

Representation of Angel-in-the-House in *Bleak house* by Charles Dickens

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Abstract:

This article intends to examine the female characters of Esther Summerson and Ada Clare in *Bleak House*, written by Charles Dickens in Victorian period. In fact, the author has tried to revisit this novel as a case in point to discuss how female characters in Victorian society, who were depicted typically in this Victorian novel, were labeled as “angel in the house”. This work will actually analyze the concept of “angel in the house,” hegemonic patriarchy, Esther Summerson, Ada Care, and Lady Dedlock as Esther’s foil. At the end, this article will discuss how in the Victorian male-dominated society women were easily manipulated by their male counterparts both in society and at home under the label of “angel in the house”.

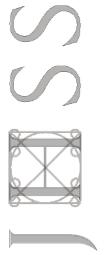
Keywords: “angel in the house”, Esther Summerson, Ada Clare, Victorian society, *Bleak house*, patriarchy, women

1. INTRODUCTION

Esther Summerson, as a Victorian model of woman, is marvelously perfect in numerous ways. The qualities which she possesses in the novel include prettiness, humbleness, modesty, quietness, assiduousness, and thankfulness. She is a good caretaker, and homemaker who usually has a habit of working only for the benefit of others. These qualities are what the society of her time desired from her as a woman and she did stick to these criteria as a woman. Charles Dickens in his book informs us about Esther. The Victorian society advocated ‘Submission, self-denial, diligent work’ since these qualities were considered as the preparations that the society expected from women in order to regard them as qualified for a marriage. This ideology belongs to the Victorian period concerning women and female personalities.

Ada Clare is another example of ‘angel in the house’. She is under the legal protection of Jarndyce. Ada Clare is a nice, sympathetic, and simple girl. When she meets Esther the two become close friends and share secrets. Their friendship means a lot to each other as they share each other’s secrets. She marries Richard and has a baby. She is all

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goodness, beauty, purity, and decency. She is attractive, decent, and sacrificed to Richard. Ada is exactly what Esther is. She, too, is a selfless character. They are good friends. They are parallel characters – that is, characters who are very much comparable in countless ways. Both are young, pretty, self-effacing, good-natured, sensible, responsible, and delicate; they are both without family who live in the same house under the protection of Mr. Jarndyce; they have analogous principles and prospects of life; young men are fascinated with both of them. Royster and Beum believe they are also intimate friends; they confide in each other, and partly for the reason that they do, they reveal characteristics of their characters to us.

Mariana Valverde in her article “The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse” points out that according to the male-oriented society of Victorian period women loved and admired fashion and this love or admiration was, in fact, their tragic flaw which had led to their going astray and therefore their fall into prostitute and whoredom.

Elisabeth Bronfen, in *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992) voices her concern about women. She argues that the highly beautiful description of the death of beautiful women in literature and arts shows that our society wishes and desires the omission and eradication of women from all facets and aspects of social life so that men should be the social choice. She believes that art and aesthetic are united in this omission of women.

Elizabeth Langland in “Nobody’s Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel” (1992) deals with a dominant element of an intricate procedure: the connection of class and gender beliefs in an image of Victorian narrative, the “Angel in the House”, who encompasses and is established by her ideological other, the servant.

Barbara Creed in *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1993) studies how men considered women as monsters and were afraid of them. She indicates that men did not regard women as sane creatures and did not love them; rather, men hated women and considered them as insane monsters, and were afraid of them as castrators. She criticizes Freud’s model of psychoanalysis. For her Freud is a version of patriarchy.

The researcher uses and applies the theory of feminism to this Victorian novel written by Dickens. Based on this methodology, this article will discuss the representation of women as angel in the house. Feminism is the theory of this article. The feminist critics and theoreticians from whose works the present researcher will benefit include Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Elaine Showalter who

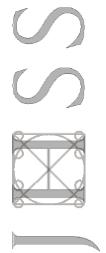
had shared objectives of defining, founding, and attaining similar political, economic, cultural, personal, and social privileges for women.

Feminism is consisted of the first-wave and second-wave groups of feminists. Woolf and de Beauvoir belong to the first-wave of feminist theoreticians; and among the second wave of feminists, Elaine Showalter is a renowned literary figure. Woolf is the founding mother of the first wave-feminist (Bressler: 118) who proclaims many of the concerns later feminist critics were to pay attention to and “who herself becomes the terrain over which some debates have struggled” (Bressler: 118). Virginia Woolf’s reputation is basically due to her being a creative woman author, and later feminist critics have examined her novels widely from very diverse viewpoints. However, her being a feminist rests on two key works, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) (Bressler: 118). Like Simone de Beauvoir, Woolf is mainly worried about women’s material disadvantages in contrast to men. In *A Room of One's Own* she examines the history and social background of women’s literary works, and in *Three Guineas* she deals with the relationships between male power and the occupations (Bressler: 118).

Simone de Beauvoir’s revolutionary work, *The Second Sex* (1949) shaped a theoretical base for materialist feminists for decades to come. Beauvoir believes that in a patriarchal society, men are thought to be important subjects, while women are deemed depending beings (Tyson: 96). Tyson sums up the view of de Beauvoir’s work, thus:

Men can act upon the world, change it, give it meaning, while women have meaning only in relation to men. Thus, women are defined not just in terms of their difference from men, but in terms of their inadequacy in comparison to men. The word *woman*, therefore, has the same implications as the word *other*. A woman is not a person in her own right. She is man’s Other: she is less than a man; she is a kind of alien in a man’s world; she is not a fully developed human being the way a man is (Tyson: 96).

Second-wave feminism has in common with the first wave’s struggle for women’s privileges in all areas, it deals with the politics of literary creation, with women’s ‘experience’, with sexual ‘difference’ and with ‘sexuality’, as simultaneously a system of oppression and something to welcome (Bressler: 120). Elaine Showalter is a key feminist figure of the second wave feminism whose work *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) deals with the literary depiction of sexual differences in women’s writing. In this book, Showalter examines a literary history of women writers; generates a history which displays the formation of their material, mental and sociopolitical bases; and stimulates both a feminist evaluation as well as ‘gynocritics’. The word gynocritics refers to female authors (Bressler: 127).



2. DISCUSSION

Angel in the House

The expression ‘the angel in the house’ is, in fact, the title of a poem by Coventry Patmore written in 1854 one year after Charles Dickens wrote his *Bleak House* (1853). But the concept was really common in the literature and fiction of the period. The poem declares:

Man must be pleased; but him to please
Is woman’s pleasure; down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities
She casts her best, she flings herself.
How often flings for nought! and yokes
Her heart to an icicle or whim,
Whose each impatient word provokes
Another, not from her, but him;
While she, too gentle even to force
His penitence by kind replies,
Waits by, expecting his remorse,
With pardon in her pitying eyes (Patmore 43)

As the poem shows, men need women to please them. It should be the pleasure of women to please men. This poem is how the Victorian society expected a woman to conduct herself. The women, as thought by many Victorian notions, should serve and submit to their husbands as also advocated by Tennyson in his poem *The Princess* (1847), the women should be, in another word, angels in the houses who are moral advisers and guides to their children, and should ensure peace and stability in their home. The characteristics of this angel in the house require that she should be lovely, sweet, inactive, self-sacrificing, and all the other characteristics and qualities by which modest women were defined in Victorian society.

Hegemonic Patriarchy

The Victorian period advocated patriarchy, a kind of patriarchy which made men able to use their ideas and circulate them to women and consequently made women submissive without the use of force. Men cleverly subjugated women without force and military power. This was hegemonic patriarchy which enforced its masculine ideas to female members of society that all members of society naturalized those ideas. The schools, colleges, universities, churches, and other institutes advertised those ideas. That social structure was a structure in which men possessed chief roles, and had active parts in political governance, honorable power, social advantage, and control of property.

The father was the one who ruled the roost in the house and mother was the one who obeyed him. The job of the mother was indoor and the job of the father was outdoor. The phrase ‘angel in the house’ is a hegemonic strategy to keep women submissive, docile, obedient, and humble. It is hegemonic because there is no need for military force. They do it with culture, literature, narrative, and other mediums. This patriarchy circulates the idea of a woman as an angel in the house who should be protecting children and be a moral advisor to them.

Esther Summerson

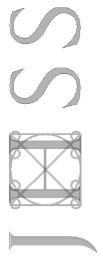
Esther Summerson is the heroin of the novel *Bleak House*. One point to know is that she is a woman who is the heroin of the novel of Charles Dickens as a man. There is a difference between a novel written by a man who makes a woman the heroin of the novel and a novel written by a woman who makes a woman as the heroin of the novel. Generally Dickens wanted women as submissive and humble and nothing more and this fact finds expression in many of his novels, one of which is *Bleak House* which is the focus of the present researcher in this article. His desire of making women submissive finds expression in the characters of submissive women in the novel. In fact, he wants women to be angels in the house that is to say to be submissive totally to their masters and their husbands.

Charles Dickens in *Bleak House* has in mind the concept of the angle in the house. He presents women and in fact, wishes them to be like this, that is to say, to obey men. His Esther Summerson and Ada in *Bleak House*, are devoted and loyal to family harmony. They are perfect examples of angels in the house.

Esther is certainly and truly a perfect example of the Victorian ideal of the ‘angel in the home’, the lady who keeps her husband’s house serene and tranquil, one who brings peace and tranquility to her husband and her children. Her sustenance is what allows her husband to get the joyful family life he has continuously desired for.

Esther Summerson is an example of a woman who is impeccable as a Victorian type of lady. The qualities which she possesses in the novel include among others: she is pretty, she is an unassuming woman, a very unassertive woman, who is quiet, assiduous, and thankful. She is a virtuous warden and housekeeper who usually has the habit of working only for the benefit of others (Shmoop Editorial Team). These are what the society of her time desired from her as a woman and she did stick to these criteria as a woman. The factors for Esther to be such an example of angel are set in the novel:

She checked me, however, as I was about to depart from her – so frozen as I was! – and added this, “Submission, self-denial, diligent work, are the preparations



for a life begun with such a shadow on it. You are different from other children, Esther, because you were not born, like them, in common sinfulness and wrath. You are set apart. (Dickens: 20-21)

As the passage makes clear, the factors in the above passage are in fact what the dominant ideology of men preached. The Victorian society advocated obedience, self-denial, attentive work as these qualities were considered as the preparations for a life on the part of any woman who wanted to start married life. This is the ideology of the Victorian period concerning women and female personalities.

Elsewhere in the novel, there is a conversation between Ada and Esther the subject of which is Esther:

Ada laughed and put her arm about my neck as I stood looking at the fire, and told me I was a quiet, dear, good creature and had won her heart. "You are so thoughtful, Esther", she said, "and yet so cheerful! And you do so much, so unpretendingly! You would make a home out of even this house" (Dickens: 46).

Even a woman belonging to the same gender and influenced by the ideas of Victorian period, encourages submission to her friend and thus acts an agent of the Victorian patriarchy. Here, Ada without knowing it is preaching those ideas to her own friend and this is what and how a society expects its members to act and to behave. In fact, Ada was describing herself or seeing herself in Esther. This is shown by Esther as the narrator whose reaction to what Ada has just said resembles an aside telling reader that "She was quite unconscious that she only praised herself and that it was in the goodness of her own heart that she made so much of me!" (Dickens: 46).

In fact, both Esther and Ada are two perfect examples of the angels in the house. Regarding the job and function of Esther, there is a conversation between Mr. Jarndyce and Ada which runs as follows:

"Aye?" said Mr. Jarndyce. "What did Esther do?" "Why, cousin John," said Ada, clasping her hands upon his arm and shaking her head at me across him – for I wanted her to be quiet – "Esther was their friend directly. Esther nursed them, coaxed them to sleep, washed and dressed them, told them stories, kept them quiet, bought them keepsakes" (Dickens: 67).

The job of a woman regarding children in the Victorian society is summarized in the above text where a woman, here Esther, is a kind friend to children, nurses them, coaxes them to sleep, washes and dresses them, tells them stories, keeps them quiet, and brings them keepsakes. This is what the Victorian period actually expected from a woman, that is to say, to devote herself, her energy, her time, and above all her life to children and to her husband and nothing more.

Victorian era wanted a woman like Esther to make a home out of a disarray house. This is echoed a lot in the novel *Bleak House*. One example of which was mentioned above. Esther is made to be a humble woman in the novel as women were made to be meek in the Victorian society. This novel is a microcosm of that macrocosmic Victorian world. Victorian world made to exist in every corner of the society. In the Victorian time meek women were made to be great mothers, mistresses and protectors of the house and they were happy to do that. If they did abide by, they were considered ‘angels in the house’, and if they did not they were labeled as mad and abnormal. Here many examples of angles in the house can be seen in *Bleak House*. Esther is craving to be such a person.

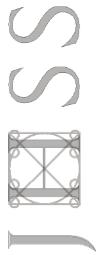
In fact, it is significant that the novel *Bleak House* is written by a man to tell us how men viewed women not only in their society but also in their home. Dickens, as a man, is a representative of his own society. He does stick to the ideas of angel in the house and propagates and preaches about that idea in this novel and other novels. Because Dickens himself could not get along well with his wife from whom he had ten children, it is highly likely that his wife was revolted against his forceful angle in the house.

So, it is true to say that Dickens is a great preacher of the ideas of his period since he is a great novelist of that time. His fictions unconsciously show the ideology of the time which wanted to unconsciously enslave women hegemonically. That is to say he wanted women to be shy, modest, self-abnegating, and obedient to men. This depiction of such women, whether real or fictional, may be considered as an indication of his desire to have such shy, modest, and self-abnegating women around him at work, at home, and in office. It is likely that he wishes for an angel girl which shows itself in the character of Esther.

When Esther is going to live in Bleak House there are certain conditions that she should observe because her guardian expects her to do so. These conditions are mentioned in a conversation below:

Mr. Jarndyce, “he went on”, makes no condition beyond expressing his expectation that our young friend will not at any time remove herself from the establishment in question without his knowledge and concurrence. That she will faithfully apply herself to the acquisition of those accomplishments, upon the exercise of which she will be ultimately dependent. That she will tread in the paths of virtue and honour, and – the – a – so forth (Dickens: 25).

The above passage shows that Esther is a dutiful girl and obedient. The reason for this is that after Mr. Kenge finishes what Mr. Jarndyce has just said Esther is silent and her silence means acceptance.



When she goes to Bleak House to be a housekeeper, she does her duty very well. Everyone adores Esther, who is self-sacrificing and cultivating, and she becomes the confidante of numerous young ladies. Esther supports everyone around her, and her first predisposition is to be maternal, possibly because she has never had a compassionate mother figure of her own. Mr. Jarndyce takes her in to be a friend to Ada, nevertheless Esther cares for Mr. Jarndyce and Richard just as much as she does for Ada. Many others, including young Caddy and Peepy Jellby, Charley, and Jo also receive Esther's devotion.

In the case of Charley who is learning writing, Esther is very helpful. She is there to tell us how Charley progresses in her writing:

one evening I went upstairs into my own room to take a peep over Charley's shoulder and see how she was getting on with her copy-book. Writing was a trying business to Charley, who seemed to have no natural power over a pen, but in whose hand every pen appeared to become perversely animated, and to go wrong and crooked, and to stop, and splash, and sidle into corners like a saddle-donkey. It was very odd to see what old letters Charley's young hand had made, they so wrinkled, and shrivelled, and tottering, it so plump and round. Yet Charley was uncommonly expert at other things and had as nimble little fingers as I ever watched. "Well, Charley", said I, looking over a copy of the letter O in which it was represented as square, triangular, pear-shaped, and collapsed in all kinds of ways, "we are improving. If we only get to make it round, we shall be perfect, Charley" (Dickens: 450).

Her caring personality is evident in the above passage. She is kind to Charley and kindly teaches her to correct herself. She identifies with Charley and uses the pronoun 'we' to create an ambience of kindness and love. Martin Danahay in the article entitled "Housekeeping in *Bleak House*" believes that Esther's personality discloses the Victorian cultural structure of "work along gender lines. Esther seems to have many roles in the novel; she cares for children, she organizes households, and she provides companionship for various male figures. All these roles can, however, be grouped under one term: housekeeper" (416).

Esther is so good and so nice that Mr. Jarndyce asks her hand in marriage in a letter. This is in fact after Esther has lived there for many years and her dutifulness and humbleness have been tested, checked, and proved by Mr. Jarndyce who has chosen her. The fact that Mr. Jarndyce uses a letter rather than speaking in person in order to propose to her is because he is afraid that he will be rejected. So, he says to her that there is something that he should tell her but that he prefers to pen it to paper in a letter. He, moreover, says that no matter what occurs, he will never be altered from as he is at present:

"My dear Esther", said my guardian, "I have long had something in my thoughts that I have wished to say to you."

"Indeed?"

"I have had some difficulty in approaching it, and I still have. I should wish it to be so deliberately said, and so deliberately considered. Would you object to my writing it? (Dickens: 643).

On the appointed night, Esther sends Charley to bring the letter. Esther isn't astonished that it's a matrimonial proposal. She says that this is a way for her to be grateful to him and make him cheerful, and the letter makes her joyful, but still she cries, sensing as if she has lost something. She tells herself that she must be cheerful from here on out, for the reason that she will be glad for the rest of her life:

'But I knew it, I knew it well now. It came upon me as the close of the benignant history I had been pursuing, and I felt that I had but one thing to do. To devote my life to his happiness was to thank him poorly, and what had I wished for the other night but some new means of thanking him? Still I cried very much, not only in the fullness of my heart after reading the letter, not only in the strangeness of the prospect – for it was strange though I had expected the contents – but as if something for which there was no name or distinct idea were indefinitely lost to me. I was very happy, very thankful, very hopeful; but I cried very much (Dickens: 647).

This is the most difficult situation for Esther to decide. She is in a predicament. To be the wife of Mr. Jarndye or not to be, that is the question for her to find an answer to. She answered the letter despite all the thinking and mulling over the letter, and declares her consent and agreement with the written marriage proposal. Esther, however, after many days thinking to write him back or not decides to answer him in person. So she verbally and personally shows her acceptance:

I put my two arms round his neck and kissed him, and he said was this the mistress of Bleak House, and I said yes; and it made no difference presently, and we all went out together, and I said nothing to my precious pet about it (Dickens: 649).

The reason for which Dickens does not consent to the marriage of Mr. Jarndye and Esther is that Dickens believes this marriage, according to the norms of the Victorian period, is wrong. Dickens, indeed, does not consider them as suitable cases who can be happy together as true lovers. Age and suitability for marriage were two major factors in Victorian society. The couple should be at close age when they get married because this will make the family stable and firm. Though it seems that Dickens wants to have a partner in mind for Esther based on love this is not however the case. Because the angle in the house does not need to be lustful and expressive, but rather dutiful to the domestic chores. That is why Mr. Jarndye understands it that they are



not really matched because they are poles apart in terms of age and this marriage does not succeed when one partner is at the door's death.

Marriage, according to Dickens, should happen according to the norms of the Victorian period, that is to say the two people who want to marry one another should be nearly at the same age, or else they will end up having a miserable life together. This marriage, if it had happened, would have been a shock for the readers of the Victorian period and for the contemporary readers too, simply because age matters in marriage in any time and in any place. So, in order not to shock the readers, Dickens does not let Esther marry Mr. Jarndyce and foregrounds the role of Mr. Jarndyce as a patriarch and as a man when he understands that he is not a suitable person for young Esther and declares his dissatisfaction himself. Dickens even does not let Esther disrespect Mr. Jarndyce by disagreeing with him. This is humbleness on the part of Esther which Dickens wishes it to be so as a patriarch of the Victorian period when she puts her two arms round Mr. Jarndyce's neck and kisses him.

Mr. Jarndyce takes Esther to the house. He sits her down and clarifies that despite the fact he'd always proposed to marry her and was contented that she'd decided to espouse him, he suspected their marriage wouldn't actually make her glad. He declares that he understood this completely when Mr. Woodcourt came back:

Understand me, my dear girl. I had no doubt of your being contented and happy with me, being so dutiful and so devoted; but I saw with whom you would be happier. That I penetrated his secret when Dame Durden was blind to it is no wonder, for I knew the good that could never change in her better far than she did. Well! I have long been in Allan Woodcourt's confidence, although he was not, until yesterday, a few hours before you came here, in mine. But I would not have my Esther's bright example lost; I would not have a jot of my dear girl's virtues unobserved and unhonoured; I would not have her admitted on sufferance into the line of Morgan ap-Kerrig, no, not for the weight in gold of all the mountains in Wales! (Dickens: 910).

He pronounces that he has once again carried on his part as her guardian and father. He says that Woodcourt acknowledged his love for Esther to him, not knowing that Mr. Jarndyce had already proposed. To demonstrate Esther's virtue, Mr. Jarndyce disclosed to Mrs. Woodcourt that he discerned Esther would tie the knot with Mr. Jarndyce anyhow, although she loved Mr. Woodcourt. He'd asked Mrs. Woodcourt to observe Esther to see if this was true. Mr. Jarndyce says that he was certain Mr. Woodcourt would acknowledge his love to Esther and had even decided he should. He was astonished and delighted by Esther's answer to Woodcourt. Woodcourt appears, and Mr. Jarndyce gives Esther to him, telling them never to thank him.

According to Mr. Jarndyce, Eshther is going to spouse him out of duty and will sacrifice her love to a sense of duty and affection, and will sacrifice it so wholly, so completely, and so religiously. Quite in total disagreement with Mr. Jarndyce, The present researcher believes that Esther is doing so because she is made selfless by the Victorian standards and views which have worked with the hegemony of patriarchy. She is the product of this hegemony of patriarchy. Such patriarchy wishes and desires to have women as selfless, self-abnegating, and dutiful. They should be at the service of men without having male privileges of the society. That is why they promoted the idea of ‘angel in the house’ to create women as unselfish and self-sacrificing.

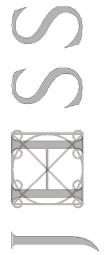
In such a society she is passed from one man to another, here she is passed from Mr. Jarndyce to Mr. Woodcourt. In fact, she marries Mr. Woodcourt simply because she is not younger than him in comparison with Mr. Jarndyce who is too old to espouse a young girl and to have a family, and this is against the ideology of Victorian society’s standards according to which any family to progress should have both partners matching each other and as it was said above against the personal ideology of Dickens, too, who was separated from his wife after living with her for many years.

This is in line with letting Esther espouse Mr. Woodcourt as mentioned above. The marriage of Esther and Woodcourt is in line with the ideology of the Victorian standards. The two can have a good family simply because Esther is a docile, dutiful, and selfless woman who can make a home out of a disordered house. This is what the novel as a Victorian one should preach. Dickens should let her espouse Mr. Woodcourt rather than Mr. Jarndyce because they will not fail as a family and will raise good children who will live up to the standards of Victorian life.

Esther, too, is happy with this ideology simply because she will have a husband-protector who can live longer than a husband-protector who can live shorter. For this reason when Mr. Jarndyce convinces her about the situation that he is not a suitable husband for her and Mr. Woodcourt is a better one, she accepts.

Ada Clare

Ada Clare is another example of ‘angel in the house’. She is under the legal protection of Jarndyce. Ada Clare is a nice, sympathetic, and simple girl. When she meets Esther the two become close friends and share secrets. Their friendship means a lot to each other as they share each other’s secrets. She marries Richard and has a baby. She is all goodness, beauty, purity, and decency. She is attractive, decent, and



sacrificed to Richard. Ada is exactly what Esther is. She, too, is a selfless character. They are good friends. They are parallel characters – that is, characters who are very much comparable in countless ways. Both are young, pretty, self-effacing, good-natured, sensible, responsible, and delicate; they are both without family who live in the same house under the protection of Mr. Jarndyce; they have analogous principles and prospects of life; young men are fascinated with both of them. Royster and Beum believe they are also reciprocated friends; they confide in each other, and partly for the reason that they do, they reveal characteristics of their characters to us.

Because the novel revolves around Esther as a heroin, there is nothing to learn about her. However, since she has conversations with Esther she is a good friend for her. It is natural that one character should be the main and focal point in the novel as heroin. It is certain that she loves to have a family and to be a good mother like Esther. Both Ada and Esther are normal according to the norms of the Victorian ideals. If one is to ask a Victorian man's opinion about women's behavior, he will certainly approve of Ada as good and normal woman according to the norms of patriarchal society of that time. They are two characters who are female in order for Dickens to show that women should be like these two ones to make a family progress and develop. Ada is devoted, dutiful, nice, responsible, caring, and a housekeeper. She, too, is a moralizer for children and from the point of view of a Victorian she makes every man as her husband successful and the house of her husband a place of peace and stability. The strong sense of responsibility and care with which Dickens endows both Ada and Esther gives these young women only domestic position.

Ada Clare is also religious as her friend Esther is, a quality which Victorian society expected from an angel in the house. She devoted herself to Richard. She bore him a child. She is a prototype of a woman that cares for her husband and for her home. But the novel does not revolve around her as much as it does around Esther, the reason for this is because Esther is more successful than Ada since the marriage of Richard and Ada fails due to the fact that Richard is not a prudent man.

Almost every woman in the novel is in a quest to find their love and set up a house to make their husband happy. Women in such a Victorian society were encouraged to do that so much so that to form their own family. This does not mean that they are erotic but it means they are family lovers and care about the family. Ada is one such character. The society of the Victorian era wanted women to be good mothers. In fact, one of the main motifs of the novel is to be a good mother and Esther and Ada are like good mothers.

Lady Dedlock as Esther's Foil

Esther's foil in many respects is her mother, lady Deadlock. Foil is a character in a work who, by sharp dissimilarity, functions to stress and highlight the characteristic temperament of the protagonist (Abrams and Harpham: 265). She is the opposite of Esther and when Esther asks her godmother about her mother she says:

Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers. The time will come – and soon enough – when you will understand this better and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can. I have forgiven her” – but her face did not relent – “the wrong she did to me, and I say no more of it, though it was greater than you will ever know – than any one will ever know but I, the sufferer. For yourself, unfortunate girl, orphaned and degraded from the first of these evil anniversaries, pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head, according to what is written. Forget your mother and leave all other people to forget her who will do her unhappy child that greatest kindness. Now, go!” (Dickens: 19).

The above passage shows that, as we understand later in the novel that Esther's mother is, in fact, Lady Dedlock, one who has not lived up to Victorian standards. She is not a good mother from the point of view of Victorian society. The reason that she is not a normal woman from the point of view of Victorian patriarchal society is that she is very passionate and sensuous, qualities which were not considered well on the part of the women of Victorian. Her mistake was her being in love with a man who was not her match financially and according to class. This leads to her fall. She gives birth to a love child. This is her secret. This secret does not let her communicate with other members of society and the members of society think she is proud and arrogant. Therefore, not to let her secret be exposed to others, she keeps a low profile in the society. This way of leading such a life has bored her to death. Esther describes her as:

Lady Dedlock has been bored to death. Concert, assembly, opera, theatre, drive, nothing is new to my Lady under the worn-out heavens. Only last Sunday, when poor wretches were gay – within the walls playing with children among the clipped trees and the statues in the Palace Garden; walking, a score abreast, in the Elysian Fields, made more Elysian by performing dogs and wooden horses; between whiles filtering (a few) through the gloomy Cathedral of Our Lady to say a word or two at the base of a pillar within flare of a rusty little gridiron-full of gusty little tapers; without the walls encompassing Paris with dancing, love-making, wine-drinking, tobacco-smoking, tomb-visiting, billiard card and domino playing, quack-doctoring, and much murderous refuse, animate and inanimate – only last Sunday, my Lady, in the desolation of Boredom and the clutch of Giant Despair, almost hated her own maid for being in spirits. She cannot, therefore, go too fast from Paris. Weariness of soul lies before her (Dickens: 161-162).

In fact, when we read the novel it is as though she is associated and identified with boredom and tiredness. She is all despair and boredom.



This is also evident from the above passage. Nothing can make her happy. On the other hand, Esther is in sharp contrast to her mother. Esther is happy and full of spirit because she lives according to the norms and standards of the Victorian society; but, lady Dedlock is not happy because she wants to live according to her own norms and standards that actually brings about her death at the end. This shows that Victorian society favors Esther-like women rather than Dedlock. In fact, when we read the novel to discover the hidden ideology of the novel we understand that Dickens, as patriarch, is practicing the same thing here by creating such a character as lady Dedlock. He is unconsciously telling us that this is the fate of those who does not obey the rules, norms, standards of the patriarch society of the Victorian period.

As Azam asserts, “The two major characters, Lady Dedlock and Esther, mark Dickens’s mature conceptions of female personalities. They are extreme opposites of each other” (94). Lady Dedlock had an affair with a man she really loved. They could not marry each other because the man’s profession and social status were disrespected. Such a society does not let her be happy with what she loves. Azam contends that:

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’ (Azam: 94).

When Lady Dedlock finds that her past is causing problems for her, her life changes and she becomes shocking. When her secret is revealed she leaves the house and goes to cemetery where her former lover is buried. By doing that she wants to protect those she cares about. In an article entitled “The Broken Glass: Vision and Comprehension in Bleak House” Ian Ousby writes “Lady Dedlock, as her manner of frozen detachment would suggest, has become an outsider in her own life, merely a passive and help-less observer of her own fate” (384).

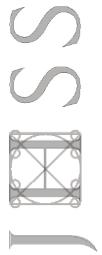
She fails to live up to the standards of Victorian period and has a love child born out of wedlock. Such a society does not let a woman be expressive and she wanted to be expressive and death was the result. She is against the norms and the patriarch Dickens has her killed at the end when her secret is about to be known to all. Such a society nips her in the bud. She commits suicide simply because she could not live up with the expectations of the Victorian society. In such a society she is led to kill herself, she seems to be a victim of the circumstances.

Sara Cash believes that the combination of the sweetness, goodness, and sacrificial flexibility of the virgin with the part of the matriarch proves not only a predominant approach in the nineteenth century about a woman's part in the house, but also a concealed terror creeping around this image of an implicit patriarchal awareness where a sexualized mother becomes hazardous and intimidating (1). She contends that in *Bleak House*, Esther Summerson and her mother, Lady Dedlock, exemplify this dichotomy. In the novel, Esther, nevertheless is still single, she is discovered as an embodiment of the good Victorian mother for the reason that she is motherly without the command of her own sexuality, whereas her own mother, Lady Dedlock, becomes surrounded and stationary in a death-like condition owing to her sexual turpitude, done when she gave birth to Esther out of wedlock (Cash: 1). However, Esther is not that much strong as a feminist woman while her mother is and her suicide can be interpreted as an act of heroism who showed her dissatisfaction with such a society and she can be considered as a scapegoat and a victim for other women. Lady Dedlock should be considered as a great challenger of the patriarchal ideas and views of the Victorian society. From a feminist perspective she killed herself so that other women understand that true love is important.

If the novel promotes Esther as an angel in the house, it demotes Lady Dedlock as evil in the house. This, however, is a construction. They both are constructed by the male figures of the society in order to preach their own patriarchal views and ideals. The Victorian society preaches domestic duties on the part of women while keeping them away from politics and other outdoor activities. The women did not have the suffrage in the Victorian times. The patriarchs of the time of Victorian did not let women express themselves.

Esther is a good wife from the point of view of Victorian society, and Dickens was aware of the taste of his patriarchal period and created her according to his time's ideals of women. As far as the issue of identification is concerned readers of Victorian period identified with Esther on the grounds that she has good qualities. But if we resist Dickens and Victorian period and read the novel against the grain and shift our sympathy from the character of Esther to her mother, we are standing against Dickens as a male writer of Victorian period which did not allow women even the right to vote. In that case we have to identify with her mother who gave vent to her feelings and stood against society and defied its rules to show that the rules are after all man-made.

This is in agreement with feminist critics and feminist writers who have had a less positive view of the Angel in the house. Virginia Woolf ridiculed the model of femaleness portrayed in such a woman, saying that she [the perfect wife] was intensely sympathetic. She was



immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed daily. If there was a chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it ... Above all, she was pure. She said additionally that she "bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her (Wikipedia). Virginia woolf was a great female writer of the time and talked about the pressures of the patriarchy. Nel Noddings considers angle in the house as youthful, feeble and tedious. Correspondingly, Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her short essay entitled "The Extinct Angel" defined the angel in the house as being dead (Wikipedia).

Concerning this duality of the daughter and mother as bad and angel in the novel, Dickens uses name symbolism which can help us understand the characters better. The last name of the heroin-narrator of the novel Esther Summerson suggests imageries of warmth and happiness, which gives her personality of angle in the house great quality. The name of lady Dedlock stands for deadlock, or impasse, in which she is trapped because of the wrongdoings she has committed in the Victorian society.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Marriage as a Social Ladder

All the three women examined in this thesis considered marriage as a social ladder. Esther in *Bleak House* regards marriage as a progress and she finds it and enjoys it. She is good enough according to the tastes of the Victorian period. But from the point of feminists she is very passive and inactive. She has accepted the conditions offered to her by the patriarchy and acts according to what society expects. One of the findings of this article is that women in male writers are shown as passive and obedient and kind and good. For example in the novel *bleak house* nearly all women are good, passive, and kind. Esther and Ada Clare are good women who act according to the norms. If they act according to the norms they are shown to have good marriage and marital life. To be good is to a great extent related to be financially well-off by marrying a rich man.

Winning the label Angel in the House

Victorian criteria and standards of good and evil in regards with women are surrounded over the submission and lack of submission of women. Women who are submissive are good and women who are not submissive are evil. The submissive ones remain in the society and the disobedient ones are omitted from society in order not to affect other women negatively. In this article Esther and Ada are submissive and remain in the respectable society of Victorian period. Victorian society

rewarded submissive women and rejected disobedient ones. Their criteria for good and evil depended on women's obedience and disobedience to men and the quality of how to raise a family.

Consequently that is how women won the label 'angel in the house' by the patriarchy system of Victorian period.

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