (1857) is hardly little.[1] But Amy Dorrit is. The titular heroine's petite dimensions have provoked varied, intriguing, and even baffling interpretations: 'her willed smallness' is a metaphor for Victorian women's compulsory 'self-renunciation'; her 'cuteness' is an outward manifestation of manipulative passive-aggression; she is 'monstrous'.[2]

In this article, I challenge prevailing views of Amy Dorrit's small size as primarily a symbol of her abstemious self-sacrifice or of women's infantilized position in Victorian culture. Reading the text literally rather than symptomatically, I show that Dickens highlights Amy's atypical stature as a bodily attribute on a spectrum of human variation and renders in clear detail her corporeal experiences in a physical world built for taller people. Aware of her visible difference from the norm that others construe as an infirmity in contrast to the strength and capability she performs, Amy sees herself doubly, from both points of view. Shifting readers away from seeing Amy through the eyes of her misperceiving friends, Dickens represents disability as a function of perception and misperception rather than identity or essence. The novel links Amy's compassionate capacity for comprehending multiple perspectives to the omniscient narrator's expansive point of view.

[1] Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, ed. Stephen Wall and Helen Small (London, 2003). References to *Little Dorrit* are to this edition, parenthetically cited. My appreciation goes to Ethan Gilberti (LSU) and Madhukari Guha (TCU) for their research assistance.

[2] Hilary Schor, *Dickens and the Daughter of the House* (Cambridge, 1999), 126; Lauren Byler, 'Dickens's Little Women; Or, Cute as the Dickens', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41 (2013), 219–50, 237; Patricia Ingham, 'Nobody's Fault: The Scope of the Negative in *Little Dorrit*', in John Chad (ed.), *Dickens Refigured: Bodies, Desires, and Other Histories* (Manchester, 1996), 98–116, 111.

Dickens creates many diminutive women in his fiction; memorable characters include the Marchioness, Charley Necket, Miss Mowcher, and Jenny Wren.[3] Several children are even named for their small size: Little Nell, Little Em'ly, and Tiny Tim.[4] However, I want to establish at the outset that this essay is not about children. Though they are often linked in critical discourse, I want to decouple Little Nell, who is only 14, from Little Dorrit, who is 22 when the novel begins and she first meets the novel's other protagonist and her future husband, Arthur Clennam.[5] Of all Dickens's works, *Little Dorrit* is by far the most explicit in drawing attention to a central figure's experience of life as a very short adult woman. His emphasis on Amy's literal littleness exposes how most of the novel's characters and many critics misread her because they expect so little of someone so small.

Disability theory helps explain how the novel's focus on perception, misperception, and shifting narrative perspective is expressed through characters' views of Amy Dorrit's small stature, including her own. Tobin Siebers reminds us that physical difference should not be relegated to what disability-as-symbol or specific bodily variation represents to the able-bodied world. Siebers's 'theory of complex embodiment that values disability as a form of human variation' assists our recognizing and valuing the vast intersectional 'spectrum of human variation', filled with diverse bodies, including extraordinary disparities in size.[6] In a kind of narrative complex embodiment that is both somatic and socially constructed, the novel repeatedly warns us that when we read bodies symbolically, we miss not only Amy's embodied experience but also risk evaluating Flora Finching's father as benevolent because of his polished forehead and patriarchal locks and risk assessing Mr Merdle as rich because of Mrs Merdle's amply bejewelled bosom.[7] The novel ties shifting narrative perspective to the failure of Amy's fellow characters to see the truth and to Amy's having learned to see multifocally from her lived practice of stereoscopic consciousness. As Daniel Novak points out, the London Stereoscopic Company ran advertisements on the first page of all *Little Dorrit*'s monthly numbers, a paratextual tie-in akin to the pianoforte advertisements inside the front cover of every number of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.[8] Rather like John Ruskin, who teaches artists to paint accurately what they actually see instead of what they expect to see or have been trained to see conventionally, Dickens reveals how all-encompassing societal expectations can prevent both characters in the world of the novel, and the novel's own readers, from seeing truly or reading literally.[9]

By the end of the narrative, Amy famously becomes Arthur's single 'vanishing-point' (p. 766), the point that organizes the visual scene, the point where parallel lines converge. In addition to underscoring Amy's significance for Arthur (while also being the point on the horizon where objects look the smallest), this much-discussed metaphor drawn from linear perspective also tells us that Arthur's view is monoscopic.[10] Marrying Amy helps Arthur multiply his points of view. By nudging us to read Amy's corporeal experience literally, the novel leaves us with an

[3] In *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), *Bleak House* (1852), *David Copperfield* (1850), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), respectively. *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845) stresses the very short stature of the cheerful young wife and mother, so small that her name is 'Dot'. In *Bleak House*, Jarndyce calls Esther Summerson 'little woman' and 'Cobweb' (a fairy in *Midsummer Night's Dream*), but these nicknames do not indicate extremely short stature. Illustrations show her taller than Ada.

[4] In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *David Copperfield*, and *A Christmas Carol* (1843), respectively.

[5] Byler, 'Dickens' Little Women'; Alexander Welsh, *The City of Dickens* (Cambridge, MA, 1971), 154; Erika Wright, *Reading for Health: Medical Narratives and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Athens, OH, 2016), 107. F. R. Leavis states Little Dorrit 'is utterly unlike Little Nell' in *Dickens, the Novelist* (New York, NY, 1971), 225.

[6] Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2008), 25.

[7] Nevertheless, Dickens often uses physiognomy to indicate character. For important recent contributions to this discussion, see Tyson Stolte, *Dickens and Victorian Psychology: Introspection, First-Person Narration, and the Mind* (Oxford, 2022) and Elke Kronshage, 'Nothing Truer than Physiognomy': Body Semiotics and Agency in Charles Dickens's 'Hunted Down' (1859)', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 48 (2017), 167–80.

[8] Daniel Novak, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge, 2008) 64–5; Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, *Victorians on Broadway: Literature, Adaptation, and the Modern American Musical* (Charlottesville, VA, 2020), 141.

[9] *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, vol. 5: *Modern Painters III* (London, 1903–1912), 496–7.

[10] For divergent takes on this image, see Janet Larson, 'The Arts in These Latter Days: Carlylean Prophecy in *Little Dorrit*', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 8 (1980), 166–8; Joss Marsh, 'Inimitable Double Vision: Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, Photography, Film', *Dickens*

opportunity to join both Arthur and Amy when—in the novel's final paragraphs, together with the omniscient narrator—they both gain a 'fresh perspective': 'Little Dorrit and her husband walked out of the church alone. They paused for a moment on the steps of the portico, looking at the fresh perspective of the street in the autumn morning sun's bright rays, and then went down' (p. 859). For Arthur, that perspective is no longer from a single position. Together, 'they went quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed', to see and hear London's 'noisy' and 'eager' people, the 'fretted' and 'vain' (pp. 859–60) of this jumbled, cacophonous world, populated by so many and such varied bodies.

SIZE, SURFACE, DISABILITY, AND DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

Amy knows that others see her as weak, inadequate, and childlike (she is called 'Child of the Marshalsea', after all) in contrast to how she sees herself as sturdy, competent, and adult. Such double consciousness takes a toll. Now widely used in theories of race and ethnicity and in the work of disability scholars such as Christopher Krentz, the term 'double-consciousness' is largely associated with W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), where he defines it as 'the sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity', an uncomfortable sensation that brings with it a burden of best behaviour and persistently undermined self-confidence.[11] In this articulation, double consciousness is a stereoscopic mode of identity, requiring two slightly different vantage points: both internal and external via a social relationship to the dominant cultural stance.[12]

For the Victorians, the term 'double consciousness' was, as Beth Tressler explains, 'fluid', ranging 'from dual personalities to the sleeping state to mesmerism to reverie to somnambulism'.[13] Tressler investigates 'the boundary between the waking state and the semi-conscious state of reverie', where 'conscious thought is temporarily suspended'.[14] When in Venice, overlooking the canal, Amy experiences such a reverie in which her present seems less real than her remembered past. But Dickens also anticipates Du Boisian double consciousness in the way Amy sees herself: both from her own perspective and from Arthur's often erroneous and limiting point of view.

Although my method in this essay is to read Little Dorrit's littleness literally, I do not argue that we abandon figurative or symptomatic analyses. There are excellent figurative readings of Amy, including examinations of her littleness as representing women's constrained role in Victorian culture.[15] Sherri Wolf is particularly persuasive. Amy's 'physical littleness and moralizing philosophy evoke feminine ideals identified with the domestic sphere', and her 'small body and limited visibility stand for a whole system of countervalues: modesty, deference, charity, frugality, industry, and self-sacrifice'.[16] Such powerful interpretations, however, rarely consider

Studies Annual, 22 (1993), 267–70; Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ, 2014), 319–20; Nancy Aycock Metz, 'The Blighted Tree and the Book of Fate: Female Models of Storytelling in *Little Dorrit*', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 18 (1989), 226–7; Schor, *Dickens and the Daughter of the House*, 143–9; and Garrett Stewart, *Novel Violence: A Narratography of Victorian Fiction* (Chicago, IL, 2009), 54–5.

[11] Krentz analyses double consciousness in deaf communities, 'that sense of internal division and "twoness" that seem[s] to categorize so many groups that live in a society that views them as inferior'. Christopher Krentz, *Writing Deafness: The Hearing Line in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007), 35. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (Chicago, IL, 1903), 3.

[12] For the intellectual traditions of Romanticism and nineteenth-century psychology leading up to Du Bois's conception of double consciousness, see Dickson D. Bruce Jr, 'W. E. B. Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness', *American Literature*, 64 (1992), 299–309.

[13] Beth Tressler, 'Waking Dreams: George Eliot and The Poetics of Double Consciousness', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 39 (2011), 483–98, 485.

[14] Tressler, 'Waking Dreams', 484.

[15] See Jay Clayton, *Romantic Vision and the Novel* (Cambridge, 1987), 123, 130; Clayton indicates that 'Amy's character should not be reduced to a meaning at all' (129); Natalie McKnight reads Amy's littleness as imprisoning her in *Idiots, Madmen, & other Prisoners in Dickens* (New York, NY, 1993), 118.

[16] Sherri Wolf, 'The Enormous Power of No Body: *Little Dorrit* and the Logic of Expansion', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 42 (2000), 223–54, 224. Ruth Yeazell states, 'her very littleness figures as a way of diminishing, in more than one sense, the weight of the flesh' (46) in 'Do It or Dorrit', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 25 (1991), 33–49. McKnight argues that 'Amy's smallness accentuates her femininity'; she 'outnorms the norms of behavior for a Victorian woman […] so small she takes up less space' (*Idiots,*

Amy's stature as a prosaic detail of embodiment. Why? *Little Dorrit* creates a fascinatingly complex hermeneutic dependent on the misperception of Amy, despite clear textual evidence that corrects these mistakes. As Alison Booth points out, Amy 'undergoes a distinct process of misrepresentation', meeting 'prejudice and misjudgement' within the novel, in which she is 'perpetually masked by others' incomprehension.'[17] Thus, while Wolf convincingly argues that Amy's 'diminutive stature [is] inseparable from her function as the model of virtue in the novel', Amy's small size is also *not* symbolic, but literal and embodied.[18] Reading literally—in *Little Dorrit* or any novel—requires 'surface reading', defined by Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best as noting 'what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding [...] surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*' to a symbolic or symptomatic meaning.[19] Dickens gives us plenty of surface detail that tells us explicitly about how it feels to inhabit Amy's small frame, with quotidian details of her standing 'on tiptoe' (p. 68) to eat her meal at the fireplace mantel in the Clennams' house at the novel's beginning or to kiss Arthur at the novel's end (p. 857). When she places her fingers 'on the Patriarchal knocker' to visit Flora Finching, it 'was quite as high as she could reach' (p. 300). Dickens shows us that daily activities in an environment constructed for average-sized people pose challenges for her.

For Clare Walker Gore, Little Dorrit's small body is 'ambiguously and troublingly disabled.'[20] She notes that Dickens creates many minor characters whose disabled bodies function symbolically, such as Jenny Wren and Silas Wegg in *Our Mutual Friend*; in fact, 'Dickens has taught us to associate minorness with physical distortion and disability'.[21] Alex Woloch argues that Dickens's novels, with their plethora of minor characters, provide a 'superficial shell of asymmetry' that 'rounds out one or several characters while flattening, and distorting, a manifold assortment of characters'.[22] In *Little Dorrit*, Mrs Clennam's deteriorating physical state represents moral, emotional, and spiritual debilitation and the collapse of the House of Clennam. Yet, as Gore explains, 'through heroines such as Esther Summerson and Little Dorrit, [...] Dickens troubles his own narrative strategies, using disability to complicate readers' response to the novels' plot-lines and final arrangements of characters' by giving disabilities to major characters.[23]

Consider the early passage in which Amy convinces the milliner to teach her how to sew. The milliner underestimates Little Dorrit, 13 at this point in a retrospective chapter, by making assumptions based on the smallness of her physique:

> 'I am afraid you are so weak, you see', the milliner objected.
> 'I don't think I am weak, ma'am.'
> 'And you are so very, very little, you see', the milliner objected.
> 'Yes, I am afraid I am very little indeed', returned the Child of the Marshalsea; and so began to sob over that unfortunate defect of hers, which came so often in her way. (p. 88)

Madmen, & other Prisoners, 117). Byler posits, 'littleness is certainly an idealized quality of girls in Dickens's novels', associating Amy with 'preciousness, physical smallness, modesty and, most importantly, self-abnegation in service of others' ('Dickens's Little Women', 219).

[17] Alison Booth, 'Little Dorrit and Dorothea Brooke: Interpreting the Heroines of History', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 41 (1986), 190–216, 196; 207.

[18] Wolf, 'The Enormous Power of No Body', 224. In *Little Dorrit*, as Jonathan Grossman remarks regarding the novel's double themes of imprisonment and mobility, 'alternative totalizing perspectives can coexist'; Jonathan Grossman, *Charles Dickens's Networks: Transport and the Novel* (Oxford, 2012), 162.

[19] Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, 'Surface Reading: An Introduction', *Representations*, 108 (2009), 1–21, 9.

[20] Clare Walker Gore, *Plotting Disability in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Edinburgh, 2019), 42.

[21] Gore, *Plotting Disability*, 57.

[22] Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, NJ, 2003), 132, 31.

[23] Gore, *Plotting Disability*, 15.

Little Dorrit feels defective because she knows others see her this way, with a difference in physical stature that sets her apart from the norm. And while many a short or tall child, or one otherwise on the flattest extremity of the bell curve, may outgrow too debilitating a sense of abnormality, at 22, Amy Dorrit still comes and goes 'shrinkingly' from the Marshalsea with a 'womanly consciousness that she was pointed out to every one' (p. 93). Her sharp recognition of how others view her oppresses her, in part because of the disjunction between their perception and her own.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson analyses the effect of being stared at for physical differences, and she applies Du Bois's theory of double consciousness directly to corporeal variabilities—like Amy's—through what she calls 'felt and attributed identity', expressing the split perspective Amy confronts daily.[24] Siebers raises this issue as crucial in disability studies, pointing out that onlookers' 'spectacle of discrimination', condescension, and 'social intolerance' in confronting difference constitutes a cultural oppression of the disabled that exceeds the challenges of bodily impairment.[25] As Garland-Thomson reports regarding reactions to adults with dwarfism, 'the default […] is to think of small people as children and treat them accordingly'. She theorizes that when people stare at short individuals, their 'stares hold the question […] of how [one] can be both child and adult at the same time'. Dickens stages just such a scene of confusion (discussed in more detail below) when a London streetwalker encounters Amy and reacts in horror when she realizes her mistake in having thought the adult Amy was a child. Garland-Thomson argues that such incongruence confuses viewers: 'shared cultural assumptions regarding proper scale and shape turn short-statured people into figures of contradiction to the eye of an ordinary starer… . Stares mark [the staree] as socially illegible'.[26] Although from Dickens's description and from Hablot Browne's illustrations we know that Amy does not have dwarfism, Garland-Thomson helps us to think about Amy's initial illegibility to Arthur and to critics such as Lilian Craton, who sees Amy as an 'aggrandized dwarf' because of the 'physical disproportion' between her small body and the people she takes care of.[27] Reading symptomatically, Craton understands Amy's size as 'a spectacular reminder of her disproportionate role in these relationships'.[28] But if we read literally, Amy is just short. She has a non-conforming body that functions as what Garland-Thomson calls a 'misfit' in a society that demands a high level of homogeneity in appearance.[29]

Amy manages well in daily life. Her footstep is 'light' (p. 91), and her fingers are 'nimble' (pp. 303–5). Her chief physical barrier is not being able to reach things that are positioned too high for her (due to her built environment) or to pick up and move things that are too big for her height and mass, which the narrator points out as her 'want of strength, even in the matter of lifting and carrying' (p. 86). This is precisely the area in which a short woman of average strength for her size would fail to perform as robustly as a person of average height of equal relative strength, whose muscles are larger, whose reach is longer, and whose body mass is greater. In fact, Garland Thomson points out that cultural expectations about how much one should be able to carry are arbitrarily configured to 'exclude and disable many human bodies while validating and affirming others', so that people who can not lift 50 pounds are considered disabled, while people who can not lift a slightly larger number are not.[30] Disability theory teaches us to read Amy's experiences

[24] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, 'Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept', *Hypatia*, 26 (2011), 591–609, 601.
[25] Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 29.
[26] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford, 2009), 173.
[27] In contrast, in *The Old Curiosity Shop* Quilp's dwarfism becomes, like Shakespeare's Richard III as hunchback, a metaphor for his deformed character. For Quilp and disability, see Goldie Morgantaler, 'A Tale of Two Dwarfs: Sex, Size and the Erotics of Transcendence', *Dickens Quarterly*, 32 (2015), 199–210.
[28] Lilian Craton, *The Victorian Freak Show: The Significance of Disability and Physical Differences in 19th-Century Fiction* (Amherst, NY, 2010), 61.
[29] Garland-Thomson includes size as a category in 'Misfits': 'misfitting emphasizes particularity by focusing on the specific singularities of shape, size, and function of the person in question', when that person's corporeal presence does not 'fit' the physical environment. ('Misfits', 595).
[30] Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York, NY, 1997), 7.

coping with an oversized physical infrastructure literally rather than symptomatically. Dickens makes it possible by showcasing the excluding, disabling expectations of those around her.

Through Amy, *Little Dorrit* critiques symbolic reading of disability. Dickens resists presenting Amy's body as what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder call a 'narrative prosthesis', in which disability or socially debilitating physical difference becomes for the text a 'metaphorical device' or narrative 'crutch' that allows the story to eliminate/cure a social ill by killing off or rehabilitating a disabled character.[31] Instead of using Amy or her size as a narrative prosthesis, Dickens repeatedly points out that other characters misread her littleness as indicators of something else: her being weak, or fragile, or child-like. He insists on her bodily experience as material rather than (or only) representative. Dickens often uses narrative prosthesis elsewhere, however, including in *Little Dorrit*, where Mrs Clennam—a wheelchair user—best fills that function. Her expulsion from the story by death frees the novel from her disability, a trope for her imprisonment in an inflexible, dogmatic religion. It is precisely such use of disability that Mitchel and Snyder decry as reductive to metaphor. Another candidate is the Clennam house—itself of a gothic character representing decay and imprisonment—wobbling, creaking, and 'leaning on some half dozen gigantic crutches' (p. 46) until its final collapse at the novel's conclusion. But Dickens treats Amy Dorrit's bodily variation differently, maintaining her corporeal integrity and her clear-eyed recognition of plural points of view throughout her narrative journey. Just as Siebers's theory of complex embodiment allows us to understand disability through multiple modes (both somatically and socially constructed), so Dickens's fiction incorporates a complex embodiment of characterization and narrative perspective, both literal and symbolic. It is as though Dickens were offering a counterpoint in this protagonist's physical difference to what Martha Stoddard Holmes calls 'critical prosthesis'.[32] Rendering Amy's body as persistently misperceived not only by other characters in the novel but also by many of the novel's readers, Dickens broaches metacritical issues of how to read fiction that champions multiple viewpoints. He critiques a symptomatic mode of interpretation that looks through rather than attending to the words on the page.

PERFORMING AND PERCEIVING LITTLENESS

Although Amy thoroughly understands her short stature as a simple physical fact with straightforward consequences, other characters read the adult Amy's small size as freakish or uncanny. And so do many critics. Natalie McKnight describes Amy as 'a freak of littleness'.[33] For Lauren Byler, 'she is defined by extreme physical distortion'.[34] To Patricia Ingham, 'Little Dorrit/Amy, a child-woman, is a manifest horror'.[35] These are strong statements. They indicate the fascinating problem in reading Amy that Dickens poses both for the novel's characters and for its critics, as well as the larger problem of metaphorizing and othering bodies outside of a very narrow spectrum of normativity. Three very different scenes in the first half of the novel investigate the fantastical or disquieting effect of Little Dorrit's littleness on other characters in the novel. In addition to contributing to critical responses focused on symbolic interpretations of Amy's physical incongruence, these scenes also reveal her capacity for seeing things from more than one point of view. The first is Amy's visit to her older sister Fanny's workplace (a theatre), tied to the Browne illustration of the scene, depicting Amy within the carnivalesque world backstage. Next is Amy's own creation for her friend Maggy of the sorrowful fairy-tale about the 'tiny woman' and the princess (p. 313). The third is a shocking after-midnight encounter with a prostitute

[31] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2001), 205.
[32] Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2010), 12.
[33] McKnight, *Idiots, Madmen, & Other Prisoners*, 117.
[34] Byler, 'Dickens's Little Women', 236.
[35] Ingham, 'Nobody's Fault', 112.

Fig. 1. 'Miss Dorrit and Little Dorrit'. Courtesy of Special Collections, Mary Couts Burnett Library, TCU.

on the grittiest streets of London. All three moments double down on Amy's basic identity as a short woman while underscoring how people react when they think what they are seeing is impossible.

The illustration 'Miss Dorrit and Little Dorrit' (Fig. 1) depicts Fanny and Amy backstage at the theatre where Fanny dances in the corps and their uncle Frederick Dorrit performs the clarinet in the house orchestra. The virtuous Amy is 'bewildered' in the topsy-turveydom of theatreland, but seeing Amy misplaced in this environment nonplusses Fanny even more. When she exclaims, 'Why the idea, Amy, of *you* coming behind!' (p. 252), we sense Fanny's discomfort at worlds colliding. In this image, so full of contrasts, Fanny gestures with her right hand toward her younger sister. Another arm and hand at first trick the eye in an unnerving sense of dismemberment, and viewers might struggle to understand how the extra limb grows out of Fanny's posterior. Ultimately, we conclude it is a prop that she carelessly sits on. Whereas the dancers are bareheaded or wear soft head coverings, standing or sitting with feet splayed, Amy is bonneted, cloaked, and sits with her hands clasped and her legs tightly crossed at the ankles, a picture of modesty. Amy does not fit in. In this backstage setting, Amy's tiny misfit body looks out of sync with expectations that are aggrandized by the theatrical setting; but in the world outside the theatre, the actresses—with their makeup, bare heads, splayed limbs, and outlandish clothes—embody the non-normative within a different set of expectations.

What we learn here is what every director knows about staging: theatrical illusion depends upon the use of contrast and perspective, of fulfilling or disrupting audience expectation, and of course on skilful performance. In this illustration, Fanny towers over Amy. Engulfed by a giant 'golden chair' (p. 254) that accentuates her small size just as the rehearsal noise exaggerates her quietness, Little Dorrit sits with her derriere nowhere near the low chair's huge back; but her feet still dangle, with only her toes touching the floor. Eyes downcast, head hanging, and hunching in the oversize chair, Amy contrasts sharply with Fanny, elegantly balanced on the table's edge, showing off the excellent posture of a dancer, amplifying their relatively small difference in height. In the frontispiece depicting the two young women's arrival at Mr and Mrs Merdle's mansion, Fanny is at most about half a head taller than her little sister, and both girls are miniscule in comparison to the Merdles' elegant footmen (Fig. 2). Little Dorrit seems especially little when her surroundings are big, just as she first seems to Arthur at his mother's house to have the 'all the manner and much the appearance of a subdued child' in her consciousness of being

Fig. 2. 'Frontispiece'. Courtesy of Special Collections, Mary Couts Burnett Library, TCU.

'out of place' when in the company of 'three hard elders' (pp. 67–8), who are Arthur (at least 18 years Amy's senior), his mother, and her 'old man' business partner (p. 64). Dickens deploys Amy's settings and surroundings to shift her aspect; as Dehn Gilmore explains, 'perception of the life-size'—or in this case, Amy-size—'is an effect: a result of inflation, shrinkage, or contrast (or all of the above)'.[36] The novel manipulates contrasts to shape Arthur's and the readers' perception of Little Dorrit's littleness in the same way that Amy herself will capitalize on contrast and illusion to save herself and Maggy from imminent danger, as we shall see later.

Just as Amy's visit to the theatre unsettles Fanny and provides the illustrator Phiz with the opportunity to play with proportion in conjuring a misperception of Amy's stature, so the story of the tiny woman contributes to readers' vision of Amy's small size as so extreme as to form a

[36] Dehn Gilmore, 'Pigmies and Brobdignagians: Arts Writing, Dickensian Character, and the Vanishing Victorian Life-Size', *Victorian Studies*, 57 (2015), 667–90, 669.

fairy-tale phenomenon. When Maggy asks her friend for a story about a princess, Amy makes up a tragic fairy tale about a tiny woman who will never win the heart of the man she loves, the thought of whom is figured as a ghostly shadow that she keeps in a box to watch over every day and which she vows to take to her grave (p. 314). Nearby lives the princess, who while riding grandly in her carriage notices the tiny woman spinning industriously in her cottage. The two women look at each other through the cottage window and—unlike most people in this novel, so easily confused by preconceptions and illusions—actually *see* each other as they are (p. 313). Maggy of course deflates such mystical, philosophical pretentions by saying that they were 'trying to stare one another out' (p. 313), a playful use of mutual staring without the objectifying effect Garland-Thomson describes for the 'staree'.[37] Like the novel's much-used moniker 'Little Dorrit', Amy reiterates the appellation 'tiny woman' 21 times during the three pages the story occupies, including once when Amy is not content to denominate her as just the 'tiny woman' but insists on 'little tiny woman' (p. 313). However, the most important word in the phrase is not 'tiny', but 'woman'. 21 times in three pages, Amy emphasizes the character's mature, adult, *woman*ly status.

Amy reiterates the mutual looking, seeing, and knowing between princess and tiny woman throughout the tiny woman story, which in Browne's illustration is titled not 'The Story of the Tiny Woman' but 'The Story of the Princess' (Fig. 3).[38] In telling her tale, Amy splits into two consciousnesses, seeing not only from the perspective of the tiny woman but also from the point of view of the Princess, whose size is never mentioned—and is thus assumed to be average, unremarkable, or unmarked—and whose title indicates all the political and economic power that the 'poor' (p. 313) tiny woman, labouring in her cottage, lacks.[39] This splitting mimics the double consciousness of any person with a non-conforming body, including other characters in Dickens's oeuvre.[40] This story-within-a-story models a kind of seeing and knowing that uses supernatural elements to naturalize the tiny woman's size.[41] Amy shifts what is eerie in the tale from the tiny woman's tininess, mentioned so often as to become normalized, to the incorporeal shadow of a remembrance of the man she loves. The vehicle for this transformation is Maggy, who when first told of the shadow exclaims, 'Lor!' (p. 313), which tells us that the shadow is spooky, while her response to the first mention of tiny woman's size is merely to ask, quite reasonably, if she is old (p. 313), which tells us that the woman's tininess is not fantastical. Once the tiny woman dies (and she may well be old by then), she and the princess can no longer look at each other with deep reciprocal knowledge, and the tiny woman takes the shadow of her love to her tomb. In this story-within-a-story, Amy (and of course, Dickens) provides in the tiny woman and her princess alter-ego a model for accurately seeing—that is, for avoiding the pitfalls of difference's effect of social invisibility, in Garland-Thomson's terms—while critiquing the misperception of the story's beloved man, who seems never to have known that the tiny woman loved him.

The third example combines elements of the first two, merging the manipulation of visual contrasts with doubled women seeing each other accurately. This long, well-known passage merits careful investigation. In it, Amy first uses what others perceive as her child-sized body to

[37] Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 173. See Kenneth M. Sroka, 'Reviving Spirit: "Illth" and Health in Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit*', *Literature and Belief*, 26 (2006), 71–104, 98.

[38] Clayton and Gail Turley Houston point out that Amy is the princess as well as the tiny woman: Clayton, *Romantic Vision*, 127; Houston, *Consuming Fictions: Gender, Class, and Hunger in Dickens's Novels* (Carbondale, IL, 1994), 147.

[39] The unmarked is 'sheltered in the neutral space of normalcy', Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 8.

[40] For example, Esther Summerson's recognition of difference between her appearance to others and her own lived experience may also be seen as a double consciousness with the same psychological effects that Du Bois theorizes. In *Bleak House*, Dickens innovates by distinguishing Esther's point of view from that of the omniscient narrator in a novel about contested sides in a legal battle, while in *Little Dorrit* he plays with flexibility in perspective in a world built on misperception.

[41] The best contrast here is how skilfully the story avoids the potential to turn into a fairy-tale for children, like Hans Christian Andersen's fairy-tale 'Thumbelina' (1835).

Fig. 3. 'The Story of the Princess'. Courtesy of Special Collections, Mary Couts Burnett Library, TCU.

protect herself and Maggy when they are locked out of the Marshalsea and must roam the dangerous streets of London for most of the night. Then, in a twist, Amy confronts the unsettled recalibration required when an observer must come to terms with perceiving reality instead of illusion.

It is a perilous walk: 'They had shrunk past homeless people, lying coiled up in nooks. They had run from drunkards. They had started from slinking men, whistling and signing to one another at bye corners, or running away at full speed' (p. 190). Amy here enacts the role of child. Her performance is crucial because, although her small size is a necessary component for this casting, shortness alone is insufficient for the effect: she must *act* childlike for the theatrical trick to work: 'Though everywhere the leader and the guide, Little Dorrit, happy for once in her youthful appearance, feigned to cling to and rely upon Maggy. And more than once some

voice, from among a knot of brawling or prowling figures in their path, had called out to the rest, to "let the woman and the child go by!"' (p. 190). The dark stage of the London streets (lit by flickering gas streetlamps just as London stages are lit by gas footlights), the relative size of the two silhouettes, and most importantly the gestural and postural performance by Amy succeed in staving off physical harassment, or worse, from the audience of rough men. Amy also directs the scene, manipulating Maggy into playing the mother without even knowing it, in opposition to their usual roles: Maggy typically calls Amy her 'Little Mother', a phrase applied to Amy 32 times in the novel either directly by Maggy or by the narrator invoking Maggy's consciousness. Wolf reads Little Dorrit's pretending to be a child while stage-managing Maggy as her 'mother' as an example of Amy's 'self-effacing', of her not wanting to be looked at by 'slinking men.'[42] This interpretation—that the scene demonstrates that Amy 'needs to be denied', highlighting her 'negating rather than affirming self' and a compulsion 'to hide her body, her age, and her sexuality'—elides the pressing danger that the young women face.[43] Amy's exploiting her physical difference from the norm to pass as a child when that very subterfuge keeps both her and Maggy safe is neither shyness nor self-effacement but ingenious self-preservation. Amy's being happy 'for once' (p. 190) in her small physique speaks volumes to how much unhappiness the reaction of others to her small form causes her the rest of the time.

What happens next is the uncanny experience of a prostitute who sees precisely and only what Amy has wanted onlookers to perceive, until she gets too close for the illusion to hold. The young streetwalker first blames Maggy for imperilling the seeming 'child' by taking her out on the dangerous byways of the city in the middle of the night, accusing Maggy, as the supposed mother, of not being able to 'see':

> 'Poor thing!' said the woman. 'Have you no feeling, that you keep her out in the cruel streets at such a time as this? Have you no eyes, that you don't see how delicate and slender she is? Have you no sense (you don't look as if you had much) that you don't take more pity on this cold and trembling little hand?'
> She had stepped across to that side, and held the hand between her own two, chafing it. 'Kiss a poor lost creature, dear', she said, bending her face, 'and tell me where's she taking you'.
> Little Dorrit turned towards her.
> 'Why, my God!' she said, recoiling, 'you're a woman!' (p. 191)

Her shock derives in part from the disorientation of seeing an adult where she was sure there was a child, invoking the social illegibility Garland-Thomson analyses.[44] The unveiling of the truth strips away the false perception that bodies conform to expectations, that children are always smaller than adults, and that things are what they seem, which in this novel, is rarely the case. Mrs Clennam is not Arthur's mother; Mr Merdle is not a rock of finance; Little Dorrit is not a child.

Compassionate as always, Amy protests that she doesn't mind if the young woman touches her, doesn't even mind if the prostitute wants to pretend that Little Dorrit is a child, if that brings comfort. But the streetwalker refuses: 'You are kind and innocent; but you can't look at me out of a child's eyes' (p. 191). Free of the theatrical illusion, she sees and knows Amy's adult capacity to see knowingly. Bereft of her fantasy of Amy-as-child, she cannot un-see the truth. The prostitute and Amy perceive each other as accurately as the Princess and the tiny woman. The prostitute cannot bear the thought of polluting Little Dorrit with her own touch precisely because she apprehends that Amy is fully and genuinely a woman.

[42] Wolf, 'The Enormous Power of No Body', 233.
[43] Wolf, 'The Enormous Power of No Body', 233.
[44] Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 173.

THROUGH ARTHUR'S EYES

It is a critical commonplace that Amy is like a child in her behaviour, form, and sexuality. As Alexander Welsh points out, although 'Little Dorrit is twenty-two at the commencement of the story and sometimes annoyed at not being recognized as a woman by the hero, [...] she is thought by everyone to be a child and signs herself, in a letter to Clennam, "Your poor child, LITTLE DORRIT"'.[45] Both Lionel Trilling and J. Hillis Miller celebrate what Miller calls her 'simplicity, loving-kindness, and faithful perseverance of childhood' virtues into adulthood.[46] Many critics assert she has the body of a child.[47] McNight's description of Amy—'with the body of a child but the face of a grown woman'—sounds chimeric or sphinx-like; indeed, Byler calls her 'a grotesque adult-child' and Ingham 'monstrous in her duality'.[48] Jay Clayton more gently refers to her as 'a child-woman' in 'her apparent sexlessness'.[49] Philip Weinstein also sees her as sexless, even 'repudiating the body altogether'.[50] But despite her title as the Child of the Marshalsea, Amy 'is anything but childlike', as Grossman observes.[51] Janice Carlisle notes that Little Dorrit commits pious frauds all the time.[52] Repeatedly lying to do good requires a nuanced, experienced, compromised moral position that precludes the childlike innocence Miller describes and requires a grasp of alternative choices and their potential consequences. Her height and weight help her pass on the street as a pre-teen, but Browne's illustration 'The Story of a Princess' (Fig. 3), an interior view where she is not a wearing a shapeless cloak as in so many outdoor or threshold scenes, depicts a curvy woman even in her utmost poverty. She is childlike neither in form nor ethos—nor, as we shall see momentarily, in sexuality.

The 'child-woman' Clayton mentions finds support in the text, but often the supporting words come from the mind of Arthur. Even when she signs her letter from Venice, 'your poor child' (p. 495), she merely repeats his words to her. It is 'in his eyes' that 'the little creature seemed so young' (p. 110), in his eyes that this energetic powerhouse who works all day before coming home to cook for her father and manage the lives of the rest of her family 'seemed the least, the quietest, the weakest of heaven's creatures' (p. 111). She 'seemed' young, little, weak, and child-like, but while seeming is believing for Arthur, the narrator knows better. Jesse Rosenthal calls out the 'willful, taunting misreading' by *Little Dorrit*'s villain Rigaud of the novel's central cipher, those mysterious letters inscribed on the watch belonging to Arthur's father.[53] Yet Rigaud might also serve as the type for Dickens's own tormenting of Arthur for his incapacity to read Amy aright. Three important scenes illustrate how thoroughly Dickens seduces readers into viewing Amy through Arthur's eyes, despite the narrator's accompanying correction. One comes early in the book, one in the middle, and one late, when Arthur's misperception finally dawns on him.

In the first passage, Amy has come with Maggy to Arthur's rooms at midnight. Although it is much clearer by the novel's end, even at this early point in the novel, 'Amy Dorrit is the aggressor', as Ruth Yeazell has said, 'in love-making'.[54] Amy comes to thank Arthur for helping her brother Tip and to implore him to cease tipping her father, which she considers degrading. The scene's night-time snack concludes as Arthur observes Amy and Maggy walking away, without being observed himself:

[45] Welsh, *The City of Dickens*, 154.
[46] Lionel Trilling, 'Little Dorrit', *Kenyon Review*, 15 (1953), 557–90, 590; J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, MA, 1958), 240.
[47] Clayton, *Romantic Vision*, 127; Craton, *The Victorian Freak Show*, 61.
[48] McKnight, *Idiots, Madmen, & Other Prisoners*, 116–17; Byler, 'Dickens' Little Women', 236; Ingham, 'Nobody's Fault', 111.
[49] Clayton, *Romantic Vision*, 129.
[50] Philip M. Weinstein, *The Semantics of Desire: Changing Models of Identity from Dickens to Joyce* (Princeton, NJ, 1984), 52.
[51] Grossman, *Charles Dickens's Networks*, 161.
[52] Janice Carlisle, '*Little Dorrit*: Necessary Fictions', *Studies in the Novel*, 113 (1975), 195–214, 200.
[53] Jesse Rosenthal, 'The Untrusted Medium: Open Networks, Secret Writing, and *Little Dorrit*', *Victorian Studies*, 59 (2017), 218–313, 302.
[54] Yeazell, 'Do It or Dorrit', 47.

> So diminutive she looked, so fragile and defenceless against the bleak damp weather, flitting along in the shuffling shadow of her charge, that he felt, in his compassion, and in his habit of considering her a child apart from the rest of the rough world, as if he would have been glad to take her up in his arms and carry her to her journey's end. (p. 189)

Arthur does not yet recognize his own attraction to Amy or Amy's to him, despite the evening's blushing (pp. 185, 186), touching (p. 183), and kissing (p. 184). But he is not completely unobservant. His habit of infantilizing her, of 'his so often calling her a child' that 'a slight shade of distress fell upon her', registers and prompts him to excuse himself for trying to come up with a 'tender word' (p. 183) that, one can extrapolate, would not come loaded with the erotic overtones that some familiar diminutives might carry. They settle on 'Little Dorrit', and the endearment has 'already begun, between those two, to stand for a hundred gentle phrases, according to the varying tone and connection in which it was used' (pp. 186–7), a nickname that allows him to continue to deflect their sexual feelings for the next 50 chapters.

David Holbrook joins Clayton and Weinstein in asserting that 'Little Dorrit is sexless', even 'as far from sexual passion as you can get'.[55] Yet the scene bursts with acute physical sensation and suppressed sexual tension. Lips part (pp. 184, 186); Amy kisses Arthur's hand and wishes they could stay in that position for longer (p. 184). It is full of unanticipated touches: when Arthur accidentally brushes her feet, he notes with hyperawareness how cold they are (p. 183). And then there is all the quivering—Amy trembles 'In all her little figure and her voice', 'trembling more and more' when she tries to thank him (p. 184). 'A tremor passes over her' when she describes nocturnal London (p. 185). He senses her vibrating body and is so moved he has trouble composing himself (p. 184). Arthur warms Amy by the fire and persuades 'her to put some wine to her lips and to touch something to eat' of the cakes and fruit he has set out (p. 186). Although occasionally wrong about what he is thinking, Amy often reads Arthur's facial expressions 'so plainly' that she answers his questions without his even asking (p. 185). Maggy, their drowsy chaperone, occasionally cuts the sexual tension by waking up to recommend they eat 'Chicking' (p. 185). But Maggy's chief task in this scene is to fall asleep so that Arthur and Amy's wee-hour tryst of sublimated sexuality can proceed uninterrupted. While Arthur distances himself from the attraction he feels for Amy by wanting to call her 'child', she is already thinking about 'what a good father he would be', not in relation to herself but to Maggy, 'her big child' (p. 183), whom Amy observes Arthur observing. Picturing a potential partner as a good parent is a classic turn-on for many women.[56]

Amy is already a 'Little Mother' to her bigger and hungrier charge (pp. 104–19), who makes Amy look even smaller and more abstemious in contrast. By placing Amy next to Maggy, with her large frame and lip-smacking gusto in consuming what Arthur serves (p. 188), the narrator simultaneously focuses and diverts Arthur's and the reader's attention from Amy's potential as a romantic/marital partner. Arthur reads Amy's 'diminutive' size as equalling fragility and defencelessness, and the novel draws us to read along with him; but the rest of the chapter reveals her to be sturdy and resourceful.

The hurt that Arthur's obtuseness inflicts in the novel's early instalments is nothing to the heart-rending scene in the middle, in which—right after he has touched 'her lips with his hand' (p. 403), a romantic gesture indeed—Arthur tells Amy of his foolishness in having loved the pretty Pet Meagles, who is marrying someone else. Again, he views Amy's body as childlike, but—again—the narrator emphasizes how poorly he sees her:

[55] David Holbrook, *Charles Dickens and the Image of Women* (New York, NY, 1993), 122.

[56] See James R. Roney, Katherine N. Hanson, Kristina M. Durante, and Dario Maestripieri, 'Reading Men's Faces: Women's Mate Attractiveness Judgments Track Men's Testosterone and Interest in Infants', *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 273 (2006), 2169–75; Nicolas Guéguen, 'Cues of Men's Parental Investment and Attractiveness for Women: A Field Experiment', *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 24 (2014), 296–300.

> He heard the thrill in her voice, he saw her earnest face, he saw her clear true eyes, he saw the quickened bosom that would have joyfully thrown itself before him to receive a mortal wound directed at his breast, with the dying cry, 'I love him!' and the remotest suspicion of the truth never dawned upon his mind. No. He saw the devoted little creature with her worn shoes, in her common dress, in her jail-home; a slender child in body, a strong heroine in soul; and the light of her domestic story made all else dark to him. (p. 404)

Understanding nothing, Arthur sees Amy's body—her face, her eyes, and her bosom—as that of a 'slender child'. The woman who would heroically take a bullet for him breathes rapidly in agitation. Here Amy's bosom is personified with its 'dying cry' (p. 404), almost like Mrs Merdle's far more 'extensive bosom' so devoid of tenderness and yet so 'capital […] to hang jewels upon' as evidence of Mr Merdle's wealth (p. 265). The contrast minimizes Amy's bosom, which discernibly quickens; that is to say, it visibly vibrates or moves beneath her thin garment, hardly the body of a child.[57] This scene of excruciating pain underscores Arthur's remarkable blindness to Amy's point of view, to her fervent love, desire, and courage, even when he perceives that she is troubled.[58] He notices enough to ask her point blank if she has a secret. "'Secret? No, I have no secret", said Little Dorrit' (p. 405). Maggy barely veils the truth that Amy *does* have a secret, when she blurts out: "'It was the little woman as had the secret"' (p. 405). Maggy here refers to the 'tiny woman' story that Amy invents for Maggy to beguile her (pp. 311–15), but Arthur has never heard the fairy tale. He must assume that Maggy alludes to Amy, the only 'little woman' in the room. Yet he *still* does not recognize Amy's passion, because his gaze is perennially turned inward as he seeks to understand himself and his own history. Rather than see himself as Amy's beloved, or focus on Amy as a mature woman and potential romantic partner (rather than a disembodied 'heroine in soul'), he just 'returned to his own subject' (p. 405). Here, in the middle of the novel, he is still his own focus or 'vanishing-point' (p. 766), though we will see that change by the novel's end, when everything in 'its perspective leads to her innocent figure' (p. 766).

The third passage occurs during the book's denouement. When Arthur is imprisoned and ill, Amy comes to him from her sojourn in Italy:

> She looked something more womanly than when she had gone away, and the ripening touch of the Italian sun was visible upon her face. But, otherwise she was quite unchanged. The same deep, timid earnestness that he had always seen in her, and never without emotion, he saw still. If it had a new meaning that smote him to the heart, the change was in his perception, not in her. (p. 791)

In addition to her lovely Italian tan, perhaps the previously pre-pubescent frame that so many critics assume for Amy has filled out. But the novel does not say that. In fact, she is 'something *more* womanly',[59] meaning that she had been womanly-looking before, if only Arthur had actually looked: 'the change was in his perception, not in her'.

PERSPECTIVES

Arthur finally learns to recognize Amy when he is locked up in the Marshalsea. It takes the magnanimous John Chivery (Amy's rejected suitor) to open Arthur's eyes, but once open, he sees.

[57] In 'Blessings for the Worthy: Dickens's *Little Dorrit* and the Nature of Rants', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 37 (2007), 17–30, 23, Jim Kincaid states that Dickens has created 'little girls with big breasts, like Amy Dorrit'. Kincaid perhaps notices something overlooked by even the great visual observer Meisel, who mentions 'the childish and by all indications breastless figure of Little Dorrit' (*Realizations*, 313).

[58] Further evidence of how pervasively Arthur's blindness influences excellent critics is Daniel Stout's surprising characterization of Amy's 'barely rippled placidity' (in contrast to Dickens's frequent descriptions of her pain) in '*Little*, Maybe Less: *Little Dorrit*'s Minimal Moralia', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 75 (2020), 207–38, 210.

[59] Emphasis added.

Like the prostitute, Arthur un-sees Little Dorrit as child, although he does not say, 'My God, she is a woman!' And, happily, he does not recoil from the truth. Through Amy, he gains access to a stereoscopic perspective of himself. In learning that she loves him, he realizes that he loves her. And for the first time seeing himself through her eyes as well as his own, he can also see her anew. More than merely reciprocating affection, he discovers that she is the centre on which all lines converge. Merging linear and narrative perspective, Arthur understands that Amy is the 'vanishing-point' (p. 766) in the story of his life.

Part of the soul-searching that has led Arthur to this epiphany is his recollection of an incident that the novel had previously occluded. It occurs just before Arthur's dramatic entrance to the finale of Book I, which concludes when Amy's father is set free by the sudden inheritance of a vast fortune (p. 444). Mr Dorrit, Fanny, and Tip parade out of the Marshalsea prison in pomp and glory. They do not notice Little Dorrit is missing until Arthur suddenly arrives, carrying in his arms Amy, who had fainted, forgotten by all and made distraught by her immanent departure from everything she knew (p. 452). Now, hundreds of pages later, almost at the end of Book II, we learn that prior to scooping up the neglected Amy and restoring her to her self-absorbed family, 'He had kissed her when he raised her from the ground, on the day when she had been so consistently and expressively forgotten. Quite as he might have kissed her, if she had been conscious? No difference?' (p. 764). Aside from the fact that Arthur admits taking advantage of her unconsciousness to steal a non-consensual romantic kiss, this late recollection represents Arthur's realization that for some time he has loved Amy with palpably adult passion.

While Arthur, prodded by John Chivery, finally comes to know himself in the Marshalsea by seeing himself through Amy's eyes, Amy retains her understanding of who she is and what she wants even in her changed circumstances in Italy. Amy would 'often ride out in a hired carriage' and alight to wander alone among the Roman ruins, which 'besides being what they were, to her were ruins of the old Marshalsea—ruins of her own old life […] in the lonely places, under the blue sky, she saw them both together' (p. 639), recalling the Victorian sense of double consciousness that Tressler analyses. Now incarnated as the carriage-riding Princess in her tiny woman tale, Amy sees the shadows of her former life bleed into her current one in a kind of photographic superimposition.[60] Such doubling means that the two distinct images she sees—one present and one past—must have different horizons, different vanishing points, and different points of view. Unlike Arthur's single vanishing point, Amy's view contains double perspectives, echoing the duality inherent in the double consciousness that springs from her bodily experience, her complex embodiment outside the norm.

Amy—like Dickens and his omniscient narrator—has always had the ability to hold onto two or more points of view at once, as when she is both the tiny woman and the all-knowing princess. Even earlier in the novel, when she visited Arthur's room in Covent Garden at midnight, she already sees his abode in multiple ways, each distinct, yet teeming together: courtly, costly, picturesque, and desolate. This is the passage when the narrator tells us outright that we 'must sometimes see with Little Dorrit's eyes' (p. 181).

[60] Amanda Anderson analyses Amy's 'capacity for a kind of double vision, one that remains true to the experience of cultural otherness as well as to her own psychological past', in *The Power of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton, NJ, 2009), 75. Kate Flint points to the magic lantern dissolve to capture this twofold way of seeing in 'Dickens, Mid-19th-Century Italy and Visual Modernity', in Catherine Waters (ed.), *Imagining Italy: Victorian Writers and Travellers* (Newcastle on Tyne, 2010), 211. Francesca Orestano comments, 'revisitation generates a kind of stereoscopic effect, when recollections of the past and present perceptions set side by side produce a grotesque effect of mutual overlapping of two differently similar images', '*Little Dorrit*', in John Jordan, Robert L. Patten, and Catherine Waters (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Charles Dickens* (Oxford, 2018), 245–59, 251. Jayda Coons discusses stereoscopic point of view as a narrative technique in '"Spectral Realities": *Little Dorrit*, Stereoscopy, and Non-Mimetic Realism', *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 42 (2019), 17–31. Novak demonstrates how 'Dickensian "realism" produced the same aesthetic and formal problems as photography did for nineteenth-century critics', including composite photography's superimposing different images; *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 65.

> Little Dorrit looked into a dim room, which seemed a spacious one to her and grandly furnished. Courtly ideas of Covent Garden, as a place […] where gentlemen wearing gold-laced coats and swords had quarrelled and fought duels; costly ideas of Covent Garden, as a place where there were flowers in winter at guineas a-piece […] picturesque ideas of Covent Garden, […] where there was a mighty theatre, showing wonderful and beautiful sights to richly-dressed ladies and gentlemen […] desolate ideas of Covent Garden, […] where the miserable children in rags among whom she had just now passed, like young rats, slunk and hid, fed on offal, huddled together for warmth […] teeming ideas of Covent Garden, as a place of past and present mystery, romance, abundance, want, beauty, ugliness, fair country gardens, and foul street-gutters; all confused together,—made the room dimmer than it was in Little Dorrit's eyes, as they timidly saw it from the door. (pp. 181–2)

What exactly does Amy see in Arthur's room? Some insight into the man she is falling for? No. She sees something much bigger: five different views of Covent Garden itself, in terms of historical romance, extravagant expense, high culture, desperate poverty, and a mixture of mystery and romance, much as a multifocal narrator might render it. They combine into an overarching, multifaceted vision that contains all the others at once in a series of binaries: past and present, abundance and want, beauty and ugliness. They are 'all confused together', which 'made the room dimmer than it was in her own eyes', suggesting that Amy's double consciousness extends to seeing and evaluating critically her own flawed but persistent perceptions. The capacity to hold five distinct 'teeming ideas of Covent Garden' in mind at once hints at Amy's compassionate enlargement of perspective that aligns her with Dickens's narrator, culminating in an interest in class and alleviation of poverty (which she experiences first-hand, but never to the degree of wretchedness she witnesses here) and a disgust with flagrant excess that will carry over even into her own days of riches. No wonder George Bernard Shaw called this novel more seditious than *Das Kapital*.[61] Critics often read Amy's giving up the Clennam inheritance as part of her self-sacrifice and self-starvation. But, as Marlene Tromp puts it, Amy Dorrit is 'a woman at peace with modest means'.[62] Perhaps there is no self-sacrifice when she jettisons her hefty legacy to marry Arthur—just a clear-sighted vision of what it will take for them both to be happy.

Amy's compassionate double vision differs from the 'staring' sun, houses, streets, and walls of Marseilles in *Little Dorrit*'s opening chapter where 'strangers were stared out of countenance' (p. 15), reminiscent of Garland-Thomson's critique of staring's dehumanization. In Jim Buzard's reading, the staring sun's viewpoint is a 'perspective on human affairs that lies completely outside the domain of human culture, rather than the autoethnographically productive, self-estranged gaze of insider's outsideness' that more closely resembles Amy's point of view.[63] The omniscient narrator in *Little Dorrit* shares with Little Dorrit herself this habit of seeing things more than one way, simultaneously. Cultivated by a double consciousness of her bodily identity, knowing both how she sees herself and how others see her, she expands her perspectives to encompass other identities that affect her point of view, including her shifts up and down the ladder of class.

[61] George Bernard Shaw, 'Preface to *Great Expectations*' (Edinburgh: The Limited Editions Club by R. & R. Clark, 1937), v–xxii, xi. In this passage, Amy radically eliminates the hierarchical aspects of perspective by seeing so much all at once. Contemporary critics complained about Dickens's penchant for describing everything in minute detail, without hierarchy, flattening differences between what they thought was important and unimportant. See Daniel Novak, 'Photography', in Juliet John and Claire Wood (eds), *Dickens and the Arts* (Edinburgh, forthcoming). In Italy, Amy recognizes poverty, drawing connections to London's poor and the inhabitants of the Marshalsea (pp. 489–91); in contrast, Mrs General (Amy's chaperone and hired teacher of propriety) insists that 'nothing disagreeable should ever be looked at' (p. 501). See Christopher Herbert, 'Filthy Lucre: Victorian Ideas of Money', *Victorian Studies*, 44 (2002), 198–200.

[62] Marlene Tromp, 'The Pollution of the East: Economic Contamination and Xenophobia in *Little Dorrit* and the *Mystery of Edwin Drood*', in Marlene Tromp, Maria Bachman, and Heidi Kaufman (eds), *Fear, Loathing, and Victorian Xenophobia* (Columbus, OH, 2013), 27–55, 40.

[63] James Buzard, '"The Country of The Plague": Anticulture and Autoethnography in Dickens's 1850s', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 38 (2010), 413–19, 416.

In this sense she shares with the narrator not omniscience but a step toward comprehending, in one half of Amanda Anderson's formulation of Dickens's tension between cosmopolitanism and provincialism, the goal of 'comparative knowledge as an intellectual and ethical value'.[64] When in Rome, Amy focuses more on the plight of beggars (whom her family and Mrs General ignore) than on tourist sites. As Anderson observes, Amy's 'personal history, particularly her capacity for sympathy and awareness of socioeconomic realities, becomes the basis, not the limit, for a larger understanding that remains open to cultural and historical alterity'; this is the novel's path toward a 'global perspective' that may serve as an antidote to cosmopolitanism's risk of estrangement.[65]

In the novel's penultimate paragraph, just after their wedding, Amy and Arthur share a 'fresh perspective' (p. 859) of the sunny street from the steps of the church where they have married. For a moment they stand on the same spot, getting as close to a single vantage as possible for two different consciousnesses housed in two different bodies of significantly different heights and powers of perception. It is the same church Amy and Maggy slept in, on the dangerous night of their encounter with the prostitute. What makes this perspective 'fresh', when it is a scene that Arthur and Amy have viewed before, is their willingness to try to see it together.

Throughout the novel, Dickens takes great care to embody Amy Dorrit, to consider what it feels like to be a very short woman, to see with Little Dorrit's eyes located at their specific height on her body. He walks us through how she walks at first in her thin shoes with her small frame, knowing herself underestimated and misperceived because of her physical difference, and then in her more elegant shoes, still with her small frame, still underestimated by her family and friends. In other words, the novel's profound interest in variable perception and point of view is utterly bound up in Amy Dorrit's misunderstood littleness and its effect on her double consciousness. Dickens makes clear that if we do not pay attention to her stature as a physical phenomenon on a spectrum of human variation and instead read it only as a metaphor or symptom of something else, we replicate the mistake that Arthur makes by misreading Amy for so long. But *Little Dorrit* offers a way out by embracing the multi-point perspective Amy models, the sort provided by a 'loose, baggy monster' of a Victorian novel, that freak of fiction Henry James decries for its disabling size.[66]

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[64] Anderson, *The Power of Distance*, 70.
[65] Anderson, *The Power of Distance*, 89.
[66] Henry James, 'Preface', in *The Tragic Muse* (London, 1921), v–xxv, xi.