Getting the Goods in *Little Dorrit*: Quarantine's Queer Logistics

KATHLEEN FREDERICKSON

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In the second chapter of Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1857), the Meagles family's adopted foundling-cum-servant Tattycoram famously narrates both her rage and her interest in Miss Wade as results of her time in quarantine: "I never was like this but twice, over in the quarantine yonder; and both times you found me," she tells Miss Wade as she sobs in her hotel bedroom, across the bay from the Marseille lazaretto.[1] It is 1825, and Tattycoram is returning from Egypt with people whom she can call neither her family nor her employers—this, indeed, is the source of her anguish and anger. For all her distress, Tattycoram, as Dickens insists, demonstrates "the force of her youth and fulness of life" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 26)—and indeed, the chapter's description of her body shuttles between a lexicon of affliction and one of *blazon*-like fascination. Though she wails and plucks at her own skin, the tableau also invites an eroticized gaze: they are in a bedroom, Tattycoram's hair is wet, and her tearing hand draws

Nineteenth-Century Literature, Vol. 75, No. 2, pp. 159–183, ISSN: 0891–9356, online ISSN: 1067–8352, © 2020 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/ncl.2020.75.2.159.

[1] Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, ed. Harvey Peter Sucksmith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 25. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text.

attention to her neck and lips, a self-touching that Miss Wade copies, in stiller form, by moving her hand onto her own breast. In spite of these pulpy pleasures, the scene still carries reference to death and disease. Miss Wade, Dickens writes, "stood with her hand upon her own bosom, looking at the girl, as one afflicted with a diseased part might curiously watch the dissection and exposition of an analogous case" (p. 26). With its speculative allusion to autopsy voyeurism, the phrase casts Tattycoram simultaneously as doctor and corpse, as her "tearing hand[s]" stage something like a mock dissection on her own flesh (p. 25). Nevertheless, for Tattycoram, these activities cure as much as sicken, given that she bids Miss Wade go away that she might carry on and "cry [her]self better" (p. 26). The sobbing, raging, and tearing, that is, are what it takes to allow Tattycoram to manage her position in the Meagles household, while the "disease" that Miss Wade recognizes is sheer fury.

To many critics, this scene and the quarantine setting it references have signaled a treasure trove of Foucaultian and sexological hermeneutics around touch, medicine, and imprisonment that have invited interpretations of, especially, Miss Wade as auguring the medicalization of sexuality later in the century.[2] So strong, indeed, is the novel's iteration of the tropes of later queer history that Annamarie Jagose, recalling her first readerly encounter with Miss Wade, notes that she struggles to remember that *Little Dorrit* predates the sexological moment of the later nineteenth century.[3] Nor is this observation wholly inaccurate, given that the novel often does seem to parody sexology proleptically, with a camp sensibility that all but layers the tropes of future queer history onto itself, as though accessorizing an outfit to excess. A long-standing habit of reading sex in these terms has had the consequence that critics have

[2] Erika Wright argues that "quarantine becomes a metonym for touch" in the early nineteenth century, so strongly is it identified with physical contact (Wright, *Reading for Health: Medical Narratives and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* [Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2016], p. 85).

[3] Jagose notes that it is a "perspectival error that takes Miss Wade as the imaginary origin of the modern lesbian identity," while noting the "pathological framework[s]" that would make this "perspectival error" seem tempting (Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2002], p. 38).

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generally adopted Miss Wade—with the formally exemplary case history of her "self-torments" that she hands to Arthur Clennam late in the novel—as the proto-paradigmatic queer subject and Tattycoram as the seduced object of her desire. Thus, even though, as Erika Wright suggests, Miss Wade's tendencies toward isolation might also make her function "as a quarantine within quarantine" (*Reading for Health*, pp. 94–95), it is as a result of this proto-pathologization that Jagose can write, for instance, that while "double quarantine is hardly sufficient for Miss Wade," Tattycoram's main job is to act as a "cordon sanitaire" between Miss Wade and the Meagles family (*Inconsequence*, p. 43).

Flipping critical attention to Tattycoram, though, makes the quarantine resonate rather differently in their plot. The quarantine setting in the novel—and Tattycoram and Miss Wade's relationship to it—reflects the debate initiated by an early-nineteenth-century anti-quarantine lobby that saw quarantine slowing the movement of goods from the Middle East. At the moment when *Little Dorrit* is set, the quarantine debate centered heavily on the importation of the new, high-quality Jumel cotton that Egypt, under orders from Mehmet Ali Pasha, had started growing in 1821, and that Britain began importing in 1823. By 1825, when *Little Dorrit*'s fellow travelers are passing through Marseille, the volume of Jumel cotton arriving on British ships was escalating rapidly—it would become the premium cotton of choice for many northern English mills. Fear of importing plague from Egypt was not wholly unwarranted. However much Arthur Clennam's claim that "the East is the country of the plague" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 15) may be suffused with the Orientalist belief that "the East" is by definition dirty and diseased, no one disputes that Egypt coped with repeated plague epidemics in the early nineteenth century.[4] Alexandria alone—the port through which the "fellow travellers" would have passed—suffered fifty-nine distinct plague epidemics between 1701 and 1844.[5] Especially when added to a belief

[4] See Alan Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), p. 214.

[5] See Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt*, pp. 214–15.

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in their own civilizational superiority, British officials were, for these reasons, particularly concerned to quarantine Egyptian bales of Jumel. At the same time, the economic importance of this cotton also motivated no small part of the new anti-quarantine effort.

Funded as it was by the Levant Company and northern mill owners, the new anti-quarantine movement invested in what would later come to be termed logistics. Most economic historians see logistics emerging after World War II and coming to prominence in the 1970s, as containerization coincided with a depression in which investments in commodity production were proving less profitable. Logistics, as Jasper Bernes and others observe, allowed capital to invest in circulation rather than production, and financed a logistics industry that sought to render supply chains faster, more flexible, and more secure.[6] In the early nineteenth century, logistics had not yet developed into a discrete field of expertise, with institutes and consulting firms acting in its name. Nevertheless, the anti-quarantine lobby of this moment suggests a longer prehistory for logistics than the ones usually invoked. The argument against quarantine centered on the costs of supply-chain delay: in quarantine, British capitalists saw the financial loss of fruit rotting on boats, money spent on paying sailors to work for extra time while commodities sat quarantined, and ships that loitered out of commission when they could otherwise be moving new cargo. Comfortable with a large margin of error, the anti-quarantine lobbyist Charles Maclean argued in 1825 that quarantine was costing Britain between half a million and three million pounds sterling a year.[7]

Dickens, I maintain, chooses quarantine over other possible spaces of touch and confinement because it flags Tattycoram's entry into the plot around these economics of circulation—the ability to profit from the movement rather than the production of commodities—in a novel in which, as

[6] See Jasper Bernes, "Logistics, Counterlogistics and the Communist Prospect," *Endnotes*, 3 (2013), available online at <https://endnotes.org.uk/issues/3/en/jasper-bernes-logistics-counterlogistics-and-the-communist-prospect>.

[7] See Charles Maclean, "Letter XI. To the Editor of the Globe London, 25th December, 1826," *The Globe*, 27 December 1826, p. 3.

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Hilary M. Schor points out, "property and love can hardly be wedged apart."[8] Specifically, Dickens invokes the quarantine as the origin point of the connection between Tattycoram and Miss Wade to route a set of Gothic thematics through a scanty but significant plot structure that relies on what I am calling "logistical aesthetics," by which I mean logistics rendered as form and tone, even when emptied of substantial parts of its diegetic function. *Little Dorrit* mixes its interest in the circulation of capital with the economics of inheritance, figured most prominently in the movement of the iron box containing the details of Arthur Clennam's parentage. Tattycoram's couriering of this box borrows the logistical urgency of anti-quarantine critique seemingly in the service of narrative resolution, drawing on logistics as a formal resource that substitutes narrative value for an absented economic value that, the novel suggests, occupies the place of her queerness. This joint focus on delivery and inheritance, moreover, strongly shapes the politics of kinship, intimacy, and desire for Tattycoram and Miss Wade. Their shared illegitimacy makes Tattycoram and Miss Wade appear as congruent doubles, even though Dickens also portrays them through an ironized Gothic mode in which Tattycoram becomes subordinate to Miss Wade's stern and controlling mien.

What quarantine helps makes visible, then, are the processes through which *Little Dorrit* identifies the conditions of Tattycoram's bodily pleasure, kinship, and intimacy as economic forms. As the courier for the box's meaningless but rushed return to Amy Dorrit, Tattycoram embodies the place where logistics bumps up against arguments about quarantine and the eroticization of confinement. This version of quarantine leads us back to Tattycoram and Miss Wade, but on rather different terms than in characterological interpretations focused on pathology and sexological type. To the extent that Dickens links the two women, he produces a doubled erotics of sameness that reroutes intimate attachment and bodily pleasure into the property, inheritance, and legitimacy that

[8] Hilary M. Schor, *Dickens and the Daughter of the House* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), p. 131.

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structure much of the novel's plot. That Dickens flips this would-be sameness into a play of dominance and submission indicates that *Little Dorrit* also offers a meditation on how freedom and coercion play into the production of supposed equivalence, economic or otherwise. As a result, the novel places Tattycoram at the center of a nexus of queer relations not only to touch and carcerality, but also to labor, contract, dependency, and affiliation.

Tattycoram acts as a suture between quarantine as an ambivalent and halfhearted figure for carceral, illicit touch and the logistics economics of the early nineteenth century, in which the debates over quarantine were embedded. *Little Dorrit* offers a conflicted response to the terms of the quarantine debate. On the one hand, Dickens seems to want to adopt the terms of an anti-quarantine lobby and position the quarantine as opposed to the efficiency of free trade by depicting carceral confinement and illicit touch. On the other hand, the novel also seems to know that, though a lively anti-quarantine movement often cast quarantine with some of the aesthetic trappings of the prison, the space of quarantine offers only a weakly Gothic carceral space. Moreover, at least at times, *Little Dorrit* also acknowledges that it is impossible to think through quarantine conditions outside of the economic considerations that position it as a site of contest.

Medical, economic, and historiographic principles intertwine in the debates over quarantine in the nineteenth century. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, an active anti-quarantine lobby deployed the rhetorical conventions of late-eighteenth-century Gothic fiction to dramatize the space of the quarantine as one of illiberal confinement and unhealthy mingling. Quarantine's cocktail of horrors, the lobby maintained, resulted from a medical philosophy that was antiquated and premised on economic systems the group viewed as defunct. In the early decades of the century, the anti-quarantine lobby's medical mouthpiece, the vaingloriously self-aggrandizing Charles Maclean, had repeatedly insisted on what was to

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become a consistent tagline in the debate over quarantine—namely, that the institution was a costly survival from the "ignorant and credulous . . . assumptions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."[9] In citing "ignorant and credulous" assumptions, Maclean aspires to slight quarantine both medically and economically. Far from feeling any shame at being funded by northern mill owners and the flagging Levant Company, Maclean flaunts his affiliation with capitalist interest, believing that these connections allow him to understand how quarantine's flawed prophylaxis results from its participation in outmoded mercantilist thinking.[10]

Dramatizing illicit touch in lazarettos was among the anti-quarantine lobby's core stratagems making quarantine seem out-of-step with nineteenth-century British liberalism, as the lobby downplayed its (material) investments in the swift movement of commodities by voicing concern for the well-being of travelers. The tactics that Maclean and his compeers deploy to sell what Maclean dubs "the evils of quarantine" include describing exposed bodies in a Gothicized quarantine space, an effort that tried to drum up a moral panic of the sort in which, in Gayle Rubin's now-classic formulation, "Sexual activities often function as signifiers for personal and social apprehensions to which they have no intrinsic connection."[11] Thus, in the hearings before the 1824 Select Committee on Foreign Trade—a committee that had been formed in no small part because the Levant Company had pled that they faced bankruptcy if the costs of quarantine did not diminish[12]—anti-quarantine witnesses were well primed to describe naked passengers plunged in sulphur baths, or fumigated by being made to walk unclothed, or scantly clothed, through "large bundles of wet

[9] Charles MacLean, "Quarantine Laws—Petition of Dr. Maclean," *Parliamentary Debates*, n.s. 12 (11 March 1825), 993. See John Booker, *Maritime Quarantine: The British Experience, c.1650–1900* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 397.

[10] See Charles Maclean, *Evils of Quarantine Laws, and Non-Existence of Pestilential Contagion; Deduced from the Phænomena of the Plague of the Levant, the Yellow Fever of Spain, and the Cholera Morbus of Asia* (London: T. and G. Underwood, 1824), p. xxiii.

[11] Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" (1984), rpt. in *Culture, Society, and Sexuality: A Reader*, ed. Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton, 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 171.

[12] See Booker, *Maritime Quarantine: The British Experience, c.1650–1900*, p. 383.

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straw" that had been set on fire.[13] Nor were quarantined goods omitted in the accounts of exposed human skin. The Committee asked multiple witnesses about the conditions of the men who worked to "expurgate" the cotton arriving from Egypt by thrusting their bare arms into potentially infected bales, emphasizing the exposure of the expurgator's body as the basis for quarantine's prophylaxis.

In *Little Dorrit*, the impropriety of such immurement may color the novel's understanding of quarantine as a space in which Tattycoram can turn from the Meagleses to a less-reputable life with Miss Wade. Nevertheless, had Dickens only been interested in staging seamy confinement as a precondition for illicit activities between two women, he would have had other—and arguably more obvious—options. As a meet-cute setting for Tattycoram and Miss Wade, the quarantine occupies a position that, in other nineteenth-century British texts, was often held by the harem. Harem sapphism abounds in the British pornographic book market of the early-to-mid nineteenth century, just as less clandestine publications imply it with abundant suggestiveness during the same period. But references to harems are nonetheless exceedingly sparse in *Little Dorrit*, an absence made conspicuous in a novel that invokes eroticized Gothic confinement in tandem with the queer intimacies of two women returning from Egypt. Moreover, the novel's insistent if ambiguous racialization of Tattycoram invites readers to interpret the perverse intimacy between her and Miss Wade as a deviation from the proprieties of white Englishness: the town agent Mr. Casby, after all, describes Tattycoram as "a fine full-colored young woman . . . with very dark hair and very dark eyes" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 523). While Mr. Casby's description of Tattycoram offers few geographic particulars, her "very dark" physique might readily suggest "Eastern" womanhood, especially as she and Miss Wade return from Egypt with a new, erotically charged connection. Nevertheless, these are associations that the novel declines to lay out in any overt way.

[13] *Second Report from the Select Committee Appointed to Consider of the Means of Improving and Maintaining the Foreign Trade of the Country: Quarantine* (London: House of Commons, 1824), p. 78.

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In lieu of the harem, Dickens offers the quarantine, which redoubles a number of the conventions that also appear in texts about the harem, but in a much more ambivalent and partial mode. On the one hand, like the quarantine, the harem regularly features in nineteenth-century British writing as an antimodern institution at odds with the principles of liberalism. For many British writers in this period, the imagined Orient becomes symbolized by what Edward Said has famously summarized as "the sensual woman, the harem, and the despotic—but curiously attractive—ruler."[14] Writing about Mary Wollstonecraft, Saree Makdisi has, for instance, argued that many early-nineteenth-century liberals choose to align the figure of the "Oriental" despot who lords over the harem with that of a tyrannical and historically residual English aristocrat[15]—a model of historical holdover that resembles that of Maclean's anti-quarantine screeds. On the other hand, though, for all the anti-quarantine lobby did their best to link quarantine with antiquatedness and unfree trade across borders, quarantine could also signal the opposite. During this same period, European powers were encouraging quarantine in Egypt as a modern measure to support (rather than hinder) their desire for an Egyptian economy built around commodity exports to Europe. Systematic quarantine in Egypt only arrived with the French expedition in 1799; Mehmet Ali Pasha, though, kept it in place during his rule as he sought to challenge the authority of the Ottoman Empire and rule Egypt through a centralized and Europeanized bureaucracy. In Egypt, as the historian Alan Mikhail suggests, quarantine broke social ties and enforced a rationalized subjection to state authority in a way that paralleled the forced reorganization of labor that went hand in hand with Egypt's increasing economic orientation to European capital. Thus, the same cotton production that cemented the imposition of aggressive quarantine

[14] Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique*, no. 1 (1985), 103. See also Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 9–10.

[15] See Saree Makdisi, *Making England Western: Occidentalism, Race, and Imperial Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 14.

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practices in Egypt also occasioned the anti-quarantine lobby in Britain.

Moreover, even with respect to maritime quarantine in Europe itself, the efforts to spectacularize quarantine were contested by skeptics who sought to cast quarantine as unexceptional and wholly compatible with the principles of liberal capitalism. The confinement of quarantine was normally temporary, and travelers coming through quarantine complained of tedium as much as anything else. Even the expurgators, whose jobs entailed fleshly contact with the incalculable surplus that Neel Ahuja calls "dread life," frequently figured as free participants in an economic contract rather than as victims in a Gothic plot.[16] "If the practice is that merely the sides of a bag of cotton are stripped open, and the arm of the expurgator thrust into it, are you of opinion that is any airing?" the Committee asked the eminent physician Sir Gilbert Blane, who replied by telling the Committee what they likely already knew: "The security also arises from the escape from disease of the person who exposes his body to it," Blane explained, acknowledging that the men worked as test subjects, paid to risk infection (*Second Report from the Select Committee* [1824], p. 54). Expurgation, Blane confirmed, was less about purging disease; the stated premise that fresh air will remove infection provided a rhetoric that softens the bald economics of risk management. Nevertheless, the Committee asked whether there was a shortage of volunteers for the job, and about the pay offered for the positions. In doing so, they routed the discussion of exposure and disease squarely back into the scene of wage labor and voluntary contract.

Quarantine, that is to say, occupied a more ambivalent place in the pantheon of Gothic spaces than either the British vision of the harem or even the prison that, in Lionel Trilling's influential 1953 interpretation of *Little Dorrit,* stands as the novel's main "informing symbol."[17] In spite of the anti-quarantine lobby's efforts, quarantine offered a feebler case

[16] See Neel Ahuja, *Bioinsecurities: Disease Interventions, Empire, and the Government of Species* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2016), p. 9.

[17] Lionel Trilling, "Little Dorrit," *Kenyon Review,* 15 (1953), 578.

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for the evocation of moral panic than the lobby might have wished. First, quarantine invoked no scapegoatable types, those "folk devils" of Stanley Cohen's early theorization of moral panic that Rubin was so deftly (if bizarrely) able to link to the speciated types of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* (1976). No one, on either side of the quarantine debate, suggested that passengers would be turned into types produced by their time in the quarantine; Tattycoram, in fact, is rare in describing quarantine as a place of change, when she claims that she "never was like this but twice, over in the quarantine yonder" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 25). Second, in clamoring for less rather than more regulation of physical contact, the anti-quarantine campaign's invocation of unseemly touch sits uneasily with the fact that most theorists, Stuart Hall most famously, maintain that moral panics seek to generate intensified criminalization and state power. This is not an intensification that holds true in the debates over quarantine.[18] Though we would do well to heed what many border activists have argued, namely that free trade proliferates rather than diminishes border policing, free trade's interest in criminalization and coercion in the early nineteenth century lay predominantly in other realms than Europe's maritime quarantine stations. At this moment, mass immigration from the Middle East was not a significant concern in Western Europe; indeed, as Felicita Tramontana points out, migration across the Mediterranean typically went the other direction through the nineteenth century, as peasants from Spain, Malta, Italy, and France relocated to North Africa in considerable numbers.[19] Instead, Europe's maritime quarantine stations focused as much on foreign commodities and Europe's own

[18] Hall, for instance, maintains that the moral panic supports "increasingly coercive measures on the part of the state, and lends its legitimacy to a 'more than usual' exercise of control" (Stuart Hall, et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* [New York: Palgrave, 1978], p. 221). See David Garland, "On the Concept of Moral Panic," *Crime, Media, Culture*, 4 (2008), 19.

[19] See Felicita Tramontana, "Migrants Have Crossed the Mediterranean for Centuries—But They Used to Head from North to South," *The Conversation: Academic Rigor, Journalistic Flair* (blog), 26 June 2018; available online at <http://theconversation.com/migrants-have-crossed-the-mediterranean-for-centuries-but-they-used-to-head-from-north-to-south-97287>.

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traveling citizens as on the heterogeneous mix of other travelers who might be present. As a result, maritime quarantine functioned as less aggressive occasions for policing than quarantines in other times and places.

What maritime quarantine offers Dickens, then, is something like Gothic Lite—evocative enough to suggest constraint and the dangerous pleasures of illicit touch, but in a half-hearted, temporary, and disputable way. Moreover, *Little Dorrit,* as I will show in the last section of this essay, makes it clear that, however much Mr. Meagles may dislike the lazaretto, the novel nonetheless remains unable to position quarantine as an obvious antagonist to some vision of global economic circulation that it likes better. Rather, *Little Dorrit* intuits a continuity between confinement and free movement, and indeed between the feudalized past and an increasingly capitalized present. This version of quarantine, that is, gives the lie to the idea that state authority is necessarily at odds with increasing embeddedness in capitalist free trade—a view that perhaps helps account for why the lazaretto slips so smoothly into the hotel in the novel's second chapter. Though Dickens elsewhere works to contrast the abundance of the hotel with the sparseness of quarantine, the "badness" that afflicts Tattycoram nonetheless flourishes in both spaces, as though restaging the sickness associated with confinement into one characterized by movement. For Tattycoram, that is, the hotel may be associated with free movement and voluntary rental residence, but it also remains an extension of quarantine space.

In *Little Dorrit,* these contradictions between the supposed formal equivalencies of liberal capitalism and the Gothic aesthetics of domination form the matrix for Tattycoram's relationship to Miss Wade. Every time we see the pair together, Dickens develops a tense narrative space in which his wish to make Tattycoram and Miss Wade appear similar butts up against his desire to establish them in a heavily ironized relation of domination and submission. His staging of this tension, moreover, relies on a series of references that link

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the two women back to their quarantine meeting earlier in the novel: Dickens emphasizes, first, their movement across cities and borders and, second, their affiliations with "the East" (they live, the narrator notes, as though "in an Eastern caravanserai" [*Little Dorrit*, p. 347]). In doing so, the novel turns to Tattycoram to ask a question—a familiar one in the history of Marxist feminism—about whether the economic model of the household under capitalism does or does not resemble a feudal mode of production.

Thus, when Annamarie Jagose makes a case that queer historiography has often appropriated Miss Wade for presentist ends, it is especially apt that she does so in the following words: "That Miss Wade has lodged so immovably in my memory is surely the consequence of a series of connections and associations whose investment in the present should not be misrecognized as any purchase on the past" (*Inconsequence*, p. 38). Possibly unwittingly, the terms in which Jagose presents her memorial might have been drawn from the novel itself. "That immovable woman" is Mr. Meagles's epithet for Miss Wade; and Miss Wade herself notes that she chooses to be "immovable and silent" in the face of perceived condescension from her fiancé's acquaintances (*Little Dorrit*, pp. 316, 648). Nonetheless, it is an appellation that seems as though it ought to be ironic: except in Jagose's memory, Miss Wade is, after all, not immovably lodged anywhere. Anything but settled, Miss Wade occupies residences in first London and then Calais that are both "to let" (pp. 317, 636) when Arthur and Mr. Meagles find her. In Amanda Anderson's words, she is "always wandering, never truly dwelling."[20] Miss Wade's immovability, that is, names an implacable social bearing at odds with her cheap and temporary housing.

As a result, Miss Wade recasts the more obviously Gothic confinement plot that surrounds the Clennam house, which famously collapses into a pile of rubble as part of the novel's denouement.[21] If the Gothic trades in the effects of an

[20] Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), p. 81.

[21] Alison Milbank notes that "the Clennam house fulfils every one of a list of Gothic criteria: it is ancient, uncared for, ruinous, haunted, defended by rusty iron railings,

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antiquated or ruined past (often embodied in a decaying mansion or other grand, ancient building), then Dickens develops the Clennam plot as the novel's clearest invocation of Gothic tropes, what with its tottering edifice and aged matriarch who thinks that Plagues of Egypt swag makes for great interior décor. In contrast to the Clennam house, Miss Wade's lodgings, dark and dingy though they are, hardly make bank. Certainly, they have the potential to be terrifying places of Gothic horror: in a Calais that the narrator describes as an "unsightly marine cemetery" (*Little Dorrit,* p. 632), the house where Arthur finds Miss Wade and Tattycoram is enough of a "dead sort of house" (p. 635) to boast withered vegetation, a dried up fountain, and a pedestal for a missing statue. But this "sort of" house can only be categorized as dead by approximation: belonging to the type and yet only somewhat of it. The spaces in which Tattycoram and Miss Wade live are neither sublime nor confining. Inside the Calais room, the mirrors are broken, the vases gaudy, and the flowers artificial, but the room is also too humble to command the majesty of terror. Diminutive furnishings such as the "little straw mat, little round table with a tumultuous assemblage of legs" (p. 636) make the room appear rustic and unprepossessing—perhaps a way station on a Gothic heroine's travels to a properly entrapping mansion, but not the final, horror-laden space itself. And indeed, neither this home nor the London one in and of themselves reduplicate the imprisonment that animates other spaces in the novel: Miss Wade and Tattycoram are always about to abandon them in the moments in which we find them.

As the name suggests, the Gothic, as a genre, invokes feudal premodernity to spectacularize a kind of carcerality that flattens distinctions between home, prison, and the seat of state power. Nonliberal, unmodern, and noncontractarian, the Gothic identifies carceral terror as the exercise of tyrannical power over someone—usually a woman—whose plight becomes exemplified in her inability to exercise free contract by refusing a marriage or moving freely through space. On

gloomy and deathly" (Milbank, *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992], p. 108).

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some level, Miss Wade and Tattycoram seem to embody these conventions. Hilary M. Schor maintains that Dickens's handling of Miss Wade warrants comparison to Robert Browning's dramatic monologues.[22] There are assuredly affinities, for instance, between the cold rage of the Duke of Ferrara in Browning's 1842 "My Last Duchess" and Miss Wade, who rails against the beloved "stupid mite" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 644) who dares to have affection for friends and cousins.

But the late Duchess, whom the Duke opines does not adequately respect his "gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name," has a plight that differs from Tattycoram's in a number of crucial respects.[23] First, the implied domestic violence that looms large in Browning's poem does not strongly animate the Wade/Tattycoram plot. Miss Wade at times holds Tattycoram's hand in a controlling way, and once puts an arm possessively around her waist; but in a novel that does not shy away from telling us about Jeremiah Flintwinch's abuse of his wife Affery, it is hard to make a case that these gestures mask deeper physical brutality. Second, Dickens pairs these scenes of controlling touch alongside Tattycoram's declaration of her at least nominally free assent. Though she highlights that she has been dependent on Miss Wade, Tattycoram insists upon this freedom even when she returns to the Meagleses—it matters to her in her telling of the history of that relationship. What has been frightening has not been the tyranny of repressive power, but something else. In the speech to the Meagleses in which she explains why she has quit Miss Wade's company, Tattycoram avows of Miss Wade: "I know she had got a power over me, through understanding what was bad in me, so well. It was a madness in me, and she could raise it whenever she liked" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 787). Manipulative though Miss Wade's power may be, this form of control is almost opposite to the gaslighting that Affery experiences in the Clennam house: Affery is beaten and threatened into misrecognizing her perceptions

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[22] See Schor, *Dickens and the Daughter of the House*, p. 133.

[23] Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess," in *Robert Browning's Poetry: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*, ed. James F. Loucks (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1979), p. 58, l. 33.

as dreams, whereas Tattycoram is afraid because she feels so clearly seen and understood.

Tattycoram's fear, that is, accompanies rather than opposes formal self-possession and at-will contractualism—a fear that comes from social relations that are liberalized and modern. Though Dickens at times invokes the language of feudal dependency to describe Tattycoram's relationship to Miss Wade, he is as likely as not to undercut himself when doing so. Never does the novel seek to undermine Tattycoram's insistence that she is both insolated and precariously dependent on Miss Wade, bereft as she is of any non-Meagles social network on whom she might rely. But in moments in which Dickens raises the idea that her vulnerability invokes feudal serfdom, the novel flips into comic skepticism. When Arthur Clennam leaves their Calais home, he looks at two women who seem to be mirror images, "each proudly cherishing her own anger; each, with a fixed determination" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 643). This picture of equivalence quickly contorts itself into one of dominance and submission: "Miss Wade barely inclined her head, and Harriet, with the assumed humiliation of an abject dependant and serf (but not without defiance for all that), made as if she were too low to notice or to be noticed" (p. 643). Nevertheless, *Little Dorrit* undercuts this image of asymmetry with considerable skepticism: this is, after all, the "*assumed* humiliation" that is only "as if" that of a serf. The two sentences are placed to haunt one another—formal equivalence by the pageantry of submission, and vice versa.

Reading Miss Wade and Tattycoram as displaying Gothicized carcerality in any straightforward way, therefore, risks missing how *Little Dorrit* stages a zone of overlap between free contract and feudalized dependency. Miss Wade insists zealously that she offers Tattycoram acknowledgment as an adult able to contract the conditions of intimacy, a relationship premised on similarity rather than on subordinating difference. The narrator may claim that Miss Wade places her arm around Tattycoram as though taking "possession of her for evermore" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 323). But it is a phrase that misrecognizes both the realities and the aspirations of their attachment—both Miss Wade and Tattycoram insist that they cohabitate only at will.

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Jeff Nunokawa's view that Dickens casts Miss Wade as an "unabashedly acquisitive woman" rings only half right.[24] At a minimum, if Miss Wade is acquisitive, then she is not very good at it, seeing as she has accumulated neither people nor wealth by the end of the book. Miss Wade is a fierce and controlling monogamist, who is jealous to the point of evoking what Claire Jarvis calls "queenly cruelty."[25] But possessiveness is not the same as acquisitiveness—and Miss Wade rather throws off acquiring people, including those who can give her access to wealth, as soon as she detects even a hint of patronage or condescension. Moreover, there is no reason not to believe her when she claims that she and Tattycoram are "sharing [her] small means" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 651) and that the economic distribution between them is more equitable than the allocation of resources in the Meagles house.

If Miss Wade represents the precarity of a relation that falsely assumes the guise of a formal equality, this depiction inverts the figurations the Meagleses give to their treatment of Tattycoram. The worst charge that Tattycoram levies against Miss Wade—and it is awful—is that Miss Wade is "as bad as [the Meagleses] were, every bit" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 643): she expects, moreover, that this accusation will wound Miss Wade precisely because it refutes Miss Wade's insistence that they are on equal footing, freely contracting adults. To some considerable extent, Tattycoram experiences an inseparable entanglement of both contract and dependency with Miss Wade as well as with the Meagleses. But the relationship between the violence of free contract and feudalized coercion and dependency work differently in the two households.

With respect to the Meagleses, one would expect to find an emphasis on contractualism and formal freedom. *Little Dorrit*, after all, stages Tattycoram's servitude there in relation to a family that it also strongly identifies with the liberal refusal of patronage. As a retired banker who supports the efforts of mysterious factory owners Doyce and Clennam against the

[24] Jeff Nunokawa, *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), p. 36.

[25] Claire Jarvis, *Exquisite Masochism: Marriage, Sex, and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2016), p. 11.

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obstructions of the Circumlocution Office, Mr. Meagles should be well positioned to propound the supposed virtues of modern capitalist wage relations. He nevertheless refuses to cast his interactions with Tattycoram in this way. In addition to expressions of familialism and affection that belie Tattycoram's subordinate position as Pet's maid, and the scenes in which Mr. Meagles disciplines Tattycoram's rage over the familial accounting by having her count out loud, he stages the only instance of a definite moment of actual incarceration that Tattycoram experiences in the novel. Mr. Meagles recounts to Arthur Clennam that, after Tattycoram announces her intention to leave the house, "I quietly told her that she should not go at that late hour of night, and I gave her my hand and took her to her room, and locked the house-doors" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 315).

Such pantomimes of obedience and submission recur in Tattycoram's relationship to Miss Wade. But the two domestic scenarios differ, in that none of the sameness, mirroring, or equivalence that Tattycoram also experiences with Miss Wade ever appears in the Meagles house. In this respect, it is instructive that Tattycoram—the third of the women in the novel whose lives are structured by illegitimate birth—is the only other character, in addition to Miss Wade and Mrs. Clennam, whom Dickens describes as "immovable." She becomes so, moreover, only at the moment in which the Meagleses ask her to repudiate Miss Wade. Having instructed Tattycoram to take her hands away because the mere mention of Miss Wade makes her "feel as if some one else was touching [her]" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 191), Pet Meagles eventually puts her hand above her shoulder for Tattycoram to take. Dickens tells us that before accepting the hand and caressing it, Tattycoram "stood for a moment, immovable" (p. 191). As she appears to channel Miss Wade's touch, Tattycoram inhabits an immovability that marks both a state of refusal in which she becomes Wade-like and also a moment of faltering—she is physically immovable in the face of Pet's demands, but unable, for the time being, to advance toward a decision. For Mrs. Clennam and Miss Wade both, being "immovable" entails an excess of resolution, even in the face of strong appeals to the contrary. For Tattycoram, it names

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the temptation toward this orientation, but also the hesitation that, for the time being, inhibits her from choosing it. If immovability names Mrs. Clennam's near-total identification with her Gothic house as well as Miss Wade's far more ambivalently ironized inhabitation of the spatial and governmental tropes of the Gothic, then, for Tattycoram, the immovable names an aporia between two intimate configurations that each mingle confinement and freedom, feudalism and "free" contract.

By the end of *Little Dorrit,* the terms of this impasse will reemerge in explicit relation to Tattycoram's ability to transport a box of documents that detail, first, the secret of Arthur Clennam's parentage and, second, the related fact that, in the service of keeping this secret, Mrs. Clennam has cheated Amy Dorrit out of 1,000 guineas that she ought to have inherited from Arthur's great-uncle. This box represents the only point of connection between Tattycoram or Miss Wade and the novel's eponymous heroine. Rigaud has given the box to Miss Wade for safekeeping; Tattycoram takes it from Miss Wade and uses its restitution as a way of returning to her place in the Meagles house. However important she thinks the box may be, Tattycoram is nonetheless not the most efficient courier: she takes the same boat across the channel with Mr. Meagles but hides herself while shipboard and only returns the box once back in England. Having caught up to the Meagleses at the Marshalsea, Tattycoram is present when, moments later, Amy arrives and claims the documents. It is the lone moment in the novel in which Tattycoram comes to know anything of Little Dorrit.

The negotiations over this stolen box could have been drawn from Charles Maclean's playbook: "Such are the evils of delay," quips Rigaud as he increases his extortion of Mrs. Clennam from 1,000 pounds to 2,000 pounds (*Little Dorrit,* p. 748). Rigaud's quip about the costs of delay suggests that, on some level, the box mimics the problem of money lost to quarantine. Rigaud is, after all, an investor in circulation rather than in production—his trade entails monetizing the timing

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and movement of the box. The box, though, is not a commodity in the way that the cotton is; the value in question is labor congealed not in the material stuff of the commodity, but rather at an additional remove, congealed somewhere other than in the making of the codicil itself. Rigaud, that is, invests in the circulation of a document that is also itself an instrument of circulation. In this respect, he doubles another of *Little Dorrit*'s core villains, Mr. Merdle, whose forgery and robbery occurs in the scene of what the no less odious Lord Decimus Barnacle touts as "Gigantic Enterprise, The Wealth of England, Elasticity, Credit, Capital, Prosperity" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 672). The novel insists that there is no scheme in which Merdle does not participate, but Merdle's own supposed business, as far as anyone can tell, is purely finance. Most critics agree that Dickens models Merdle on John Sadleir, whose ruinous overinvestments caused the 1856 crash of the Tipperary Bank. But Dickens also sets the novel in the years of a financial panic that economic historians often name as resulting, for the first time, in the diversification of the stock-exchange and varied but quotidian financial activity—"an investment here, a loan there," as Alexander Dick puts it.[26] Like the cause of the 1825 crash, Merdle stands in for wide-ranging and diversified financial speculation, as opposed to the collapse of a particular company, sector, or commodity; of speculation that can appear to be separate from any specified kind of commodity production—of, to use Karl Marx's term, "fictitious capital."[27] This is capital that Dickens identifies with both speed and sickness: the chapter detailing the rapid spread of Merdle mania is, after all, called "The Progress of an Epidemic."

The Merdle plot represents an odd moment in a book famous for its depiction of the Circumlocution Office, which uses its reams of forms to enforce delay. The interminable

[26] Alexander J. Dick, "On the Financial Crisis, 1825–26," *BRANCH: Britain, Representation, and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. Dino Franco Felluga; extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, n.d., accessed 12 April 2019; available online at <https://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=alexander-j-dick-on-the-financial-crisis-1825–26>.

[27] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume Three*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 525.

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stalling at the Circumlocution Office keeps Daniel Doyce from producing his mysterious invention in England. Thus, while the Merdle epidemic occurs because of excessive rapidity, Doyce and Clennam need to thwart slowness in order to get production off the ground. In contrast to Merdle's financial empire, Doyce and Clennam are making *something*; Dickens insists on this point, even though the novel reveals neither what that something is nor the details of the production process required for making it. On some level, then, it seems to turn Doyce and Clennam into pure exchange-value, by eradicating the materiality of the commodity they make and that of the means of production required for producing it. Nevertheless, *Little Dorrit* insists that the commodity exists—it matters that, as capitalists, Doyce and Clennam are engaged in production rather than in circulation alone. The novel relies on factory production and the successful defeat of the efforts of the slowing Circumlocution Office to resolve the plot, in that it is the success of this mysterious commodity that frees Arthur from the Marshalsea and allows him to marry Amy Dorrit, newly reimpoverished after her family has lost all its money in the Merdle swindle.

Rigaud's quip, as well as the scene in which Tattycoram returns the box, make it look as though the documents ought to be aligned with the economy of the Doyce and Clennam plot, in which the costs of delay are paramount. When Tattycoram acts as a courier for this box, she thinks that she is intercepting some kind of scheme that she intuits to be nefarious. In returning the box, she knows she interrupts whatever is being cost by its delay, though it is not clear that she knows what the contents of the box are, let alone why they matter. Though Tattycoram may not be quick to pass the box to the Meagleses, *Little Dorrit* narrates the transfer with remarkable speed: in less than a page, Dickens has Mr. Meagles leave Miss Wade's in Calais, return to England, arrive at the Marshalsea, and be reunited with Tattycoram. It seems to argue for the box's importance, and for the dramatic urgency of its return. You could, after all, hardly ask for more in a penultimate chapter of a very long novel than an international chase scene and the return of a secret codicil to a will.

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This moment, though, is stranger than it looks at first blush. It invokes all the genre conventions of urgent narrative resolution: Tattycoram, in the syuzhet if not the fabula, appears as an agent of which any delivery company would be proud. Nevertheless, though Tattycoram may act as the character who mimes the conditions for narrative resolution, the delivery also marks the awkward place where the plot fails to come together in the way that Dickens hoped: he lamented to his friend John Forster that he had wished to make Miss Wade and Tattycoram more smoothly integrated into "the blood of the book."[28] The strangeness of this moment in *Little Dorrit* stands out, then, as the odd narrative blip in which Dickens attempts to suture the two plotlines together. But at the same time, the narrative speediness of the return of the box also reflects Tattycoram's peripheral status in the broader narrative. Dickens has given her a plot that he lacks time and space to resolve in any elaborate way.

This peripherality might make it seem as though Tattycoram plays second fiddle to the box of secrets, especially given that, as Jesse Rosenthal argues, the box becomes a figure of the novel's central plot, with its "series of deviations and delays" and "messages still to be delivered" at the end.[29] The box is nonetheless no less narratively extraneous than Tattycoram herself. Even aside from the fact that Amy insists that Arthur burn the codicil unread as they head off to be married, the documents that Tattycoram delivers are the originals of copies that Amy has already received from Rigaud; Tattycoram delivers her no new information. Moreover, as far as the unfolding of the marriage plot goes, nothing hangs on having these documents get to Amy twice—the duplication is diegetically redundant. Thus, what the delivery of the box accomplishes is, in fact, to return Tattycoram to the Meagleses—which is to say, the documents are a vehicle for Tattycoram, rather than the other way around.

There is another reason for understanding the box as being about Tattycoram more than the resolution of the

[28] John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 2 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1876), II, 227.

[29] Jesse Rosenthal, "The Untrusted Medium: Open Networks, Secret Writing, and *Little Dorrit*," *Victorian Studies*, 59 (2017), 294.

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marriage plot. Because the box's secret documents detail Arthur's illegitimacy, the box is connected to Tattycoram and Miss Wade thematically as well as diegetically. When Tattycoram delivers the box, then, she delivers a secret of the kind that shapes her erotic being in the world, a kind of portable closet for Arthur Clennam, who does not even know that he has such a thing. If *Little Dorrit* is at all interested in merging the erotic with the concept of identity, it is so only to the extent that the novel is relentless in staging Tattycoram and Miss Wade as a couple united by illegitimate births that occasion economic anger mobilized into passionate fervor. In John D'Emilio's classic essay "Capitalism and Gay Identity" (1983), "identity" names a recognized being-in-the-world made possible by a long historical shift from household production to free labor.[30] *Little Dorrit*, with a rugged insistence on the letter of the law, instead designates identity through parentage, legal records, and the economic consequences of illegitimate birth. "She has no name, I have no name," Miss Wade explains curtly when Mr. Meagles condemns her with the affront, "I don't know what you are, but you don't hide, can't hide, what a dark spirit you have within you," adding that he is "old enough" to have heard of women who take "a perverted delight in making a sister-woman" into wretches like themselves (*Little Dorrit*, pp. 324, 323). The *double entendre* that makes having "no name" a sign of both illegitimacy and queerness is not subtle. Having "no name" seems like it ought to make you interchangeable, anti-identitarian, and unbound, but *Little Dorrit* insists otherwise: it is this quality that enables Tattycoram and Miss Wade to appear like formal equivalents but also fixed and immovable, and thus decidedly distinct from the freely laboring communities of gay men and lesbians that populate D'Emilio's analysis.

Freed from the encumbrances of a birth family, illegitimacy might seem to mean an erotic identity that promises free contract and free association, those historical conditions that loom large in D'Emilio's essay—or for that matter, a literalized

[30] See John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), p. 102.

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version of the wish to "feel historical" that Christopher Nealon invokes when he chooses "foundlings" as a metaphor for queer lives in the early-twentieth-century United States.[31] But *Little Dorrit* refuses these models. Namelessness becomes a kind of fixity that both Tattycoram and Miss Wade perceive as lost economic value. In this novel, the success of the marriage plot requires the successful production of an unknown commodity, in an economic model in which conquering delay and obstruction has been paramount. In contrast, Tattycoram on some level parallels this movement, inasmuch as she moves from the space of quarantine to the rapidity of couriership that facilitates a reunion with the Meagleses that can be said to double the marriage plot. But, unlike in the case of Doyce and Clennam, Tattycoram participates in logistics that do not deliver, standing as a kind of hope in circulation that the novel does not anticipate will succeed.

In borrowing the urgency of logistics, prevalent in anti-quarantine critique, to get Tattycoram back to the Meagleses, Dickens returns her to a space that appears to take her out of circulation and back to the ambivalent space that is neither the family nor the wage. Mr. Meagles's disciplining of Tatty demands that she learn to control herself through counting, as though attuning her to numerical sequencing will quell the anger she experiences over her exploitation. What Tattycoram promises to do when she returns to the Meagleses is "get better by very slow degrees," counting to ever-higher numbers: "I hope I shall never be quite so bad again, and that I shall get better by very slow degrees. I'll try very hard. I won't stop at five-and-twenty, sir. I'll count five-and-twenty hundred, five-and-twenty thousand!" (*Little Dorrit*, p. 787). Among the things that this statement tells us is that Tattycoram is still angry: she is not better yet, and imagines herself looped into a perpetual, but slow, reciting of numbers that substitutes for the *accounting* of which she is all too well aware—that indeed has been the basis for her attachment to Miss Wade all along. Here too we see Tattycoram rehearsing the terms of value as emptied-out form.

[31] See Christopher Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2001).

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This scene is the last we hear of either Miss Wade or Tattycoram; in a sense, the novel's last word on queerness is fully reducible neither to pathologized identity nor to a relation to conjugal family, but rather it leaves us with an affectively charged enactment of valueless accumulation, an unreconcilable account.

University of California, Davis

ABSTRACT

Kathleen Frederickson "Getting the Goods in *Little Dorrit*: Quarantine's Queer Logistics" (pp. 159–183)

Most queer readings of Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1857) have focused on Miss Wade as a figure of proto-sexological pathology. Flipping critical attention to Tattycoram instead allows us to reexamine sexuality and quarantine in economic terms. Dickens chooses quarantine over other possible spaces of touch and confinement because it flags Tattycoram's entry into the plot around these economics of circulation—the ability to profit from the movement rather than the production of commodities. In the 1820s, when *Little Dorrit* is set, a vocal anti-quarantine lobby was stridently lamenting the financial losses occasioned by holding goods in quarantine as they came into Europe from the Levant—a lament that was especially loud when it came to the costs incurred by northern mill owners who were importing increasingly large quantities of cotton from plague-prone Egypt. Dickens invokes the quarantine as the origin point of the connection between Tattycoram and Miss Wade to route a set of Gothic thematics through a scanty but significant plot structure that relies on what I call "logistical aesthetics," by which I mean logistics rendered as form and tone, even when emptied of substantial parts of its diegetic function. *Little Dorrit* mixes its interest in the circulation of capital with the economics of inheritance, figured most prominently in the movement of the iron box containing the details of Arthur Clennam's parentage. Tattycoram's couriering of this box borrows the logistical urgency of anti-quarantine critique seemingly in the service of narrative resolution, drawing on logistics as a formal resource that substitutes narrative value for an absented economic value that, the novel suggests, occupies the place of her queerness. This joint focus on delivery and inheritance, moreover, strongly shapes the politics of kinship, intimacy, and desire for Tattycoram and Miss Wade.

Keywords: Charles Dickens; *Little Dorrit*; quarantine; logistics; sexuality

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