

Dickens's Perception of Female Personality: Representation of Lady Dedlock and Esther Summerson in *Bleak House*

Azmi Azam

Anglia Ruskin University, Department of English, Communication, Film and Media, Faculty of Arts,
Law and Social Science, Cambridge, England

*Corresponding author: azmiazam13@yahoo.com

Copyright © 2014 Horizon Research Publishing. All rights reserved.

Abstract Dickens's concept of female personality shown in *Bleak House* (1852-53) is one of his most sensitive as well as complex representations of womanhood. Lady Dedlock and Esther Summerson, the two female protagonists of the novel are the best examples. Therefore, this essay will display the character of Lady Dedlock and Esther with multiple points of views to illustrate Dickens's notions regarding women. The study will evaluate the psychological turmoil of the two characters, as well as their ways of survival in the male centric society of the then England. It will also focus on Dickens's concept of home and the contribution as well as the role of women in such situations. Moreover, comparative study between characters will be shown to throw more light on the argument and Dickens's intention for such character sketches of women will be explained. Additionally, comparisons between Dickens's female characters and other characters from literature will be presented to clarify his views.

Keywords Lady Dedlock, Esther Summerson, Victorian Feminism, Motherhood, Patriarchy, Pessimism, Feminism

1. Dickens's Life

This greatest of Victorian writers, Charles Dickens was born in Landport, Portsmouth, on February 7, 1812. His father John worked as a clerk in the Navy Payroll Office in Portsmouth, and was transferred several times, first to London, then to Chatham, and finally, in 1822, back to London, where the family lived in Camden Town. John Dickens was constantly in debt, and in 1824 he was imprisoned in Marshalsea debtor's prison (Southwark). Charles Dickens was forced to leave school at the age of 12 and go to work in a bootblack factory to help support the Dickens family. It was his personal experience of factory work and the living conditions of the poor that created in Dickens the compassion, which was to mark his literary

works such as *Oliver Twist*. John Dickens was released from the purgatory of Warren's Blacking Factory when he received a legacy from a relative, and could finally pay his debts and be set free from Marshalsea. So Charles Dickens went to Wellington House Academy for two years, then took work at Gray's Inn as a clerk.

Dickens worked as a Parliamentary reporter before finally moving on to *The Morning Chronicle* in 1834. His first published work appeared in *Monthly Magazine* in December 1833, and he followed it with nine more, penning his name as "Boz" to the last two articles. The pseudonym "Boz" was drawn from a pet name for his younger brother when they were children. In 1836 his articles were compiled and published as *Sketches by Boz*.

Shortly after *Boz* was published, Dickens married to Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of a co-worker at the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper. Together they had 10 children before they separated in 1858, yet it was not Catherine but her younger sister, Mary, who was to prove the inspiration for many of Dickens's literary heroines. She remained to him an ideal of womanhood that found expression in his characters such as Rose Maylie in *Oliver Twist*, and Agnes Wickfield in *David Copperfield*. Dickens followed up *Sketches* with his first commercial success, *Pickwick Papers* (more properly *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*). This collection of 20 short stories was appeared in monthly installments and it became a publishing phenomenon — easily the most widely read literary work in English to that date. Although the series was largely humorous, it also dealt with the grim social iniquities of the time, and it was this awareness and concern for the plight of the lower classes that was to mark much of Dickens's life work.

Dickens was working on another serialized novel while *Pickwick Papers* was running. This work proved to be one of his most enduring, a tale of innocence amid the squalor of London's criminal classes, *Oliver Twist*, which was published from 1837-38. Dickens kept up his prodigious output, and *Nicholas Nickleby* followed quickly on the heels

of *Oliver Twist*. In his new work Dickens tried to combine the humor of *Pickwick* with the cry for social reforms of *Oliver*. It worked, and sales of *Nicholas Nickleby* reached 50,000 copies every month.

Dickens started his own magazine, a weekly titled *Master Humphrey's Clock*. In *MHC* he introduced the tragic heroine, Little Nell, in the serialized tale of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. It was this work which gave him international fame, and the name of Charles Dickens spread to the USA, where he was enormously popular. In December 1843 Dickens wrote one of his most enduring works, the short story entitled *A Christmas Carol*. Lesser known Christmas tales followed in subsequent years, such as *The Chimes* (1844) and *The Cricket and the Hearth* (1845). In these stories and his longer works Dickens constantly returned to themes of social inequality and oppression of the poor. The largely autobiographical *David Copperfield* followed in 1850. In that year he also helped found the Guild of Literature and Arts to assist struggling artists. The Guild raised money through public theatrical performances, and Dickens was a regular performer at Guild events. He loved the stage, and it was this love of dramatic performance, which he brought to public readings of his works. Dickens literary output remained prolific, with later works including *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860-61), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65).

Charles Dickens died on June 9, 1870 and was buried at Westminster Abbey.

2. Dickens's *Bleak House* and London

Bleak House is one of Dickens' finest achievements, establishing his reputation as a serious and mature novelist, as well as a brilliant comic writer. It is at once a complex mystery story that fully engages the reader in the work of detection, and an unforgettable indictment of an indifferent society. Its representations of a great city's underworld, and of the law's corruption and delay, draw upon the author's personal knowledge and experience.

But it is his symbolic art that projects these things in a vision that embraces black comedy, cosmic farce, and tragic ruin. In a unique creative experiment, Dickens divides the narrative between his heroine, Esther Summerson, who is psychologically interesting in her own right, and an unnamed narrator whose perspective both complements and challenges hers.

Generally, *Bleak House*, was intended to illustrate the evils caused by long, drawn-out suits in the Courts of Chancery. The story begins with the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, in the High Court of Chancery, which has been going on for a long time.

As the story unfolds it is revealed that Esther is the illegitimate daughter of Captain Hawdon and Lady Dedlock. When the Dedlock's lawyer, Tulkinghorn learns of this, and tries to profit by the information, he is murdered by Lady Dedlock's former maid. Lady Dedlock flees and later dies at

the gates of the cemetery where Hawdon lies buried. John Jarndyce falls in love with Esther and asked her to marry him. She consents out of respect for Jarndyce but during the engagement she falls in love with Allan Woodcourt. When Jarndyce learns of her feelings for Allan, he releases her from the engagement and she marries Woodcourt. The chancery case comes to a close with court costs eating up all of the estate. Carstone, who has married Ada, dies in despair.

3. Dickens and London

Dickens applied his unique power of observation to the city in which he spent most of his life and his descriptions of nineteenth century London allow readers to experience the sights, sounds, and smells of the old city. This ability to immerse the reader into time and place sets the perfect stage for Dickens to weave his fiction. Victorian London was the largest, most spectacular city in the world. While Britain was experiencing the Industrial Revolution, its capital was both reaping the benefits and suffering the consequences. Fashionable areas like Regent and Oxford streets were growing in the west, new docks supporting the city's place as the world's trade center were being built in the east. Perhaps the biggest impact on the growth of London was the coming of the railroad in the 1830s which displaced thousands and accelerated the expansion of the city.

In London of the early 19th century, the homes of the upper and middle class exist in close proximity to areas of unbelievable poverty and filth. Rich and poor alike are thrown together in the crowded city streets. Street sweepers attempt to keep the streets clean of manure, the result of thousands of horse-drawn vehicles. The city's thousands of chimney pots are belching coal smoke, resulting in soot which seems to settle everywhere. In many parts of the city raw sewage flows in gutters that empty into the Thames. Street vendors hawking their wares add to the cacophony of street noises. Pick-pockets, prostitutes, drunks, beggars, and vagabonds of every description add to the colorful multitudes. Personal cleanliness is not a big priority, nor is clean laundry.

The second half of the 19th century, London residents were still drinking water from the very same portions of the Thames that the open sewers were discharging into. Several outbreaks of cholera, along with the Great Stink of 1858, brought a cry for action. When cholera broke out in the Soho area in 1854, Dr. John Snow teamed with Rev. Henry Whitehead to prove that the disease was spread, not through foul odors and bad air, but by contaminated water.

Sir Joseph Bazalgette, chief engineer of the new Metropolitan Board of Works (1855), put into effect a plan in 1875, which finally provided adequate sewers to serve the city. In addition, laws were put in effect for filtration and sewerage procedures. In *Bleak House*, the problem with sanitation and unhealthy sewerage conditions has been depicted by showing the slum dwellers. The novel truly presents the then England real picture and marks Dickens as

a keen social observer.

The Victorian answer to dealing with the poor and indigent was the New Poor Law, enacted in 1834. Previously it had been the burden of the parishes to take care of the poor. The new law required parishes to band together and create regional workhouses where aid could be applied for. The workhouse was little more than a prison for the poor. Civil liberties were denied, families were separated, and human dignity was destroyed. The true poor often went to great lengths to avoid this relief.

Dickens, because of the childhood trauma caused by his father's imprisonment for debt and his consignment to the blacking factory to help support his family, was a true champion to the poor. He repeatedly pointed out the atrocities of the system through his novels. With the turn of the century and Queen Victoria's death in 1901 the Victorian period came to a close. Many of the ills of the 19th century were remedied through education, technology and social reform and by the social consciousness raised by the immensely popular novels of Dickens, and *Bleak House* is not an exception.

4. *Bleak House* and the Female Characters

The story of *Bleak House* depicts an aristocratic couple, Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock and the disintegration of their personal relationship, though the most attractive portion of the story is the discovery of Lady Dedlock's illegitimate child Esther Summerson and her struggle. The two major characters, Lady Dedlock and Esther, mark Dickens's mature conceptions of female personalities. They are extreme opposites of each other. On one hand, Lady Dedlock represents the society lady whereas Esther, on the other, represents the deprived unhappy illegitimate child who survives by her own efforts in society. The novel first introduces Lady Dedlock to readers as a typical self-conscious British lady. She once loved a man and had a child by him. Though she was truly in love, they could not marry each other because the man's profession and social status were disrespected.

As an ambitious self-conscious lady, she felt the need for social acknowledgment to be more important, thus she left her true love. Later, she marries a rich man who is more mature in age and sensibility than her, but she never finds the true taste of conjugal happiness. Therefore, she starts to keep herself busy in social interactions and duties as well as transforms herself as the perfect English beauty of the then England. This raises the question of whether a woman can be complete or successful if she gets the highest respects of the society, in terms of wealth and status, but lacks conjugal happiness. If a close inspection is provided, it will be found that Lady Dedlock carries some distinctive features exceptionally well. For instance — “she had beauty, pride, ambition, insolent resolve, and sense enough to portion out a legion of fine ladies. Wealth and station, added to these, soon

floated her upward; and for years, now, my Lady Dedlock has been at the center of the fashionable intelligence, and at the top of the fashionable tree” (Dickens 2008, p. 19). There is no doubt to the fact that Dickens has sketched this character with all the best features of an English lady but, she is found unhappy, as if something still has not been achieved by her.

The writer admits that “she is the best groomed woman in the whole stud” (Dickens 2008, p. 413), but such a hyperbolic statement fails to hide the emptiness in Lady Dedlock. This marks the question of a woman's true happiness. Moreover, she is marked as the archetypal fallen woman who has surrendered her virginity before matrimonial alliance as well as given birth to an illegitimate child. Also, she never had the courage to accept the child socially. This highlights the contrast between Lady Dedlock's external presentation and internal appearance. By showing such a high profile lady as unhappy, Dickens indirectly indicates that “Woman being clearly destined by God and Nature for a domestic role, the primary aim of her education should not be academic, still less cultivation of elegant ‘accomplishments’ such as music or sketching, but should focus on training her to become a wise and efficient housekeeper and manager of servants” (Slater 1983, p. 324).

This vision suggests female identities with a specific imagery of domestic outlook preferring that those who go beyond these criteria, suffer from melancholy. The definition of a woman in the Victorian era was traditional and Dickens thoroughly accepted it in sketching his characters. Therefore, by showing a recalcitrant character like Lady Dedlock, he indirectly displays the fact that Lady Dedlock is a woman of two different personalities. To the world, she is powerful, but to herself, she is timid and cowardly. She is one of the most critical Dickens's characters but one where Dickens himself fails to disclose all her complexities. In this regard, Dysen says, “Dickens, by mingling good and evil in his coincidences, keeps close to one of the delicate yet elusive mysteries of human destiny, our sense of irrational aspects haunting the most ordinary life” (Dysen 1987, p. 256). Therefore, she represents the typical rich lady who carries an imposture of faultless personality, but inside is just the opposite.

Moreover, in front of society, she hesitates to confess her guilt but, in the darkness of the wood, she confesses to Esther that she is responsible for Esther's suffering as well as her own inner torments. In fact, she admits that she is bound to suffer for her helplessness and says: “This is the earthly punishment I have brought upon myself. I bear it, and I hide it” (Dickens 2008, p. 535). This quotation shows that Dickens gives ample opportunities to his readers to discover the psychological complexities by directly presenting the character's dilemmas. By doing so, he suggests that women always hide their innermost tensions and agonies as if disclosing them will be a shame.

Such conservativeness, Dickens suggests, is one of the conventional female features. He describes Lady Dedlock with many characteristics, but also keeps many things

implied in order to allow his readers to evaluate the psychology of a woman like her. Similarly, Julia Kristeva says in "Woman Can Never Be Defined" that "in 'woman I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies'" (in Eagleton 1996, p. 267). Therefore, it can be argued that such a practice transforms Lady Dedlock into a discourse for readers in order to judge from multiple angles. Furthermore, her complex personality becomes more attractive to readers when Lady Dedlock is found feeling vulnerable both when she discovers her lover's grave, and Esther as her child whom she left.

5. Lady Dedlock as a Pity Figure

Readers feel pity for Lady Dedlock because she has been deprived of true love, happy married life and motherhood due to her own frailties. Dickens could have given a more positive touch to the character instead of a helpless female identity who has no way out but to flow through the social boundaries of that time. She could have married her lover, could have reared her child by herself, but Dickens avoided to plan such roles for a woman like her. By doing so, he marks that domestic happiness is only for those women who follow the traditional norms, and Lady Dedlock has willfully avoided such a notion.

There is no doubt that she has valued social status more than her inner urge of being a wife and a mother in the true sense of the term, though it is also evident that she is being constantly tormented between her urge of social respect and her emotional demands. It seems that the novelist has portrayed her as a woman who has been destined to suffer emotional turmoil as if "women in our culture are not simply encouraged but required to be the bearers of emotion, which men are culturally conditioned to repress, an epistemology which excludes emotions from the process of attaining knowledge radically undercuts women's epistemic authority" (Tompkins 1989, p. 123).

It seems that she has been victimized for solitary emotional suffrage because she has tried to be recalcitrant. Her suffering is that she wants to love her illegitimate child Esther but she could not accept her because of the risk of social shame. She reminds us of Aristotle's concept of ideal tragic hero because she encapsulates some of the features. She has *hubris* and arouses *catharsis* in the minds of readers. A secret discovery and sudden reversal of fortune's wheel for that discovery are also found in case of Lady Dedlock. The most important feature for Aristotelian tragic hero is that the individual is responsible for his/her own sufferings. Therefore, it can be said that she is a very striking tragic personality who is engaged in emotional turmoil for her own frailties. It is true that every human being in this world is imperfect and that imperfection triggers the individual to achieve the goal of perfection.

Similarly, Lady Dedlock tries to substitute her imperfection as a mother and a wife by being an effective

society eye-candy in aristocracy which Dickens highlights in the novel as the typical Victorian elite woman representative. Her bluntness reminds of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth who influenced Macbeth to commit the sin of murder in order to capture the crown of the king. At the end, it is found that the peak of conscience makes Lady Macbeth realize her guilt and damns her by letting her commit suicide.

Likewise, Lady Dedlock has been as stern and haughty as Lady Macbeth and her ambition of being elite leads her to hide her illegitimate child and marry an old rich man. At the end of the novel, she is found to be suffering from a sense of shame that causes psychological trauma as her punishment. It arrives to the fact that "occasionally the heroines 'protest' their right to gainful employment, or rebel against the tyranny of the loved men. But in the end they succumb to that form of power" (Coward 1994, p. 189). Dickens depicts Lady Dedlock as a woman who cannot revolt against the patriarchal society though she is one of the powerful individuals. It is assumed that if she does so, she may get some optimistic outcomes at the beginning only.

The society may provide encouragements to her as a token of her brevity and revolutionary step to change the world, though the end may offer her some sufferings to dare the chains of male-centric social system. Therefore, her emotional misery is being depicted in the novel suggesting that social conventions always urge woman to be submissive in all circumstances. A similar tone is found where Teresa De Lauretis (1996) says that "all women are implicated in the confrontation with a certain image of 'Woman' that is the culturally dominant model for female identity" (see Rosi Braidotti's "Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory", in Eagleton 1996, p. 416).

Furthermore, she says that "in women there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes" (see Kadia Kanneh's "Love, Mourning and Metaphor: Terms of Identity", in Eagleton 1996, p. 332); but in Lady Dedlock, that mother-figure has been missing — which, according to Dickens, marks herself as an incomplete individual. Therefore, Dickens displays that a woman's true image is always conventional and indirectly points out that those who try to deconstruct these traditional features, suffer terribly the way Lady Dedlock has suffered.

6. Bleak House and Esther Summerson

In case of Esther's character sketch, more complexities are found compared to that of Lady Dedlock. From her childhood, it is evident from the novel that she is not brought up in a normal environment and has constantly been deprived of parental affection. Her aunt has hardly contributed to Esther's personality development. In fact, it is found that her aunt's words have always been harsh toward her. She is told that she is unexpected to all and more maverick than the other children: "You are different from other children, Esther, because you were not born like them,

in common sinfulness and wrath. You are set apart” (Dickens 2008, p. 650). As a result, she has no friends to talk to and starts to talk to her doll as a substitute.

It is true that her doll has been her constant companion throughout her childhood. It can be said that she chose the doll to talk to being assured that the doll is incapable of giving her harsh feedbacks. She used to disclose every single agony she has ever felt to the doll, but it is shocking that she buries the doll before leaving her aunt's house. General readers think her as a disturbed child and the act of burying her doll assures her as mentally unstable. Despite this fact, such an act can be evaluated in another sense. In Quantum meditation, the doctor asks the patient to write all her agonies in papers and then asks to tear as well as burn them. This method creates a psychological effect as a self-therapeutic understanding that all the agonies have been destroyed and now only joy is left to be accomplished. So, it can be said that Esther tells all her sorrows to the doll and then buries it with the sense that past agonies are destroyed and a new beginning is about to start: it can be said that Esther is exceptionally mature for her age.

Esther's maturity is further evidenced when she meets her mother in the wood. Knowing that her mother is responsible for her childhood agonies, as well as her illegitimacy in birth, she shows love and respect to her mother from the core of her heart: “I told her that my heart overflowed with love for her” (Dickens 2008, p. 535). Her obedience is marked when she agrees to keep her mother's secret alive: “I must keep this secret, if by any means it can be kept” (ibid., p. 536). Her tenderness is highlighted when she says: “I raised my mother up, praying and beseeching her not to stoop before me in such affliction and humiliation” (ibid., p. 535). Instead of being angry, she is found happy and satisfied. It seems that she realizes the helplessness and burden of her mother more than her own sorrows. Even though her upbringing has been disturbing, she realizes her duty as a daughter very well; but in some situations, she is found pessimistic and confused too. Similarly, Slater (2009, p. 348) marks in Chapter 15: “Writing *Bleak House* (1852-1853)” that “*Bentley's Monthly Review* found her ‘perfectly lovable in every way’, for example, but Charlotte Bronte thought her style too often weak and twiddling”.

It seems that she learns every single emotional torment of her mother's as if it is her own emotion, whereas Lady Dedlock has been incapable of similar empathy towards Esther. Regarding Esther's exceptional attributes, it can be said that “Woman's special gift of intuitive insight into the hearts of those around her, her ‘natural’ timidity, which Dickens saw as a high virtue, her physical gentleness and her role as bearer and nourisher of children clearly pointed, he believed, to the domestic private circle as her proper sphere” (Slater 1983, Chapter 14: “The Womanly Ideal”, p. 310).

Thus, it is assumed that despite of Esther's pessimism, she is portrayed as an exceptionally sensible person. As she has never experienced maternal love during her childhood, she suffers from identity crisis in various aspects of her personality development. In this regard, Morris (1991, p. 82)

says: “Esther's desire for a mother in whose loving image she could discover her own desirable identity is denied by her frowning god-mother. However, later she finds a beautiful, blue-eyed smiling angel in the person of Ada”. Esther recognizes herself as pretty when she finds Ada who is, herself, a depiction of true female beauty. The message which Dickens tries to give is that a child's proper upbringing depends upon the mother and a woman's true beauty lies in her feminine features.

Gradually, Esther is found to become more mature and at the end of the novel, she is found as a satisfied woman after her marriage to Alan Woodcourt. Regarding her nature, Timko and Guiliano (1996, p. 67) point out a remark printed in *The Spectator* on September 24, 1853: “His [Dickens'] heroine in *Bleak House* is a model of unconscious goodness [...], her unconscious and sweet humility of disposition are so profound that scarcely a page of her autobiography is free from a record of these admirable qualities [...]. Such a girl would not write her own memoirs, and certainly would not bore one with her goodness till a wicked wish arises that she would either do something very ‘spicy’, or confine herself to superintending the jam-pots at Bleak House”.

Moreover, they emphasized that “Whether he knew it or not, Dickens in his creation of Esther holds up for inspection one of the nineteenth century paradoxes about women's identity” (Timko and Guiliano 1996, p. 79) and the ending of the novel suggests Dickens's concept that a woman's true happiness lies on domestic achievement. He indicates that Esther finally feels happy when she has a handsome husband and lovely children with whom she can imagine a prosperous future. The dots/dash at the end of Esther's speech: “My guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that ever was seen; and that they can very well do without much beauty in me — even supposing — ...” (Dickens 2008, p. 914) suggests continuation and it can be marked as her continuation of contentment. It seems that: “The middle-class ideology of the proper sphere of womanhood, which developed in post-industrial England and America, prescribed a woman who would be a Perfect Lady, an Angel in the House, contentedly submissive to men, but strong in her inner purity and religiosity, queen in her own realm of the Home” (Showalter 1989, p. 13).

There is no doubt that Esther carries these features very well. Though she suffers from psychological turmoil in her childhood and youth, but she has been able to organize herself with the passage of time. If she is compared to Shakespearian heroines, it will be seen that she is very mature and self-confident.

7. *Bleak House* and Shakespearian Feminism

In Shakespearian heroines, women are portrayed as helpless and undervalued individuals. For example, in *The Tempest* (1623), Miranda is found as a virgin daughter of Prospero who has been deprived of the knowledge of her

father's exile and has been a victim of abuse by the deformed slave Caliban. In *The Merchant of Venice* (1600), Portia is found as a very intelligent and philosophical woman who knows judiciary but she comes to the court in the disguise of a male solicitor. It may so happen that women were not allowed to have such responsibilities at that time, or Shakespeare has tried to show that if a female wants to show her talent, she has to be disguised as a male.

Furthermore, in *Othello* (1622), the defenseless and innocent Desdemona died in the hands of her jealous husband Othello. Again in *Hamlet* (1603), Ophelia's mental illness and suicide mark the result of patriarchal subjugation on delicate woman psychology. It seems that in case of Shakespeare, women are traditionally bound to experience prolong sufferings, both physically and mentally, whose ultimate end of suffrage is death. It arrives to the fact that "The heroin became a self-referential sign, and her lengthy ritual of dying a deliberate disengagement from the patriarchal and class society in which she was assaulted" (Todd 1991, p.122).

All the characters have been portrayed as feeble personalities who cannot tolerate any catastrophe; neither can fight for their survival at the end. These female characters are presented as subjugated and dominated individuals under patriarchal community surrendering to the male-dominated norms and conventions of the society. Neither their words nor their actions are rebellious toward the forceful injustice and subjective pressure provided by their respective male counterparts. It seems that "in a world defined by man, the trouble with woman is that she is at once an object of desire and an object of exchange, valued on the one hand as a person in her own right, and on the other considered simply as a relational sign between men" (Furman 1985, Chapter 3, p. 61).

8. Bleak House and Great Expectations

In case of Dickens's novels, a typical Victorian woman image is found in those who dare to stand out from the crowd but fail to establish an extraordinary position in that society, and Lady Dedlock is a good example. In his other novels, for instance in *Great Expectations* (1861), Miss Havisham and Estella also represent the Victorian ladies of that time. In this literary work, Miss Havisham has been depicted as a victim of fraud. As a result, she turns frustrated and never married or loved again in her entire life as well as cultivated anti-male perspectives in Estella, her niece. On the other hand, Estella turns into a stern feminist under the influence of her aunt and treats Pip, the protagonist of the novel, with disgust.

The novel starts showing these two characters very stubborn and dominating, but at the end, both of them are found feeble and submissive. In fact, Miss Havisham asks Pip to take care of Estella as well as Estella becomes gentle with him. There is no denying to the fact that "*Great Expectations* belongs to that class of education or

development-novels which describe the young man of talents who progresses from the country to the city, ascends in the social hierarchy, and moves from innocence to experience" (Stange 1972, p. 295). Therefore, Estella and Miss Havisham are just for the development of the plot that indirectly highlights the significance of Pip and marks Dickens's conception of female personality as well.

It can be said that the female characters are not the pivotal individuals though they carry some significance in the plot structure. The writer could have depicted Miss Havisham as a confident woman who survived by marrying another person and living a healthy and happy conjugal life instead of a life-time singlehood with anti-male standpoints. On the other side, Estella could have been portrayed as a soft-spoken English beauty. Both the ladies are non-traditional, have been victims of the male counterparts and got mentally fragmented.

At the end of the novel, the reader is told that because of the agedness and suffrage of both the female characters, they seek Pip as a source of peace for the future ahead. In this way, Dickens tries to say that females try to survive and struggle to achieve happiness in their own terms but the ultimate peace for them can only be achieved with the company or support of male counterparts. Thus, Dickens suggests that Pip's arrival at the end to the countryside provides a hope for Estella's future happiness and gives Miss Havisham a chance to confess her guilt for culturing Estella as an unsympathetic feminist.

There are some similarities between Miss Havisham and Lady Dedlock. Both these female representatives tried to escape the shackles of the conventional duties of womanhood. Both of them avoided the responsibilities of a mother-figure. Both of them lived a life of solitude and suffered at the end for their attempts. Dickens could have depicted them as happy individuals but he did not do that to mark the fact that women are best in their feminine features and their eternal happiness lay in their responsibilities in the society as well as in home. To Dickens, home is a place that is nurtured by women more than men. A man can build a house but a woman makes it a home by her feminine attributes of making harmony and peace in the environment. No matter how powerful a woman could be in the society, her true personality is valued in her sense of home-making that includes rearing children, creating harmony in the environment, loving her husband and doing all her responsibilities properly.

9. Aurora Leigh and Bleak House

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (*née* Moulton-Barrett) was born in March 6, 1806 in Durham, England. Her father, Edward Moulton-Barrett had made his fortune from Jamaican sugar plantations, and in 1809, he bought Hope End, a 500-acre estate near the Malvern Hills. Elizabeth lived a privileged childhood and enjoyed contributing to family theatrical productions with her eleven brothers and

sisters. She is known as a prodigy of learning and poetry, published her first volume of verse when she was thirteen and in her thirties established herself as an authority on the Greek Christian poets. Her collected works include translations of Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* (1833) and Bion's *Lament for Adonis* (1833) as well as selections from other classical authors. Enormously admired for her learning and her passionate moral and political commitments, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose fame much surpassed that of her husband, Robert Browning, during her lifetime, achieved the Victorian ideal balance between personal and political. Although frail, she apparently had no health problems until 1821, when Dr. Coker prescribed opium for a nervous disorder. Her mother died when she was 22, and critics mark signs of this loss in *Aurora Leigh*.

Aurora Leigh deals with social injustice, but its subject was the subjugation of women to the dominating male. It also commented on the role of a woman as a woman and poet. Barrett's popularity waned after her death, and late-Victorian critics argued that although much of her writing would be forgotten, she would be remembered for "The Cry of the Children", "Isobel's Child", "Bertha in the Lane", and most of all the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Yet *Aurora Leigh's* heroines are marked as the true daughters of her age. Virginia Woolf's praise of that work predated the modern critical re-evaluation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and today it attracts more attention than the rest of her poetry.

Barrett's poem employs a contemporary setting and contemporary social issues as a context for an inquiry into the relation between gender and genre. The poem, which explores the *Woman Question*, as it was called by contemporaries, dramatizes the modern woman's severe need for mothers — that is to say, for nurturing political and literary female ancestors. In examining the growth and development of a woman poet, *Aurora Leigh* shows that women cripple themselves by internalizing patriarchal or androcentric conceptions of them. When Aurora first rejects her arrogant beloved, her rejection does not free her from the grip of interiorized male constructions of women, for she merely displaces Romney, her lover, from the centre of power, speaks about herself with images of male power, and feminizes him. Only when both can break free from the conceptual structures that oppress them, she fully becomes the woman, wife, and poet she wants to be.

In presenting her heroine's path to poetic and personal maturity, Barrett not only explored the Victorian relation between gender and genre, but she also created a female literary tradition by alluding to her predecessors. Her work draws upon novels written by women, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) being one major source: the female protagonist's status as an orphan, the figure of a cruel aunt, the proposal by St. John Rivers, and Rochester's blindness all appear in *Aurora Leigh*.

Moreover, in *Aurora Leigh*, the poet represents Aurora as a self-confident, independent and educated lady who ultimately finds her true dignity and happiness in love saying: "Art is much, Love is more. / O Art, my Art, thou'rt much,

but Love is more!" (Browning 2001, pp. 381, 656-657). Therefore, it can be emphasized that love is the ultimate source for a woman to be truly happy and satisfied. Moreover, we find similarities between Esther and Aurora in case of childhood psychological torments. Like Esther, Aurora suffers from self-complexities and sadness with the feeling that she is born to make her father sad. Whereas, both of them ultimately discover peace in love at the end of the story indicating that a woman's true identity lies in home-making and domestic peace.

10. Goblin Market and Bleak House

Christina Georgina Rossetti, one of the most important women poets writing in nineteenth-century England, was born in London on December 5, 1830. Although her fundamentally religious temperament was closer to her mother's, this youngest member of a remarkable family of poets, artists, and critics inherited many of her artistic tendencies from her father. Judging from somewhat idealized sketches made by her brother Dante, Christina as a teenager seems to have been quite attractive if not beautiful. In 1848 she became engaged to James Collinson, one of the minor Pre-Raphaelite Brethren, but the engagement ended after he reverted to Roman Catholicism. Partly because of her shyness and partly just because she was a woman, Christina Rossetti was never completely a part of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Nevertheless, her *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) was the first unalloyed literary success the Brotherhood enjoyed, and there is a loose parallel between her fondness for the rhythms of folk songs and the Pre-Raphaelite interest in medieval things.

In *Goblin Market*, Rossetti creates a rudimentary framework of behaviour in which a female hero — a heroine — might operate. Rossetti's efforts are to some degree successful, though she fails to solve the problem completely. Throughout the poem, Lizzie remains pure; this is nothing new. The role of the unstained virgin has existed longer than the English language. Spenser's Florimell provides an early example. What is different about Lizzie is that she actively pursues temptation with the intention of conquering it. When she sees that Laura is wasting away (Rossetti 2000, p. 1514), Lizzie resolves to go and get her the fruit as a final, desperate effort to save her sister's life. When the Goblins refuse to sell her the fruit (Rossetti 2000, p. 1516) and attack Lizzie, she forbears temptation and keeps her mouth closed.

Eventually, she manages to save her sister by running home and asking Laura: "Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices / Squeezed from goblin fruits for you", explaining that "For your sake I have braved the glen / And had to do with goblin merchant men" (Rossetti 2000, p. 1518). Laura's cure, implemented by her sucking the juices from Lizzie's face, is somewhat baffling; the reader is left confused as to what actually cured her, the residual juices or her sister's love.

Furthermore, in case of home-making, *Goblin Market* shows the contribution of two ladies in domestic settings,

though the story reflects anti-feministic viewpoints. The poem depicts that the world is a market where feminine innocence is purchased by Goblin men. If the timidity of Laura and Lizzie is compared with Esther, it is found that Esther is far more matured and self-restricted. In spite of all the agonies, Esther is found to be self-constoled with the passage of time. At the middle of the novel, she is found much organized in her thoughts and actions.

Even Slater (2009, Chapter 15, p. 359) admits: "Esther tells us how happy and busy and useful and mutually loving she and her family and her dearest friends all are. Even the initially shocking detail about Caddy's baby being born deaf and dumb tends to serve the 'prettiness' of the chapter because Esther can tell us what a tender, caring mother Caddy is to the poor child. The final 'pretty' touch is Esther's modest bashfulness about her own prettiness which prevents her from finishing her last sentence".

In addition, *Goblin Market* also suggests the message that a woman's safety and respect lay inside the boundaries of home. If a woman crosses such a restricted area, she is sure to be devalued the way Laura and Lizzie were disrespected. The fruit in the poem is a metaphor for temptation and the Goblin men represent the selfish patriarchy society. Similar views are detected in Dickens's representation of woman along with the concept of home. He trusts that woman's true recognition is in her potentiality to maintain her household harmony, rearing children and satisfying her husband along with the essential pedagogic knowledge.

Therefore, *Bleak House* suggests the message that: "Home is the center round which the influence of every married woman is principally accumulated. It is there that she will naturally be known and respected the most [...]. It is there that the general character, the acknowledged property, and the established connections of her husband, will contribute with more force than they can possess, to give weight and impressiveness to all her proceedings" (Armstrong 1990, p.7).

11. Conclusion

Dickens represents women in his novels in a particular way in order to highlight the traditional concept of womanhood in the Victorian period. He focuses on the Victorian male view that a woman is nature's gift that remains safe and sound inside the boundaries of home. She is blessed to play multiple roles at a time as a lover, nurse, daughter, adviser, wife, mother, and nurturer amongst others. She should not be rebellious, but contented with her domestic settings. As she is human, she is bound to have some frailties as well. The female characters, who try to dismantle the chains of conventionality, suffer from subjective torments and ultimately find peace by accepting the prescribed role for them. All these features constitute the image of traditional woman and Dickens's female characters mark these attributes. Therefore, Dickens's ideas of home and vision of womanhood are idealistic and traditional —

this has been clarified through the character sketches of Lady Dedlock and Esther in *Bleak House*.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ackroyd, P. (1999). *Dickens*. London: Vintage.
- [2] Aristotle (1960), *The Poetics*. Longinus, *On the Sublime*. Demetrius, *On Style*. Loeb Classical Library. London - Cambridge, Mass.: Heinemann.
- [3] Armstrong, F. (1990). *Dickens and the Concept of Home*. London: UMI Research Press.
- [4] Browning, E. Barrett (2001). *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems* (1856). Ed. Kaplan, C. Reading: Cox & Wyman.
- [5] Coward, R. (1994). "Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today", in Eagleton, M. (ed.), *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell. Chapter 3.
- [6] Cunningham, G. (1978). *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*. London: Macmillan.
- [7] Dickens, C. (2008). *Bleak House*. (1853). Ed. Gill, S. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [8] Dysen, A. E., ed. (1987). *Dickens, Bleak House: A Casebook*. London: Macmillan.
- [9] Eagleton, M., ed. (1996). *Feminist Literary Theory*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [10] Flint, K. (1987). *The Victorian Novelist: Social Problems and Social Change*. London - New York: Methuen.
- [11] Furman, N. (1985). "The Politics of Language: Beyond the Gender Principle?", in Greene, G. and Kahn, C. (eds.), *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*. London - New York: Methuen.
- [12] Gillooly, E. and David, D., eds. (2009). *Contemporary Dickens*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- [13] Gilmour, R. (1981). *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- [14] House, H., ed. (1971). *The Dickens World*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [15] Hunter, S. (1984). *Victorian Idyllic Fiction*. London: Macmillan.
- [16] Kyd, T. (2000) *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592). Ed. Mulryne, J.R. London: Guernsey Press.
- [17] Miller, J.H. (1973). *Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- [18] Morris, P. (1991). *Bleak House*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- [19] Rossetti, C.G. (2000). "Goblin Market" (1862), in Abrams, M.H. (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 7th ed., vol. 2. New York: Norton.
- [20] Schlicke, P., ed. (1999). *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- [21] Shakespeare, W. (1995). *Hamlet* (1603). Ed. Jenkins, H. London: Routledge.
- [22] Shakespeare, W. (1997). *Othello* (1622). Ed. Honigmann, E.A.J. Walton-on-Thames: Nelson & Sons.
- [23] Shakespeare, W. (1997). *Macbeth* (1623). Ed. Braunmuller, A.R. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [24] Shakespeare, W. (1997). *The Merchant of Venice* (1600). Ed. Brown, J.R. Walton-on-Thames: Nelson & Sons.
- [25] Shakespeare, W. (1998). *The Tempest* (1623). Ed. Orgel, S. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [26] Showalter, E. (1989). "A Literature of Their Own", in Eagleton, M. (ed.), *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. 1st ed. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [27] Slater, M. (1983). *Dickens and Woman*. London: Dent & Sons.
- [28] Slater, M. (2009). *Charles Dickens*. London: Yale University Press.
- [29] Stange, G.R. (1972). "Expectations Well Lost: Dickens' Fable for His Time" (1954), in Ford, G. and Lane, L. (eds.), *The Dickens Critics*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- [30] Todd, J. (1991). *Feminist Literary History*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- [31] Tompkins, J. (1989). "Me and My Shadow", in Kauffman, L. (ed.), *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [32] Timko, M. and Guiliano, E., eds. (1996). *Dickens Studies Annual: Essays on Victorian Fiction*. New York: AMS Press.
- [33] Webster, J. (1990). *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613). Ed. Brennan, E.M. London: Black.