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Female Characters in Selected Novels of Charles Dickens

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Declaration:

I hereby declare that I have written this master's thesis by myself and that all the sources used during writing were properly cited.

Prague, **15th July 2017**

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Abstract:

This thesis deals with the topic of the female characters in selected novels of Charles Dickens. The theoretical part is focused on describing the characteristic features of the women in the Victorian period. The practical part analyses the most important female characters according to the author's personal choice, shows similarities and differences among them and compares them with the society at that time.

Key Words:

Victorian woman, Victorian era, female characters, the angel in the house, fallen woman

Abstrakt:

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá tématem ženských postav ve vybraných románech Charlese Dickense. Teoretická část je zaměřena na popis charakteristických vlastností žen ve Viktoriánském období. Praktická část analyzuje nejdůležitější ženské postavy podle autorčiny vlastní volby, poukazuje na jejich společné a rozdílné rysy a porovnává je s tehdejší společností.

Klíčová slova:

Viktoriánská žena, Viktoriánské období, ženské postavy, "anděl v domě", "padlé ženy"

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Introduction

This thesis explores the female characters in selected novels of Charles Dickens. It depicts the female characters in each novel, their interconnection and impact on the plot as such. Victorian archetypes are also explored and compared to Dickens's portrayal of women. Eventually, a development throughout the novels is traced comparing the depiction of female characters in the earlier novels and the later one.

The theoretical part is essentially concerned with Victorian society and the portrayal of the Victorian woman from various points of view. First, attitudes towards women including Victorian morality are described. Then, women's possibilities of education and job offers as well as their role in the patriarchal society are depicted. To outline Victorian archetypes, two fundamental opposites are described - the idealized, pure and self-sacrificing woman, the so-called "angel in the house" and "the fallen woman" who acts against the ideal by losing her sexual purity. To portray a wider range of female characters, classical mythology is used, based on Aphrodite and Demeter and eventually Dickens's specific archetypes are described. The last section of the theoretical part is focused on the moments of Dickens's life that served as an inspiration for his novels, mainly focused on women that shaped Dickens's life and his life project – Urania Cottage – a shelter not only for fallen women.

The practical part of this thesis discusses the pivotal characters in the novels, chronologically organized, namely *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, followed by *Little Dorrit* and *Great Expectations*. Since each novel explored different themes, female characters come from various surroundings and have various destinies, they are initially discussed separately. Their similar features are compared afterwards. *David Copperfield* essentially explores the life of the main male character of the same name who encounters diverse women, marries a premature "child-wife", Dora, but later realizes the immaturity of his decision and marries Agnes, "the angel in the house". In this novel, Dickens also raises the question of fallen women in Victorian England. The portrayal of *Bleak House* is very gloomy as well as its plot. It predominately explores the tragic life of Lady Dedlock and her illegitimate daughter, Esther, who as the embodiment of "the angel in the house" leads eventually a happy fulfilling life like Agnes. *Little Dorrit* reflects Dickens's childhood memories. The main female character of the same name had a difficult childhood, too and like previous "angels in the house" gains a happy future. The highest

contrast is to be found in Dickens's later novel, *Great Expectations*. Unlike in previous novels, the main focus is not paid to "the angel in the house", but to the femme fatale, Estella. The main theme is unreciprocated love and torture and even the ending was originally tragic as it would probably be in reality, however just before publishing it was changed into a happier one.

In his novels, Charles Dickens depicted women who very often reflected his personal experience. He also raised some social questions, e.g. prostitution in Victorian England. His novels change in mood and endings just as his life experience changed – from more positive to more negative.

It is necessary to stress Dickens's limited point of view on women. Although he was living and writing in the Victorian era and was influenced by stereotypes of ideal femininity, he has an interesting treatment of women. E.g. Dickens's "angel in the house" usually suffered in childhood or she is also physically damaged in order to be able to marry a prosperous man, e.g. Ester in *Bleak House* who after surviving smallpox is no longer a good-looking woman, yet her inner qualities are strengthened.

What is more, Miriam Margolyes in her *Dickens's Women* argues that "he never portrayed a woman whom we would recognise as a mature sexual and emotional partner for his heroes... because his own relations with women were all damaged, incomplete or destructive." Additionally, Dickens's daughter once remarked: "my father never understood women" (Margolyes 12) which underlines Margolyes' words and stresses the fact that there is not a single pure character whose destiny would not be somehow damaged throughout their life.

THEORETICAL PART

1 – The Victorian Era

1.1 Victorian society

Before describing the 19th century society, the overview of a woman's position in the society will be given. In the Early English Modern Period women were socially and economically dependent on men. The woman was responsible for domestic duties only, such as raising children and taking care of the household or helping her husband in the field as most of the families were living in the countryside. The society was strictly religious and that affected everyday life. The church communicated to the people biblical stories, e.g. the story of God creating Adam first and afterwards Eve from Adam's ribs. From this and other stories the inferior position of women was given.

The following nineteenth century in Britain was a time of industrialization, urbanization and generally speaking a century of great changes. The industrial revolution in Britain – the transformation from an agricultural into an industrial society - was the first one of such a large scale and was followed by other countries (Kiely 28). A significant year was 1851 when The Great Exhibition took place in London in Hyde Park. Around six million people wanted to see the achievements in modern industry and science. A few years later, in 1859, Charles Darwin published his famous scientific work *On the Origin of Species* which expressed the concept of evolutionary biology. His work provided a completely different point of view on the so far very strict religious Victorian society and shook its values. There were some authors, e.g. Thomas Hardy, who had a particular interest in science (Diniejkó), yet Dickens deliberately avoided such themes.

Industrialisation also hugely affected British demography and urbanization. Within the first half of the nineteenth century more than half the population moved to the cities where they found their new occupation. It affected also the lives of women. No longer were women responsible only for domestic duties. They also started to work for new employers since a lot of workforce was needed. The industrial cities were unplanned and therefore living conditions unsanitary. "Often several families lived in one room of a rickety house with no indoor plumbing and little heat or light" (Mitchell 5).

The unsuitable conditions of a poor workforce along with the introduction of the Corn

Laws, which prohibited the import of corn in order to raise the price of domestic corn, caused a period of hunger, known as the “hungry forties”. In addition, The Famine reduced the population of Ireland to one million (Kinealy) and caused a mass immigration to England. Since people had to spend money on food rather than other goods for a certain standard of living, the economic situation led to depression and left many people unemployed. Prices of food kept getting higher as well as the crime rate. The situation was even worse for lower-class women. It happened very often that the only option for them to make their ends meet was to become a prostitute, the so called “fallen woman”, the Victorian archetype that is going to be elaborated later. These conditions were a great inspiration for writers like Charles Dickens.

As mentioned above, the lower-class society very often suffered from the industrialisation and unsuitable conditions for living and prostitution was quite common. Yet, the middle and upper-class society was getting wealthy. With the reign of Queen Victoria, the image of a happy middle or upper-class family appeared (Abrams) and also another Victorian archetype of “the angel in the house”, the pure domestic wife popular in Victorian novels including Dickens’s, which is going to be elaborated later.

Rapid social changes influenced also the Chartist movement that was run by the working class. Its aim was to establish parliamentary democracy and to gain the right to vote. Working class men had no right to vote until 1884 with the third Reform Bill. (Mitchell 14). Even though their demands were rejected after several months of speeches and meetings, it remained as a symbol of action and disagreement with conditions. Prosperity then arose and the Chartist movement faded away.

As far as women are concerned, it took more time until they received their right to vote. “In 1866, Hastings resident Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon had drafted and promoted a petition for votes for women” (Wojtczak). After that suffrage groups started to form all over the country. Women held open air meetings and public rallies. Yet, 62 years later after her petition, “In February 1918 female householders aged over 30 were granted the vote” (Wojtczak), 34 years after the vote for men.

1.2 - The role of religion

Religion had a powerful role. Its beliefs and values based on duty, self-sacrifice and sexual propriety shaped the Victorian society. Religious structures were the base for the ideal Victorian family, which means patriarchy in which a woman was supposed to be obedient to a male member of the family, either a father or later a husband and to be the pure “angel in the house”.

“The Protestant version of Christianity was a powerful cultural adhesive” (Moran 45). The Church was involved in the everyday life of people. Religious institutions helped with the care for the poor and “sought to reform the marginalized (as in the ‘Magdalen’ asylums for fallen women)” (Moran 45). Naturally, the church had to face also accusations of hypocrisy and puritanical repression which is known from some novels (for instance St. John Rivers in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*) since sometimes the religious ideas and systems were interpreted in very varied ways.

There were novelists, like Charles Dickens, who explicitly avoided religious themes, yet he personally “employed the rhetoric of sin, judgement and forgiveness in *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit* in order to promote self-discipline, compassion and honesty as the basis of social justice” (Moran 45). His picture of female chastity and purity was also according to Victorian Christian teaching.

Evangelicalism, a form of Protestantism, dominated religion in the 19th century in England. It taught that only faith could save sinners and the absolute authority of the Bible. “Emphasis on the fallen nature of humanity etched introspection and guilt on the Victorian personality” (Moran). Self-awareness meant being aware of one’s sinfulness and constantly resisting temptation. Because “pious” was a standard which everyone was supposed to approach, any departure from this standard was considered a spiritual failing. As an example could serve a pious woman, “the angel in the house”, and her opposite, “the fallen woman”, who ended up in sin and the society scorned her. Both terms are going to be discussed later.

Bible reading was a daily practise and attending Sunday’s Holy service stressed the importance of a pious life. As Evans summarized: “The common conception of the meaning of life, and large agreement on its consequent practise, was the essential cement, which in spite of manifold diversities of society and economics, held the Victorians so

strongly together” (278).

Victorian morality

Victorian morality goes hand in hand with religion. Public standards for public behaviour were strict.

“By the 1840s, respectable men kept quiet about their premarital or extramarital affairs... By the end of the period, revelations about extramarital sexuality would cause a man to lose his seat in Parliament” (Mitchell 268).

Yet, at the same time, journalists and clergy-men started to talk about prostitution as they saw it as a fundamental problem not as a natural feature of life.

There have been some discussions which claimed that a woman should stay ignorant of sex until the wedding night and whenever she is out, she must be protected by chaperones (Mitchell 269). Therefore any woman seen walking alone in public was assumed by men to be sexually available.

2 - The Victorian woman

The Victorian era is characterised “as the domestic age par excellence, epitomised by Queen Victoria, who came to represent a kind of femininity which was centred on the family, motherhood and respectability” (Abrams). Victoria with her beloved husband and children became an icon of middle-class femininity and domesticity (Abrams).

The nineteenth century in which Victoria was living was, according to Gleadle, divided into “separate spheres” (8). On one hand women were perceived as affectionate, loving and religious, on the other hand, men were perceived as more robust and pragmatic. This separation of sexes was mirrored in the expectations and roles they had in the society. “Men were to engage themselves in the worlds of business, work and politics; whilst women were consigned to the home and family” (Gleadle 8). Victorian society was strongly patriarchal and it shaped women’s lives to a great extent. Woman’s motherhood and domesticity was regarded sufficient emotional fulfilment for them.

2.1 Everyday life of the Victorian woman

Work

The person who says “Victorian women led idle and luxurious lives” has forgotten about the other three-quarters of the population (Mitchell 44). Women of all classes did work. The major employments were domestic service, factories and needlework, e.g. Little Dorrit doing needlework in the house of Mrs Clennam in the novel *Little Dorrit*. Beside the role of the domestic servant, women worked as seamstresses, in laundries or in textile mills. When machines supplied the strength, women could work in areas where quickness and neat work habits were required.

In a typical middle-class urban household there were three female servants: cook, housemaid and nursemaid. Usually they were unmarried (Mitchell 52). One of the explanations could be a lack of men. In 1851 the population of males in England and Wales was 8,781,225, whereas there were 9,146,384 females (Mitchell 13). It could also explain the superior position of men as they were “rarer”.

Even when women gained a job, they earned less money than men and their employment was regarded as unskilled. “They faced a double burden of work in the public and domestic spheres (Kiely 30). Yet, it was common for a woman from the working class to bring home money. In many middle-class households women contributed to the success of their husband’s business. “Except for the most socially prominent physicians, for example, the doctor’s wife was often called on to serve as his assistant or to give advice to patients who stopped at the office when the doctor was away on a house call” (Mitchell 46).

The role of governess

A typical respectable occupation of Victorian women was governess. She also frequently appears in Victorian novels, e.g. the character of Esther in *Bleak House*. This woman taught middle or upper-class girls, usually at home. A daily governess gave lessons in one subject every day and was common in the cities. A resident governess, the one familiar from many Victorian novels, lived with the family.

The real status of a governess was nevertheless ambiguous. She had a higher social role than a servant; yet lower than family members. She spent more time with the children including having meals, yet she was often invited to join the drawing room after dinner.

Even mothers interviewing governesses were more interested in their manners rather than in their teaching abilities.

Most of the governesses could not be educated in schools suited for them; therefore they were teaching what they learnt from their governesses as children. “Governesses with good credentials were also hired to go abroad with colonial and military families who wanted their daughters to receive an English education without sending them home to boarding school” (Mitchell 184).

Education

In England, children were educated in various ways. Low-cost elementary schools were suitable for working-class and lower-middle class children and were usually built by religious organizations. It was not easy to evaluate how many people were literate. “The census reported that 67 percent of males and 51 percent of females were literate” (Mitchell 170).

Girls were less likely to attend school than boys as public life was not their future. If attending school, girls were taught how to look after babies and help their mothers with housework. They were more morally and social protected and as a result of that parents disliked the idea of having them away from home at large schools. The best option was a governess who could teach the girls at their homes, e.g. Ada and her governess Esther in *Bleak House*.

Girl’s schools

Girls had on average less education than their brothers as it was already remarked. For elementary education there were a few options: first, they could attend an elementary school, second they could be educated by a governess until their teens and third, if the family could not financially afford a governess, they were educated by their mothers. When some girls reached their teens, they attended boarding schools for a few years. The education there differed. Some schools were focused on foreign languages, other paid more attention to social graces and appearance, e.g. girls studied the tables of precedence in order to know how to arrange seating for their future dinner guests.

“By the 1850s and 1860s, many middle-class parents understood that girls’ education

needed reform, and new academic schools were established” (Mitchell 187). Schools were built in many towns outside London. These new so called high schools were for pupils age 12-18 and served as a preparation for younger girls. Fees were low, so it was affordable for girls from various social level.

Women were not expected to study at the university. “At Cambridge, a residence established in 1869 in the suburb of Hitchin became Girton College in 1873. A second women’s college, Newnham, took its first students in 1875.” (Mitchell 192) Nevertheless, they were still not a part of the university and a number of professors and scientists had to help them with teaching and political support. Women could attend some regular lectures in Cambridge, but in 1872 women were also examined. They could not get a degree, only a certificate saying which examination they passed. (Mitchell 192) By the end of the nineteenth century there was still a low number of women studying at colleges. “Even professors’ daughters sometimes had trouble persuading their fathers they were serious about wanting to undertake university study” (Mitchell 193).

Marriage

“The most incomprehensible thing in the world to a man, is a woman who rejects his offer of marriage!” (Austen)

During the Victorian era, marriages were not very romanticized. Love played only a little role. Marriage was for a woman an expected natural and almost inevitable role. “...it satisfied her instinctual needs, preserved the species, provided appropriate duties, and protected her from the shocks and dangers of the rude, competitive world” (Mitchell 267). It also determined her social status, role, economic circumstances or a place of residence.

At home her features, such as purity and sensitivity, could blossom and she was protected from the evil public world where she would hardly find a place on her own. Since marriage was the main purpose of a woman’s life, it was common that her own needs were suppressed in order to be good at pleasing men and raising children.

Marriage signified woman’s maturity, those who did not marry were considered as a failure or something abnormal. “(...) the childless single woman was a figure to be pitied” (Abrams). That woman was very often encouraged to become a governess, obviously to

compensate her loss.

Although marriage was presented as the inevitable luck and destiny of a woman, Sally Mitchell makes us doubt about it. “There were more women in their twenties and thirties than men to marry them (largely because of male emigration and colonial service), but not all single women were unhappy old maids” (269). Women from the working class who had a well-paid job were more likely to stay single than women with a lower income. Women from the middle and upper classes could also earn some decent incomes and live an independent happy life. Nevertheless, the independent women were minority in the society.

“As a general rule, women expected to be married by the age of twenty-six, although there were a number who became wives beyond this age” (Jones 173). With the increasing age, the chances of getting married got decreased. It was natural to expect that a woman will be either continually pregnant or breastfeeding until the end of her fertile age. Generally, frequent pregnancies were destructive for the women’s health and many of them died owing to complications with childbearing, illustrated on the example of Dora in *David Copperfield*.

Unmarried women

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the natural role for her was the contrary: to get married and have children. Only if women were unmarried or widows could they own property, otherwise all property was in the possession of their husbands (Teachman 38). If an unmarried woman earned some decent incomes, she could live independently as mentioned above. In the opposite case she had to rely on her male friends or relatives, in the worst case complete strangers, e.g. Miss Murdstone in *David Copperfield* who relied on her brother. Although women could work, job possibilities were very limited and low-paid. When there was not any other solution, a woman had to start working as a prostitute. This was a common case for a lower-class society.

An unmarried woman was expected to live in permanent celibacy and to serve others (Teachman 87). The social position of unmarried women was above the average servants, yet lower to the family they were living with. Spinsters were considered unnatural and leading a less satisfactory kind of life (Teachman 89). This could be a reason why spinsters

in the analysed novels are almost always depicted negatively, e.g. Miss Murdstone in *David Copperfield*.

Divorce

During the Victorian period, divorce was not very common. It was against all ideas of the ideal family and pure Victorian society. Once a couple was married, it was extremely difficult for a woman to divorce. “The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 gave men the right to divorce their wives on the grounds of adultery” (Simkin). Yet, living in the patriarchal society, when a married woman discovered her husband to be unfaithful, she was not able to obtain a divorce. When a couple eventually divorced, children became the man’s property and the mother could be even prevented from seeing her children (Simkin).

2.2 Victorian archetypes

2.2.1 “The angel in the house”

In the Victorian Era there were two predominant archetypes of women - the angel and the fallen woman. Apart from Queen Victoria, there were created many characters that should remind of the ideal Victorian woman. “The angel in the house” was present in every household. The most conventional picture is to be found in the poem “The Angel in the House” by Coventry Patmore. The poem idealizes “the angel in the house” as can be seen on the extract:

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;
And if he once, by shame oppress'd,
A comfortable word confers,
She leans and weeps against his breast,
And seems to think the sin was hers,... (109)

The ideal woman was very pious and diligent. She accepted her place in the sexual hierarchy and played only a domestic role. Those presumptions claimed that if she succeeds, her husband and sons will not want to leave her in the evenings to find entertainment somewhere else.

This image was strongly criticized by the first wave of feminism, mainly by Virginia Woolf. She described 19th-century women as those who were to offer selfless sacrifices, perform flawless housework, and embody perfect purity (Blair 53). Moreover, in her essay *Professions for Women* she claims: “Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer” (Woolf, 5). She did not appreciate the idea of the “phantom” (as she described the angel in the house) being still present in life.

2.2.2. Fallen women

“Where there are men and women in a society, there will always be, to some extent, by some definition, prostitution; it is as an act old as time itself” (Shaw).

As seen from the quote above, prostitution has always been a part of a society. Yet, with the increasing number of social problems and with the morality of the rising middle-class, prostitution was seen as “a social evil of epic proportions” (Shaw). By the time of Hungry forties women were displaced by skilled men and became totally economically dependent

on the male breadwinner. Since the women were in a subordinate position and economically dependent on the man in marriage, they could not do much in order to enhance their financial situation and become independent. “Suicide and mortality rates were particularly high and in the towns there were high rates of prostitution among women who escaped from oppressive husbands” (Kiely 30).

Those women who did not have any male breadwinner, had to take care of themselves. By the mid nineteenth century it had become more difficult for women to get an appropriate job and make ends meet. Since those women could not find any other means of supplementing their incomes, they turned more and more to prostitution.

According to Shaw, it is reckoned there were approximately 219,000 prostitutes in the 19th century, which means one in twelve unmarried women in the country chose the path of "non-virtue". Fallen women have served as inspiration for artists. E.g. Shaw provides the example of Wilde's poem *The Harlot's House*:

Like strange mechanical grotesques,
Making fantastic arabesques,
The shadows raced across the blind.

We watched the ghostly dancers spin
To sound of horn and violin,
Like black leaves wheeling in the wind.

Like wire-pulled automatons,
Slim silhouetted skeletons
Went sidling through the slow quadrille.

In this poem Wilde dehumanized fallen women, talking about them as “mechanical grotesques”, “automatons” or “skeletons”. It is quite a disrespectful portrait of prostitution

and demonstrates the opinion of the vast majority of Victorian society.

In general, the artists tried to express their point of view and to warn about this problem without causing offence. The figure of the fallen woman was everywhere – in paintings, in novels and also in newspapers. (Shaw) The fallen woman was a figure of destruction and she could find her peace only after death.

With the passing of the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864,..., which legalised prostitution but entailed legislation enabling police to arrest women suspected of being prostitutes and the subsequent examination of them for signs of venereal disease, it became a matter of public controversy and the era of “The Great Social Evil” was born (Shaw).

This Act was the first step which attempted to fight against growing prostitution. Any woman could be forcibly medically examined and if signs of venereal disease appeared, she was sent to the Lock Hospitals which were specialized in treating sexually transmitted diseases. The reason was not only to protect women themselves, but also to protect the British Army and the women’s sexual clients. It accentuates the patriarchal society since women had to act according to the new rules, being in an inferior position.

It ended up with a large reformation campaign called the anti-contagious diseases movement led by Josephine Butler (Shiman 148). It claimed that not only women are to be blamed for prostitution, but it is patriarchal society; better to say, men, who gave birth to the large amount of working prostitutes. Another woman to be mentioned considering this problem was Elizabeth Gaskell, who deals with the double standard of sexuality in her novel *Ruth*. She presented fallen women as “victims of oppressive discursive structures that propel them toward ruin rather than reform” (Eberle 137).

There were men like Dickens and his friend Wilkie Collins who were patrolling the streets in order to help women in any possible way (Tomalin 275). “Debates about prostitution flourished during the period of Dickens’s and Gaskell’s editorial dealings which began in 1850 and ended in 1863” (Michie 79). This meant that Dickens was influenced by the state of the society and as a consequence he was interested in rescuing prostitutes. His effort was

channelled in a Home for Homeless Women, the so called Urania Cottage, which helped “fallen” women and will be later more discussed.

2.2.3 Aphrodite and Demeter

Victorian society itself was divided between the enthusiasm from the Industrial Revolution and the great social problems. This reflected also the basic distinction between the angel and the whore. Yet, it would be very simplified to claim there were only two, see chapter 2.2.1 and 2.2.2. Focusing on Dickens’s novels, he has created plenty of characters that would not simply fit into one of those two categories. With the help of Hofmann another distinction could be made, according to Romantic features. For this purpose the help of nineteenth century art will be needed.

“In an erudite study on nineteenth century art, Hofmann claims that there are two female archetypes which dominate nineteenth century works: Aphrodite and Demeter” (Wilkie 25).

Aphrodite is the Romantic femme fatale and Demeter is a traditional symbol of motherhood.

This part of the thesis is going to be focused on these two archetypes that had many other attributes that would help for better understanding of Victorian thinking and the society at that time.

APHRODITE

This archetype symbolizes women’s love, beauty, sensuality and sexuality. The Aphroditic state is that one which is not restricted by man. At its basic level, it is expressed by freedom. The most known type of Aphrodite is the femme fatale. It was developed during the Romantic Movement (*Classics*). The description could be derived from Keats’ *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* in which according to Braun:

La Belle Dame... feigns passivity for the sake of gaining power. By giving the knight an illusion of his own control and maintaining the mystery of her own allure, La

Belle Dame retains control over lovers past and present by turning them into passive and languishing victims. (27)

This kind of woman is a powerful woman who wants to command the attention of men and at the same time to subjugate them. She can offer them a beautifully terrible mixture of pain and pleasure. The femme fatale always seems to take revenge on men as a result of something that happened to her in the past. She is also quite obscure and mysterious considering her past. Later on, she became a vampire in a literature as a result of her attractiveness which lay in the terror of her power combined with a womanly mystery close to the supernatural (*Classics*). In Dickens's *Great Expectations* it is Estella who could serve as an example of femme fatale.

DEMETER

Demeter is the maternal archetype. She symbolises maternal instincts that can be fulfilled through maternity. Demeter was in ancient Greece represented as a mother whose main role was nutrition. Yet, it could be expressed through helping professions like teaching. It is a fulfilling role once a woman becomes a mother. It is her aim, the stronger her instincts are, the more she wants to become pregnant and give birth to a baby. Demeter's instincts are not restricted to being a biological mother. She can express her maternal love also when taking care of children that are not hers (*Classics*). The most common type of Demeter is maternal. She is supportive and helpful in her relationships. She is also dependable and everyone feels like at home in her household. In the novel she is depicted as "warm-hearted mother", e.g. the character of Peggotty in *David Copperfield*.

2.2.4 Dickens's specific characters

Dickens did not only work with the stereotypes mentioned above, he also created his own. The portraits of his stereotypical archetypes are particularly "the prepubescent child, usually described as 'little' (Emily, Dorrit, Dora)" (Margolyes 16) and forbidding spinsters that were often negative towards people they encountered, e.g. Miss Murdstone in *David Copperfield*.

“The prepubescent child”

This character is very common in Dickens’s novels and occurs in the first three examined novels. The term prepubescent is in quotation marks as it does not deal with children, but with adult women who resembled rather a child than a mature woman since they are of a diminutive figure and are sometimes mixed up with a child. They are often called “little”, e.g. Little Emily, Little Dorrit or "little housekeeper" – Esther in *Bleak House*.

Special kind of a prepubescent child is a “child-wife”, a term first used in *David Copperfield* by Dora when she requested David to call her a “child-wife”¹ and he started using the term from that day on. The child-wife resembles a woman who is immature despite her age. Both physical appearance and behaviour resemble a child rather than an adult woman. This archetype cannot survive in the world as it is weak and dies in the novels, e.g. Dora and Clara in *David Copperfield*.

Forbidding spinsters

In the novels of Charles Dickens spinsters are often depicted very negatively, e.g. Miss Murdstone in *David Copperfield*. Dickens’s description could be based on the Victorian mentality, which was not fond of them. According to Nelson “aging spinsters were a particular source of concern (...)” (133). They were not pitied and considered problematic since Victorians woman's natural instinct was to bear children, but since they could face a “lonely and impoverished old age” (Nelson 133).

3 - The author’s help to women – Urania Cottage

Dickens saw the increasing problem with prostitution in London and wanted to act. He met a famous philanthropist of the nineteenth century - Angela Burdett-Coutts, who was an heiress of a great fortune from her grandfather and was interested in various charitable ventures (Margolyes 82). In May 1846 he responded to Miss Coutts’s plan of “establishing an asylum for prostitutes... who wanted to make a new start in life, and were prepared to go overseas to find it” (Slater 341). In the letter he suggested the whole organization of the asylum: “Together she and Dickens created Urania Cottage, an Asylum for Fallen Women,

¹ Dickens, Charles, *David Copperfield* EBOOK, chapter 44. [Subsequent page references preceded with DC are given in parentheses in the text.]

later to be called A Home” (Margolyes 82).

Dickens was tirelessly involved in helping young women who were coming in a bad state, drunk and disorderly. He was organising their daily schedule, interviewing them as well as he helped them with some administration. “Order and punctuality, cleanliness, the whole routine of household duties — as washing, mending, cooking — the establishment itself would supply the means of teaching practically, to everyone”(Rogers). Dickens believed that education could help them to improve their fates by introducing rigid rules in their lives without realising the rules imposed on them. He wanted women to be encouraged rather than to be constantly reminded of their sinfulness.

He was also positive about the idea that fallen women should emigrate (Australia, America) in the hope of starting a new, better life and also to marry. This idea can be seen in the character of Emily and Martha in *David Copperfield*. However, Margolyes argues that it was not always voluntary: “They often had difficulty in appreciating the difference between voluntary emigration and transportation” (83).

Although Urania Cottage was originally supposed to serve only prostitutes, there were also many other women, e.g. “starving needlewomen of good character, poor needlewomen who have robbed their furnished lodgings..., domestic servants who have been seduced” (Slater 343).

There were also women who did not feel any guilt or a need of getting married and live a pure life. It was beyond Dickens’s comprehension. Slater argues: “...Dickens, a Christian Romantic and a man for whom domesticity was a real passion, was, unlike Zola, incapable of imaginatively comprehending such a woman as this” (344). Thus, women depicted in his novels share the same features - feelings of guilt, looking for forgiveness and a better life.

All in all, Dickens always stuck with the ideal of Victorian womanhood – the angel in the house, and even though he was helping women who passed through Urania Cottage, “nothing would move Dickens from conviction that prostitutes must be the most miserable of women” (Slater 348), a woman that must be excluded from all female domestic joys.

To conclude the theoretical part, the Victorian era was a patriarchal world in which a

Victorian woman had an inferior role. The life-time event for her was a marriage. She was also working but rarely achieved the same financial position as men. Victorian society created “the angel in the house” which was a dreamed archetype. The contrary archetype was “the fallen woman” - the whore everybody was separated from and who was never talked about in public. It was a great issue in the Victorian society that had to be solved, e.g. Dickens’s *Urania Cottage* for fallen women. Charles Dickens created various characters that do not only fit into angel-whore division but also into Romantic archetypes – Aphrodite – femme fatale and Demeter – a maternal type. In addition, an archetype of a prepubescent child and forbidding spinster often occurs in his novels and therefore are all above mentioned archetypes described in the theoretical part.

PRACTICAL PART

The practical part is focused on Dickens's perception of women. During his life he encountered hundreds of them and also experienced different roles as a man - Dickens as son, brother, husband, father and even lover. There are clear connections between his female characters and women he met in his life, e.g. "his mother and Mrs Micawber,..., Maria Beadnell and Dora Spenlow or Flora Finching" (Slater, introduction to the book). Through his writing he could express his feelings and emotions that he experienced throughout his life.

Dickens created stereotypical archetype of women - "prepubescent child", usually described as "little" (Emily, Dorrit, Dora); the unattainable sexual object (Estella, Lady Dedlock); the grotesque, sometimes evil, sometimes comic; the bad and incompetent mother (Mrs Clennam); the spinster longing for a man (Rosa Dartle). (Margolyes 16)

Once again it could be stressed that all Dickens's female characters are somehow damaged since Dickens probably never understood women. (Margolyes)

The novels are listed chronologically in order to show Dickens's developing attitude towards female characters in his novels. The practical part describes each novel separately in order to explore its main themes, atmosphere and major female characters. Afterwards the female characters are compared.

1 – David Copperfield

“Dickens’s favourite and most autobiographical novel was David Copperfield” (Margolyes 18). It was first published as a serial publication as nineteen monthly one-shilling instalments from May 1849 to November 1850 (McCrum). It underwent many changes of the title, the last one: *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery (Which He Never Meant to be Published On Any Account)* (McCrum): The first novel as a whole was then published on 14 November 1850.

David Copperfield is known as a social novel with autobiographic features which is foreshadowed in the very first sentence of the novel: “Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show” (DC chapter 1).

In this novel Dickens raises the problem of prostitution in Victorian England. Unlike the society he does not share the common opinion that fallen women have to be ostracized. He gives them a second chance by sending them to Australia, the same idea that he practised in *Urania Cottage*. Generally, he criticizes the Victorian society. He also depicts the unfair life showing on one hand David who has to fight for his own existence and a place in society, on the other hand Steerforth, who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and whether he studies or not, his status is forever established and he does not have to care about his future.

The analysis starts with Agnes, “the angel in the house”, who would do everything to make everyone happy. She is then compared to David’s “child-wife” Dora, explaining why she was not eventually the right wife for him. Since David’s mother Clara has some similarities to Dora in terms of sharing a “prepubescent” figure and immature thinking, she is described as the next one. The contrary mother figure to Clara is Peggotty. She is a figure of maternal Demeter, David feels always at ease when he is at her place.

There are also negative characters, e.g. a forbidding spinster Miss Murdstone. She is a fully negative character, feeling good when making harm for others. Rosa Dartle is also a negative character who cannot get over her past and is always jealous when it comes to Steerforth. The last two characters analysed in this novel are Little Emily and Martha, both

fallen women who eventually start a better life that would not be possible in Victorian England as they would be scorned and their life would probably end up with death.

“The angel in the house” - the incarnation of good

As it was already argued by Miriam Margolyes, Dickens could not portray a woman that would be a sexual and emotional partner for his heroes at the first place and all characters are somehow destroyed. Even the “angels in the house” are not the first choice for the main characters, in this novel it is Agnes who is in the background almost all the time of the story and David realizes her qualities only at the end.

When she appears in the novel for the first time, she is marked as a “little housekeeper” (*DC* chapter 15) for her widowed Dad. She takes care of the household, does the needlework or serves tea. No wonder that she is associated with an angel, e.g. David once exclaims: “You are my good Angel”... Yes, Agnes, my good Angel” Always my good Angel!” (*DC* chapter 25)

Agnes is a self-sacrificing young woman. As a child she lost her mother and since then her father was totally fixed on her existence, which appears later to be unhealthy. She is always more concerned about him than herself. When he starts drinking and his business with Uriah Heep makes Agnes realize that Uriah wants to force her father to marry her, she, instead of opposing, begs David not to intervene. She would rather sacrifice her life and marry Uriah Heep than risk her father’s reputation. By Agnes Dickens is questioning typical characteristic features of “the angel in the house”, e.g. self-sacrifice.

It must have completely surprised David when Agnes confided in him after Dora’s death: “I have loved you all my life!” (*DC* chapter 65) This statement underlines her self-sacrifice. She kept listening to his experiences with women, even when it had to hurt her. When Dora is about to die, it is Agnes who comes to the Copperfield’s household and nurses her until her end. She is a close friend of Dora who in her last minutes asks Agnes to marry David which stresses the intimacy between these two women. Slater calls this behaviour as a “spiritually redemptive powers” (308). Agnes is the embodiment of the Victorian ideal woman, the so-called “angel in the house”. Interestingly enough, there is no

physical description of Agnes. On the other hand, her goodness is frequently stressed as well as her “superhuman saintliness” (Slater 251).

According to Potter: “David frequently uses such religious imagery when referring to her (Agnes) and his feelings for her, thereby implying that their relationship and eventual happiness have a universal moral quality“. His love towards Agnes begins with a siblings’ love. “It was for me to guard this sisterly affection with religious care” (*DC* chapter 60). Therefore he addresses her frequently as his sister.

After three years abroad in order to recover after loss of his wife, David comes to the conclusion that Agnes loves him and he loves her. His brotherly love developed into real mature love which is in contrast to the destructive romance and marriage to Dora. However, he must take a lot of courage to meet her after years of constant rejection. He confides to her that without her he would be incomplete: “When I loved her—even then, my love would have been incomplete, without your sympathy. I had it, and it was perfected. And when I lost her, Agnes, what should I have been without you, still!” (*DC* chapter 62)

Eventually, they both declare their love to one another and decide to marry. The greatest reason why David loves her is: “You will always be my solace and resource, as you have always been.” (*DC* chapter 60) which describes Agnes’ self-sacrifice. David has always used her advice and her presence in order to become a better man. Agnes has always been a person one can learn from and depend on in hard times. Her love ultimately creates a new life, she bears for David children. It is another contrastive feature to Dora’s adolescent love.

“Child-wives”

The main hero David Copperfield encounters two prepubescent women, in this novel called “child-wives”, who are very young and beautiful but their lives finish tragically. It is Dora Spenlow, David’s first wife and Clara Copperfield, his mother.

The first time David encounters Dora, his boss’s daughter, he falls in love with her. “I was a captive and a slave. I loved Dora Spenlow to distraction!” (*DC* chapter 26) She loved to

play with her dog for hours and was also keen on painting flowers and playing the guitar. All activities as well as her diminutive figure and innocent behaviour were the main reasons why David could not resist her from the first moment.

There could be one more explanation why was David so much attracted to her from the very first moment. Considering the theory of Oedipus complex which leads people to choose a sexual partner who resembles a parent, a possible answer could be given. Dora mirrored Clara in many aspects, from appearance to behaviour.

Yet, David, blind with love, did not notice her imperfectness. He was told that "...Dora is a favourite child of nature. She is a thing of light, and airiness, and joy" (*DC* chapter 37). This expresses Dora's childish character. She cannot think as an adult person and make some thoughts about her future. When David comes home telling Dora that he is ruined, her only reply is "How can you be such a silly thing, as to sit there, telling such stories? I'll make Jip bite you!" (*DC* chapter 37) It underlines Dora's childish behaviour and incompetent way of thinking.

Once David marries her, he gains two life roles, first Dora's husband and second, Dora's caretaker. It is a similar example to Clara Copperfield who married Mr Murdstone, who became a cruel authoritative father figure not only towards David but also cruel towards Clara.

Yet, the relationship between Dora and David is not perfect. After the marriage David tries to change his Dora into a domestic housewife and therefore frequent arguments about housekeeping appear. He is advised by his aunt Miss Betsey that he should love Dora for "the qualities she has" (*DC* chapter 44), which means to accept her personality as it is so that she feels happy.

To stress Dora's childishness, she requests David to call her "child-wife" (*DC* chapter 44) a term she uses from that day on. This nickname should remind him that Dora is not able to do housekeeping or finances and every stress makes her cry. The only thing she is good at is assisting David when he writes and holding pens for him.

It is essential to remark that Dora was raised in an upper-class society without a mother. It is reflected in her personality. From her childhood she was cared for by nurses and was

allowed to do everything. Additionally, she never learnt how to become a proper housewife. She remained in her childhood thinking and refused to grow up.

Marrying Dora means for David also a clash of social classes. Dora comes from upper-class society where she is not expected to have any domestic duties, yet David comes from the middle-class society and needs a wife who would be capable of caring for the household while he is at work.

Nevertheless, Dora's character slightly develops. She starts seeing immense differences between David and herself. When Dora encounters Agnes, she is immediately fond of her and regards her older sister. She notices plenty of similarities between them. In one moment she exclaims: "I wonder why you ever fell in love with me?" (*DC* chapter 42) However, David does not see that Agnes may be a better partner for him.

Despite being seen as a flat character, Dora realises the troubles in their marriage and predicts possible consequences.

Another intuitive act happens at the end of her life. She has a miscarriage which leads to a long illness and eventually to her death. In her last hour she secretly asks Agnes to marry David after her.

Dora's death could be seen as an example of a social Darwinism - someone who did not fit in the strict Victorian society was simply sorted out. Even though Dora failed as a wife, she is described as a sexually attractive woman which was probably the main reason why David fell in love with her and married her. However, later when he mentally grew up, his opinion about love changed and became more mature as well. Therefore Agnes could be seen as the right woman for an adult man as she provides him with stability, understanding and is a capable housewife. Yet, her appearance is not mentioned since it is probably no longer of prime importance in a grown-up relationship.

Clara Copperfield is another character that has many mutual features with Dora Spenlow, David's first wife. First, she is described as "a very Baby" (*DC* chapter 1). David describes her "pretty hair and youthful shape" as well as "eyes so dark that they seemed to darken their whole neighbourhood in her face" (*DC* chapter 2). Throughout the novel she is frequently associated with a childish appearance. Before marrying she was working as a

nanny who worked with children. Eventually, when she dies, Peggotty comments that it is “like a child that had gone to sleep” (*DC* chapter 9). From this point of view she resembles Dora very much.

Clara is very young when she marries her twice as old husband who dies before David is born. She is socially ineffective like Dora. She hardly takes care of the household, yet she is a proud character being aware of her beauty. With respect to being a mother, she is quite flighty and spoiled and never takes advice from anyone. Therefore it is easy for Mr Murdstone to flatter her and make her fall in love with him despite Peggotty’s warnings.

Once they are married, Mr Murdstone plays the cruel authoritative father figure in their new relationship. Even Clara admits to Peggotty that she is “a weak, light, girlish creature and that he² is a firm, grave, serious man” (*DC* chapter 8). This again resembles Dora very much. She was described in a similar way and like Clara was not capable of being a responsible adult woman. Eventually Clara is destroyed by Mr Murdstone’s brutality. Once again social Darwinism appears. Clara is a weak character who does not fit into the strict Victorian society and is sorted out.

Maternal Demeter

David’s childhood was difficult. He did not have many opportunities to feel maternal love from his biological mother. First, Clara Copperfield died quite young and second, she was always quite childish, “prepubescent child” and could not be considered a good mother who would do for her children everything that is expected. Thus David had to look for maternal feelings by different women.

The first woman that surrounds him with love is Clara Peggotty, a housekeeper and a nurse at David’s mother’s household. She could be related to Demeter, the maternal archetype. Although she is not his biological mother, she takes care of him with love and provides him a haven whenever it is possible. When David has to leave for Salem, a boarding school, she gives him secretly some money. When he is threatened by Mr Murdstone, she comes at night and tries to comfort him. Later when David’s mother dies and she moves

² Mr Murdstone

away to marry Mr Barkis, she welcomes David at her new home and introduces her house as David's haven as well.

Peggotty could be considered an incarnation of loyalty. She is threatened by Mr Murdstone multiple times or yelled at by David's mother, nevertheless she always stays. When Mr Barkis passes away, she moves once again, this time to London to become a servant at the household of David and Miss Betsey and she does her job again with great devotion. People in her surroundings feel at ease and love her company.

Peggotty could be seen, in her social-class, as an ideal model of a working-class woman. She loves taking care of people; she is self-sacrificing and also aware of where she belongs. She creates a feminine haven and acts like a caring mother. Her role in the novel is to introduce David to the world of good, yet poor people, which is contrastive to the world where he wants to belong.

The second woman that surrounds David with maternal love in his later age, yet not so intensive, is his aunt, Betsey Trotwood. However, her introduction is full of contradictions. Miss Betsey is the sister of David's departed father. She appears in the house of Clara Copperfield who is pregnant with David and expects her to have a girl. At the childbirth she terrorizes the doctor by questions about its sex:

‘The baby,’ said my aunt. ‘How is she?’

‘Ma’am,’ returned Mr Chillip, ‘I apprehended you had known. It’s a boy.’

My aunt said never a word, but took her bonnet by the strings, in the manner of a sling, aimed a blow at Mr Chillip's head with it, put it on bent, walked out, and never came back. She vanished like a discontented fairy; or like one of those supernatural beings, whom it was popularly supposed I was entitled to see; and never came back any more. (*DC* chapter 1)

Reading such an introduction no one would foretell her real character. After the mother's death David runs away from the terrifying Murdstone family and finds his aunt, Miss Betsey. The first time he spots her in the garden, he describes her as a "tall, hard-featured lady, but by no means ill-looking" (*DC* chapter 13) as well as handsome with a "very quick, bright eye" (*DC* chapter 13) even when she is already at a certain age.

Miss Betsey is a strong, independent woman as she runs her own household and does her own finances. "Rescued from the function of being the 'terrible aunt', Betsey becomes that rarity among Dickens's women, a mature woman who is sensible, kind, wise and genuinely good. She is neither satirised, nor idealised" (Margolyes 74). She does not care only for her nephew David, but also for a mentally handicapped man, Mr Dick, who is mistreated by his brother. She also helps with saving Little Emily, a fallen woman who will be described later.

To understand her acts, one must be aware of Miss Betsey's past. In her teenage hood she desperately fell in love and later married a young, handsome man who was later very mean to her. It was generally thought that he died abroad, thus she took her maiden name again, bought a cottage and started living as a single woman. As it was mentioned in the theoretical part, as a widow, she could lead a fulfilling life even without a husband.

However, it appears later that he was still alive and destroyed Miss Betsey's life. Miss Betsey has a kind heart and keeps in her memory good feelings she had towards him in the past and therefore she gives him always some money for living. Margolyes argues: "If one were to disagree with Kate that her father 'didn't really understand women', it would be in contemplation of Betsey and her continuing love for her cruel husband" (75).

After such a life experience with her own husband, Miss Betsey is highly disappointed with the institution of marriage and therefore when she becomes acquainted with the fact that her beloved nephew David's father has married a young nanny half his age and that new-born David is a boy, she refuses to become a godmother and goes away.

Her misfortune with her love makes her strong enough to stand up for David against the Murdstones when David is not at the appropriate age to do so. She has a high sense of justice and no fear of expressing directly what is on her mind in order to help the people who are important to her. In the following extract she accuses Mr Murdstone of the destiny of David's mother: "...you were a tyrant to the simple baby, and you broke her heart... and

through the best part of her weakness you gave her the wounds she died of. There is the truth for your comfort, however you like it” (*DC* chapter 14)

In addition, Miss Betsey is a character that is able to learn from her mistakes. She distances herself from David's marital troubles claiming she made some mistakes in the past, too and everyone must find their own way how to cope with the problems.

Miss Betsey is also a teacher-figure for David. She demonstrates the importance of learning from his experience and she tests his character when she claims she has no money in order to challenge David to support his own family.

All in all, it could be once again stressed that both Clara Peggotty and Miss Betsey played a crucial role in substituting David's biological mother and provided him with many pieces of advice and helped him in difficult times.

The forbidding spinster

In Dickens's novels spinsters are very often depicted negatively, therefore they could be called forbidding spinsters. In this novel there are two who are going to be mentioned - Miss Murdstone and Rosa Dartle. Both women remained single and treated those around them badly.

The first character, Miss Murdstone, is the unmarried elder sister of Mr Murdstone who accompanies him everywhere. She is described as “a gloomy-looking lady... dark, like her brother... with very heavy eyebrows, nearly meeting over her large nose” (*DC* chapter 4). Dickens loved to play with names and the name Murdstone is a nice example. It is the combination of a *word* murder, her brother eventually indirectly murders David's mother, and a *stone*. Both Murdstones reveal no feelings; they are very hard to others and cold like a stone.

Another example of Miss Murdstone's coldness is when she announces: “Generally speaking... I don't like boys” (*DC* chapter 4), David's fate is in that moment sealed. This quote also reveals her personality and raises questions about her past and her attitude to all boys.

As a woman she does not have much power on her own, yet she is good at influencing others. When David is young she most likely intensifies punishments via her brother. She is a cruel person and this is the only way how she can let out her malevolent feelings.

Miss Murdstone also appears later in David's life when he wants to marry Dora. She introduces herself as Dora's confidential friend. The first time they see each other after a few years, they both are surprised and disgusted at the same time. Despite Miss Murdstone suggesting letting the past be and starting from the beginning, David has a hard time trusting her and he has reasons. Later on he learns that Miss Murdstone has found secret love letters between him and Dora and kept hiding them. In one of the letters Mr Spenlow forbids David to marry Dora, however he dies all of a sudden and Miss Murdstone vanishes mysteriously forever.

To sum up, Miss Murdstone is the embodiment of evil, jealousy and hatred. She finds her peace only when she can make harm towards others. Her sudden second comeback as well as mysterious vanishing is also bizarre.

The second forbidding spinster and a negative character in *David Copperfield* is Rosa Dartle. Rosa is an orphaned cousin of Steerforth's departed father. According to David: "She had black hair and eager black eyes, and was thin, and had a scar upon her lip" (*DC* chapter 20), which is a similar description to Miss Murdstone. The scar is a consequence of a previous argument when young Steerforth threw a hammer at her face. Even now he is quite sharp with her. He tells David that she will bear the scar until her grave "if she ever rests in one" (*DC* chapter 20) which sounds quite frightening.

Miss Dartle is an ambiguous woman. On one hand, it appears after Steerforth's death that she loved him truly when she exclaims: "He had a soul worth millions of the friends to whom he stooped!" (*DC* chapter 56), yet on the other hand, she seems to be irritated by Steerforth's presence. She is frequently sarcastic and changes his statements in order for him to look foolish. It could be owing to unfulfilled sexual desires that developed into hatred.

Miss Dartle is said to be “all edge” (*DC* chapter 20) which means that she is never nice and polite to anyone. She is also entirely jealous of him. It is she who first tracks Emily when she deserted Steerforth. She finds her room, enters and starts being as mean, frightening and sarcastic as only she could be: “...if I had any feeling in my breast but scorn and abhorrence of you, it would freeze it up” (*DC* chapter 50).

Once Steerforth is dead, Miss Dartle gets even more insane. She accuses Steerforth’s mother who trained him from the very beginning to be what he became later and says that she was the only one who truly loved him, despite not being able to express her feelings owing to his mother. Miss Dartle blames Steerforth’s mother for being the reason of infidelity as well as becoming “a mere disfigured piece of furniture” (*DC* chapter 56) between the mother and the son. That is to say, Miss Dartle lost her value as a living member of the family and became rather a person of no concern.

All the above lead her to a never-ending inner fight. She is desperately in love and jealous about anyone in Steerforth’s presence and living with his mother only stresses her bad qualities, typical for spinsters. It is no surprise that she became so revengeful. What is interesting is that Dickens has no pity for wicked characters. She underwent a difficult past but never changed and remained cruel. As a consequence she must suffer all her life. A contradictory example is Miss Betsey, who also underwent a difficult past, yet she learnt from her mistakes, became a better person and eventually gained her inner peace.

Fallen women

This chapter is going to focus on the presentation of fallen women in the novel *David Copperfield*. First, it is essential to remember that Urania Cottage in which Dickens was so interested was opened in May 1846, three years before publishing the novel (Slater 341). The fallen women living there were inspiration for his novels, e.g. Martha Goldsmith, who was one of the initial inmates (Hartley 1). She was successfully moved to Australia and lived there a better life, like Martha’s character in the novel.

In *David Copperfield* Dickens changes the traditional view on fallen women who were after their fall sentenced to decline and eventually death. He creates new lives for their characters and he tried to do with women in Urania Cottage.

The most prominent character of the fallen women in the novel is Emily Peggotty, known as Little Emily. She could be also describes as a “prepubescent child” with the first name “little” typical for those characters. She is a lovely child from a lower-class family, the daughter of Peggotty’s brother-in-law who drowned when she was a little child. There is a little hint in her introduction about her fate. When Emily runs towards the sea waves he declares: “if I were a draughtsman I could draw its form here, I dare say, accurately as it was that day, and little Em’ly springing forward to her destruction” (*DC* chapter 3). It is a clear foreshadowing of her misfortunate future.

There is one more fact that foretells her future. Emily is not satisfied with her social status and wants to be a lady. She is better-looking and dresses more stylishly than people from her social class. She becomes an apprentice dressmaker, which would be a perfect job for her social class, yet she shows a great talent for this job, which leads to gossips in her neighbourhood as she is not average as other people in the village.

Despite Emily becoming engaged to Ham, her friend from childhood, she seems not to be truly satisfied as Ham’s class position is equal and it would not enable her to climb higher. Emily’s life could be seen from the perspective of social mobility. She is aware of her status from her childhood times when she confesses to David: “your father was a gentleman, and your mother is a lady; and my father was a fisherman, and my mother was a fisherman's daughter” (*DC* chapter 3). The only way she could raise her social status would be through marriage to someone from a higher class. Thus she becomes vulnerable to seductive Steerforth. In her farewell letter to her family when she is escaping with Steerforth she claims that she will never return “unless he brings me back a lady” (*DC* chapter 31).

It is essential to perceive Emily not as a person who desperately lacks for money, but for a better, safer life that could not happen to her in her fisherman family. Emily is an example of a fallen woman – an outcast of the nineteenth century British society. Nevertheless, she pays for her deeds. Right after escaping from Steerforth, she becomes seriously ill, not far

from death. When she is in London, in disgrace, she even refuses to contact the Peggotys as she feels humiliated.

Another hint is when we learn that “She’s getting to be a woman” (*DC* chapter 7). It is a warning about her sexual danger that later ends up in vulnerability to Steerforth. Yet, her sexuality is not as threatening as Rosa Dartle's. Rosa is in comparison to Emily a middle class woman who was physically damaged by Steerforth - he made her a visible scar on her forehead which she carries as a symbol since then. She tracks down Emily when she is in London after escaping from Steerforth and treats her with hatred and jealousy. She also creates a clear boundary between her and Emily: “what is there in common between us, you think!” (*DC* chapter 50) Hereby she highlights the Victorian opinion about a clear separation between the pure and impure.

Using Rosa Dickens protests against the concept that only male gender could be cruel to the fallen women. Rosa is the embodiment of a hysterical jealous woman who is furiously possessive of Steerforth, although she was refused by him. Yet, due to her treatment towards Emily she generates sympathy for her (Emily).

The second kind of protest against the cruelty of the male gender is Agnes, who mirrors the figure of Angela Burdett-Coutts (Healey), a nineteenth century philanthropist. Agnes is a symbol for female companionship between fallen and regular women. Despite being frightened, as prostitution was generally regarded like a disease and according to this belief she could be contaminated, she shows Emily kindness, sympathy and is there for her.

Another fallen woman, Martha is described rather mysteriously as a “black shadow” (*DC* chapter 22) of Emily. When she follows Emily one night, her name is not even explicitly mentioned. It foreshadows her misfortunate. She acts in the novel as a silent warning, too. It never becomes clear what her fate was, it is generally supposed it was something sexual, and Ham, the fiancé of Emily, does not agree with her morals and with the meetings of Emily and Martha. The first time they meet, Emily is pure; however Martha is already the embodiment of impurity, known in the neighbourhood.

The only way for Martha to start a new life is to move to London to be fully anonymous. Still, it costs a lot of money. Therefore Emily gives her financial aid. It is possible that Emily can see her own future in Martha. To become a fallen woman meant a total exclusion and isolation in 19th century British society.

Martha is the epitome of the fallen woman. Standing by the River Thames she exclaims: “ ‘Oh the river...it’s like me...it comes from country places where there was once no harm in it –and it goes away, like my life, to a great sea that is always troubled – and I feel that I must go with it!’ ” (*DC* chapter 47) The image of a fallen woman standing by the river or being found washed up in the River was normal in Victorian era. Nead claims it was the synonym of the “lowest and most degraded level of prostitution” (125).

Yet, Dickens changes the typical concept of the drowned woman. Eventually it is Steerforth who is found washed up, neither Martha nor Emily. Moreover, since Martha helped to find Emily, she is rescued and leaves for Australia to start a better life.

Dickens’s idea of emigration to Australia for fallen women did not meet with agreement at that time. To the Victorian society, “the fallen woman must die at the end of their story, perhaps because death rather than marriage is the one implacable human change, the only honourable symbol of her fall’s transforming power” (Auerbach 161). Rather than killing fallen women, Dickens gave them a second chance in a country where no one would be aware of their past. As Emily’s uncle claims: “no one can’t reproach my darling in Australia. We will begin a new life over there!” (*DC* chapter 51) This idea was not a permanent solution for British society, Dickens only swept it under the carpet.

In the novel, both Emily and Martha are salvaged from their miserable fate when they move to Australia. Emily never marries, yet Martha does. She marries a man who is aware of her past and still accepts her. This happy ending was against all rules of the thinking of the Victorian society.

To sum up, the semi-autobiographical novel, *David Copperfield*, shows the female characters from the perception of the main hero, David. Throughout his life he encounters many different personalities and his attitude to women develops, e.g. first he marries his

“child-wife” Dora whose description suggests her incompleteness in terms of expectations of a mature woman, but eventually he realises that it is Agnes who is a suitable partner for him in other words the Victorian ideal - the angel in the house. Both “prepubescent child” archetype, i.e. Dora and Clara, are sentenced to die since they cannot survive in the Victorian patriarchal society. On the other hand, Agnes, “the angel in the house”, is in the background of the story. Her appearance seems not to be important, yet her inner qualities are raised. In Dickens’s eyes only she could be a suitable wife for his main male hero.

Through character of Miss Murdstone Dickens shows his opinion about spinsters that are in this thesis called characteristically – forbidding spinsters. Miss Murdstone treats everybody as mean as possible. Another spinster, Rosa Dartle, is also a jealous spinster. Both negative characters are “rewarded” by bad ending, typical for Dickens novels.

There are two maternal Demeters in the novel, too. The typical one is Peggotty who replaces David's biological mother. The second one, quite a special character, is Miss Betsey, an independent woman who eventually helps David and other characters with their lives. Both characters end well.

In this novel Dickens also raises the question of prostitution in Victorian England. He represents his ideas about help for fallen women, which were based on his real help for Urania Cottage. Unlike others at this time, he calls for a second chance for fallen women and that the society does not judge the women when they do not know reasons for their situation.

2 - Bleak House

Bleak House is one of Dickens's major novels, which followed *David Copperfield* and was published as a monthly serial from March 1852 to September 1853 (Margolyes 95). It is a complex mystery and rather a detective story which engages readers and fully occupies their mind. The novel reveals London's underworld and also law's corruption at that time, based on Dickens's experience.

Bleak House could be considered a biography of Esther since half of it is narrated by her. From another point of view it could be seen as a family drama – the life of Lady Dedlock, Esther and Captain Hawdon, Esther's biological father. Nevertheless, the impression that the novel creates is mysterious and gloomy, e.g. Chesney Wold, an aristocratic estate where Lady Dedlock lives, is cold, artificial, haunted and generally speaking not very hospitable. Lady Dedlock is also emotionless. The weather seems to be very often rainy and foggy, which gives an overall impression of a secret mystery that is eventually going to be revealed – Lady Dedlock's past. Another mysterious act is Tulkinghorn's murder and misleading evidence. People like Lady Dedlock or Hortense are suspected and inspector Bucket is in charge of solving the mysterious murder.

The story portrays an aristocratic couple, Sir Leicester and his wife Lady Dedlock who carries a huge burden from her past - a secret illegitimate daughter who is later shown to be Esther Summerson. She and Esther are extreme opposites. On one hand, Lady Dedlock is the embodiment of British upper-class society, familiar to everyone from her social class; on the other hand, Esther represents a deprived unlucky child and it would be better if she had not been born as her aunt reminds her frequently.

In the novel there are two narrators, which makes this Dickens's novel unique. The first is Esther, who is a good-hearted person who always tries to find something good about others, even when they are the opposite. The second is a third-person narration of an unknown person whose tone is very gloomy and negative. Due to both narrations a reader can see the plot from different perspectives.

There are a couple of female characters in *Bleak House* that encounter Lady Dedlock's and Esther's life, mainly Ada, the ward of Jarndyce, a very nice and beautiful girl approaching the Victorian ideal, yet not entirely and therefore she is punished in terms of the death of

her husband, Lady Dedlock's maid Rosa, a pure young girl, and Hortense, a negative character full of hatred, and lastly the philanthropist, Mrs Jellyby throughout whom Dickens raises the question about usefulness of foreign charity and her daughter, Caddy Jellyby who, suffers in the household of her mother and finds her peace after marriage and leaving the house.

"The angel in the house"

As typical for nineteenth-century novels, they often deal with "the angel in the house", so does *Bleak House*. Yet, both characters, Esther and Ada, are to a certain extent damaged characters as was typical for Dickens. First, attention will be paid to Esther, who makes this novel extraordinary by narrating half of it. Second, attention will be paid to Ada, a girl for whom Esther was a governess and had a very close relationship to.

Bleak House's speciality is its double narration. To understand Esther's narration, her personality and background is going to be described first. Esther is a young woman who was raised by her wicked godmother. She is told that she is an orphan and is frequently reminded by her godmother: "It would have been far better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday, that you had never been born!"⁴ There is one more sentence that keeps resonating in Esther's mind: "Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers" (*BH* chapter 2). Her childhood agony does not make her a self-confident woman, indeed.

When her godmother passes away, a well-known philanthropist, John Jarndyce, takes care of her and provides her appropriate education for her social class as a governess. Later on, she becomes a governess of Ada and her distant cousin Richard in the residence of Bleak House. Despite not knowing maternal love, Esther is capable of expressing maternal feelings to Ada who she takes care of as of her treasure.

Being a part of this household helps her to meet many people and to reveal the secret of her origin. She is completely astonished when she identifies her mother as Lady Dedlock. When they both secretly meet in the forest and Lady Dedlock confesses being her mother,

⁴ Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House* EBOOK, chapter 2. [Subsequent page references preceded with *BH* are given in parentheses in the text.]

Esther's reaction is very mature: "I told her that my heart overflowed with love for her" (*BH* chapter 36). Esther swears not to tell anyone the secret, what is another symbol of maturity. Her mother then leaves and dies soon after.

Esther's story ends surprisingly. According to the plot development, Esther should enter a self-sacrificing, sterile marriage. "Instead, he (*Dickens*) suddenly turns Jarndyce into a sort of deus ex machina" (Slater 257) and ensures Esther that marrying her would mean for her a denial of her happiness. Despite an uneasy life Dickens wants a happy ending for Esther. She ends up as the mistress of Bleak House where she used to be a housekeeper by the side of a loving young man. She gives him two children and receives also a well-regarded social role - a village doctor's wife. As she says at the end of the novel:

But I know that my dearest little pets are very pretty, and that my darling is very beautiful, and that my husband is very handsome, and that 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—. (*BH* chapter 48)

In *Esther* Dickens shows that a woman find her happiness in being "the angel in the house" as Esther definitely is. Not only personal features like purity, piety, self-sacrifice, good housekeeping, but also giving a husband children and taking care of him makes a woman satisfied in the eyes of Dickens.

Looking at Esther from a psychological point of view, Slater argues:

Esther's constant self-deprecation, her apparently desperate desire to be incessantly busy and useful to others, her idolization of Ada... her strange hallucinations when dangerously ill, the complexity of her response to Jarndyce's sexless marriage-proposal, all these things and many others touches in the narrative, may be seen as creating a coherent and convincing impression of a neurotic personality (255).

Taking into consideration that Esther could be neurotic, one must also realize that she was “the angel in the house” for which was typical to self-sacrifice and to put itself on the last place.

Nevertheless, Esther is also a narrator. From the very beginning one can have an impression that the whole narration will be affected by her childhood agony. She remarks repeatedly: “I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever” (*BH* chapter 3). Moreover, her never-ending self-deprecating about compliments paid to her or any kind of love or gratitude expressed towards her could also stress a certain kind of neurosis. Yet, her description is changing, so do her age and maturity. As an example, Mrs Jellyby is first described as a very nice person, even though she is far from being perfect, later she is much more critical about her never-ending business with Africa.

Slater argues that Dickens wanted to present Esther as “one of life’s walking wounded” (256). He stresses the geniality of Esther’s own narrative in her personal, hesitant way in contrast to the satirical impersonal third-person narrator.

Slater also suggests that she is a woman “with a distinctly compulsive personality whose gushes of confidence are mixed with strange hesitancies and reticences, making us feel a constant need to interpret or gloss her narration” (257). She seems to be both unreliable and reliable narrator which leads to dissatisfaction.

What is more, Esther is called by Jarndyce his “little housekeeper”. It is a description of her diminutive figure, typical for Dickens’s “prepubescent child” characters in which she also fits.

All in all, in Esther Dickens created an exceptional character - “the angel in the house” whose childhood was very difficult and also, a narrator of the novel, which makes the whole novel extraordinary, in terms of its narrative structure.

The second “angel in the house” is Ada Clare who shares with Esther the same household, Bleak House, and whose governess is Esther. Esther is from the very beginning captivated by Ada’s beauty: “With such rich golden hair, such soft blue eyes, and such a bright,

innocent, trusting face!” (*BH* chapter 3), as well as her purity: “She is the child of the universe” (*BH* chapter 6). This description reminds one of Dora from *David Copperfield* and warns the reader that Dickens will damage a perfect character to some extent.

Ada is a young woman who is handled with care. She is educated, yet her thinking is quite naive without seeing the consequences of her acts, which could be demonstrated on her secret marriage to her distant cousin Richard. They truly love each other, yet Richard is not a mature man and a capable breadwinner. Despite Ada's trying to be dissuaded from a closer relationship, she marries him. Richard's job is not profitable and he is indebted. Therefore he works even harder as he is obsessed by his job without noticing his wife. Ada hopes that a baby could change his state of mind. This act could be seen as self-sacrifice in order to help her beloved husband. Unfortunately, Richard's job makes him seriously ill. He eventually passes away leaving his beloved wife and his son alone. Ada must recover from such a great loss and makes a new start in her life.

Ada is an imperfect “angel in the house”. On one hand, she is self-sacrificing, pure and good, yet on the other hand, she sacrifices her life to a man who is incapable of being a responsible husband and man of the Victorian era and qualities. For her unwise marriage she is punished by the death of her husband. After that she could become happy in possible terms. If her character were even more damaged it is highly possible that she would not have survived like Dora.

To compare Esther and Ada, it is Esther who is eventually the embodiment of the true Victorian ideal “angel in the house” and therefore she is rewarded with her beloved husband and children. Ada is punished for her unwise thinking by the loss of her husband and as a single mother cannot present the real Victorian ideal. A similar destiny also met Agnes in *David Copperfield*. She was also the embodiment of goodness and eventually married well, which was in the eyes of Dickens the biggest reward for a woman. Dora like Ada was punished for her imperfectness.

A story of Lady Dedlock

Bleak House, as it was already mentioned, is a story about Esther and Lady Dedlock,

whose mysterious secret is revealed. Since Lady Dedlock is a very specific character and she is in the main focus of the whole novel, she deserves a separate chapter as well.

Lady Dedlock, the biological mother of Esther Summerson, is an ambitious self-confident woman from upper-class society who needs social acknowledgment. After an unsuccessful romance, from which her illegitimate child Esther was born, she marries an older and powerful man who does everything for her to make her happy. Yet, it seems not to be enough. Lady Dedlock is often pictured looking outside into the distance and claiming that she is “bored to death” (*BH* chapter 2) which creates an overall impression of a spoiled, arrogant lady from upper-class society. As a consequence she creates various social interactions and she transforms herself into English beauty with a wide reputation. “Wealth and station, added to these, soon floated her upward, and for years now my Lady Dedlock has been at the centre of the fashionable intelligence and at the top of the fashionable tree” (*BH* chapter 2). Dickens presumably wanted to show that all wealth and power cannot be compared to happiness.

Lady Dedlock could be classified as a fallen woman. As a young woman she was engaged to a captain in the army. “She never did marry him, but she gave birth to a child of which he was the father” (*BL* chapter 15). It was absolutely unimaginable to do so and not to ruin her life. What makes her fallen are also the words of her sister, Miss Barbary, who brought up Esther: “Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers” (*BH* chapter 2). Miss Barbary was a strictly religious woman and claiming this she once again shows a clear border between purity and the fallen woman. The same could be seen in *David Copperfield* where Rosa strictly claimed that Emily is fallen and Rosa herself is pure. On the other hand, Lady Dedlock cannot be considered a typical fallen woman. She is proud and never regrets her deeds in public as Emily or Martha in *David Copperfield* did. She is tortured by a passionate regret but resists until the moment when she realizes there is no way back and runs away.

Lady Dedlock is described as an ice queen with no feelings so when she starts showing a maternal love to her new maid Rosa, everyone is surprised. Lady Dedlock is captivated by her beauty and behaves to her above her standards: “ ‘Why, do you know how pretty you are, child?’ she says, touching her shoulder with her two forefingers” (*BH* chapter 12). Even Rosa is stunned. She becomes the lady's favourite maid, which is slightly suspicious.

She seems to be compensation for her biological daughter, Esther.

Lady Dedlock's behaviour towards Rosa is just one more reason for Tulkinghorn not to trust her. He manages to discover her secret about her past and starts intimidating her. As a result of that, Lady Dedlock must start acting. In spite of being fond of Rosa, she must send her away in order to protect her from a scandal. She secretly visits Esther as she is aware of being her mother and confesses to her: "Oh, my child, my child, I am your wicked and unhappy mother! Oh, try to forgive me!" (*BH* chapter 42) She finally reveals her face. "If you hear of Lady Dedlock, brilliant, prosperous, and flattered, think of your wretched mother, conscience-stricken, underneath that mask!" (*BH* chapter 42) After her heart-rending confession she disappears forever. Even though she is almost immediately searched for, she is later found dead at the grave of her former fiancé. Lady Dedlock passes away in disgrace, convinced that her loving husband would never forgive her immoral behaviour.

One can see two faces of Lady Dedlock. To the outside world she is powerful and beautiful, but inside she is afraid. Lady Dedlock would never confess to the outside world the truth about her child; however she does it in person in secret in the woods. It is the moment when she admits her helplessness: "This is the earthly punishment I have brought upon myself. I bear it, and I hide it" (*BH* chapter 36). In this moment a psychological complexity is portrayed. Lady Dedlock is another character that was somehow damaged by Dickens as it was typical for him and it is mentioned in the theoretical part. She would be too perfect for his novel without having the other "scared" face and "dark history".

Slater claims that Lady Dedlock is a victim of "her own passionate nature and of occasions conspiring against her - the false report of her lover's death, her sister's outrages Puritanism, the malignity of Tulkinghorn, the vindictiveness of Hortense" (262). Since she is portrayed as a woman who does not want to admit her fail in past, Dickens has no mercy with her and let her die in disgrace, which could be seen as a typical destiny for fallen women after all.

Mrs Jellyby - A philanthropic lady and her family

Mrs Jellyby is a very specific character that even created a new term in dictionaries. Therefore she deserves her own chapter, too. In this character Dickens “dipped his pen in its most brilliant, satirical ink, and with all the power of his wicked genius he created Mrs Jellyby, the antislavery campaigner in *Bleak House*” (Margolyes 77).

In the novel she is described as:

...a lady of very remarkable strength of character who devotes herself entirely to the public. She has devoted herself to an excessive variety of public subjects, at various times, and is at present (until something else attracts her) devoted to the subject of Africa... (*BH* chapter 4)

Mrs Jellyby’s mind is fully occupied by her charitable project in Africa. She belongs to the class of charitable people who do a little, yet they make a good deal of noise (Margolyes 79).

Despite being in charge of the whole family as her husband Mr Jellyby has no voice in the household, she has no time for her own children. They are neglected and dirty, sometimes causing accidents but with no interest of their mother. Caddy Jellyby is a good example of a neglected daughter and will be described later. In Esther’s narration she witnesses that she has never seen “such dissatisfied children” and describes them as “absolutely ferocious with discontent” (*BH* chapter 8). Mrs Jellyby is also depicted as a mother with handsome eyes “though they had a curious habit of seeming to look a long way off. As if—I am quoting Richard again—they could see nothing nearer than Africa!” (*BH* chapter 4) This quote only stresses her zero interest in her own household.

Dickens gave a name to a brand new type of person. Nowadays, when someone is called a jellyby it means he or she is “a philanthropist who cares only for distant people”⁵.

Even this comic character receives a positive future from Dickens, mainly owing to her

⁵ from <http://www.abbreviations.com/JELLYBY>

good intentions in charity. After failure with her charity in Africa, Mrs Jellyby “has taken up with the rights of women to sit in Parliament” (*BH* chapter 57).

By this character Dickens raised the question of the usefulness of charity abroad which was already at that time common due to the British Empire spreading around the world. Mrs Jellyby remains until these days a ridiculous character with her concerns about distant problems, yet overlooking home ones.

One character that is paid attention to and who suffers in the household of Mrs Jellyby is her daughter Caddy. When Esther, who is a couple of times present in the Jellyby household, visits this family, Caddy is responsible for running the household, better to say, trying to avoid any catastrophe which can occur every minute in such a chaotic house. Caddy and Esther hit it off. Esther teaches Caddy how to do housekeeping, finances and helps her to be educated in fine arts in order to become independent of her mother. In addition, she wants to marry Prince Turveydrop, the proprietor of a dance studio and a dancing master. After doing so, she gives birth to the deaf child Esther (the name shows the close relationship with Esther Summerson). Furthermore, she becomes a dancing teacher and later, when Prince cannot teach any more, she runs her own dancing school.

Caddy is an example of a modern successful woman in contrast to her mother. Even though her childhood and background was not uncomplicated, owing to Esther she got over it and became a successful young lady. She is self-sacrificing, married, has a child and she helps her husband with his business (typical for Victorian women as mentioned in the theoretical part) and later she even sets up her own one which makes her an extraordinary woman of her era.

The forbidding spinster

As in *David Copperfield*, in *Bleak House* Dickens also created a negative character full of hatred and jealousy, similar to Rosa. It is Mademoiselle Hortense, Lady Dedlock’s maid, a 32-year-old French “large-eyed brown woman with black hair” with a “general uncomfortable tightness of face, rendering the jaws too eager and the skull too prominent”

(*BH* chapter 12). This foretells her character. She has been working for Lady Dedlock for five years and always kept some distance, yet the new young maid Rosa who appears in the house of Lady Dedlock seems to be favoured by her lady, which makes Hortense wary and entirely jealous. This leads to her discharge.

Hortense desperately seeks jobs. She even asks Esther and seems to be offended when she is rejected. Then she starts working for Tulkinghorn in order to discover the truth about Lady Dedlock. Once it is revealed, Hortense is of no use and is dismissed. Feeling betrayed, she murders him and eventually ends up in prison. That raises the question whether Dickens made it happen because she was French, in his eyes defined as “other” and a woman.

Hortense is a negative character. She is full of hatred, envy and a feeling of injustice. When some violence happens in the novel, she is always the first person to be suspicious. Nevertheless, her destiny is sealed when she is accused of a murder. There is one point in which she is useful for a reader: she always says what should be forbidden and kept in secret and thanks to that she reveals the secrets and mysteries of underworld of the upper-class society.

To sum up, *Bleak House* differs slightly from the other three novels owing to the female narrator, Esther who is also a part of the plot and describes the story from her “angelic” point of view. The reader notices the mystery and gloominess in every moment all the time. In the novel there are many characters, yet the main focus is on the story about Lady Dedlock, who ends up tragically as fallen women did at that time - in disgrace. Only Esther would completely fulfil the requirements of Victorian society, being “the angel in the house”, yet in making her also a female narrator of the novel Dickens created something new. Esther is also an example of Dickens’s “prepubescent child” like Dora in *David Copperfield*. In *Bleak House* Dickens also raises social questions, for example in the character of Mrs Jellyby, the philanthropist, who is fully occupied by her charitable work in Africa; however her children in her own home are neglected.

Dickens seems that he often wants to damage beautiful women. If a woman should become eternally happy having a loving husband and children and so fulfil Dickens’s idea of “the

angel in the house”, she cannot be beautiful. That is shown on the example of Esther, who eventually fulfils all expectations, receives all that a life could give her, including a happy family, yet after her disease she is no longer good-looking. A similar case was Agnes, “the angel in the house” in *David Copperfield* whose childhood was not easy either and who was finally rewarded a good husband, even though her appearance was not mentioned as it was probably not extraordinary. Another example of a damaged woman is Ada, who has a beautiful face and is a pure creature, yet she acts according to her will, despite warnings and her life does not end up well – her husband dies and she has to take care of her child alone. Similarly Dora in *David Copperfield*, a beautiful woman, yet too childish ended up badly, in that case by death.

3 – Little Dorrit

Two months after publishing *Bleak House* Dickens started writing another novel – *Little Dorrit*. It was published like both previous novels, in monthly instalments “under the Bradbury and Evans imprint from December 1855 to June 1857” (Goldman 159) and it became an immediate success.

The overall tone of the novel is rather pessimistic. One of the main topics is injustice. Half of the novel is set in the debtor’s prison, a place where Dorrit’s family ended up. The omniscient narrator seems to be concerned about the characters and judges their state of being. The prison’s setting creates a general helpless, estranged, dark and gloomy atmosphere. Charles Dickens used his childhood memories when describing the place. Whoever enters the prison feels uncomfortable and depressed.

The theme of isolation could be also seen in “detention places” where people have to stay for a couple of weeks in quarantine when they come from abroad (*Merriam-Webster*). Another example is in the second book when the Dorrit Family stays in a monastery in the Alps totally isolated from the outside world.

Little Dorrit is a novel of a main character of the same name that is exploited by her family, especially by her own father. Amy Dorrit known as Little Dorrit for her diminutive figure, Dickens’s “prepubescent child”, is an embodiment of self-sacrifice who experienced a lot of suffering in her short life.

In this novel similarities with *David Copperfield* could be traced. The main male character, Arthur Clennam, meets various women in his life, starting with the pure, yet arrogant Pet Meagles (a similarity with Dora can be traced), later he is introduced to Flora, who reminds him of his first love of twenty years ago and he ends up with Amy Dorrit, “the angel in the house”, as David Copperfield did with Agnes. Here “Dickens is giving the fullest expression to his nightmare memories of the blacking-factory days through the figures of the heroine and her family” (Slater 275). Three negative characters are also going to be explored, namely Mrs Clennam, Arthur’s mother, the mysterious Miss Wade, the forbidding spinster, who suffered a lot as a child and eventually Tattycoram, the adoptive sister of Pet’s family who is treated as “other” and does not want to accept this role.

“The angel in the house”

The first and essential character of the novel is Little Dorrit herself. She is the youngest child of her widowed father, William Dorrit, who is imprisoned in Marshalsea, the prison for debtors, with his three children. This kind of prison was not like the usual prison for criminals. Since his children were not the debtors, they could freely leave it as Edward, Amy’s brother, and Fanny, Amy’s sister, did. Amy Dorrit, the youngest child of William Dorrit was even born in the prison. Unlike her siblings she never got to know an ordinary life outside the bars. Amy was also very specific in her appearance. “Arthur found that her diminutive figure, small features, and slight spare dress, gave her the appearance of being much younger than she was. A woman, probably of not less than two-and-twenty, she might have been passed in the street for little more than half that age”.⁶ Little Dorrit is another example of Dickens’s “prepubescent-child” archetype that was often described as “little”. Another characters of a similar figure already mentioned are Little Emily or Agnes who was called “little housekeeper” in *David Copperfield*.

Amy Dorrit is also “the angel in the house”. She is described by her father as follows: “We should all have been lost without Amy. She is a very good girl, Amy. She does her duty.” (*LD* chapter 9) She is self-sacrificing and devoted to her family, mainly to her widowed father: “Did much more, in comforting her father’s wasted heart upon her innocent breast, and turning to it a fountain of love and fidelity that never ran dry or waned through all his years of famine” (*LD* chapter 19). Amy even finds a job at Mrs Clennam's as a seamstress in order to earn some money for her father. Sometimes she even does not eat her meal so she can bring it to him. She is aware of the shame mixed with the love and pity that she feels for her father. She is very similar to Agnes from *David Copperfield* who is also taking care of her widowed father. Her behaviour seems to be extremely self-sacrificing. Unfortunately, her family takes it for granted. Amy’s sacrifice is eventually stressed by Arthur when he is set free from the prison: “It is not my imprisonment only that will soon be over. This sacrifice of you must be ended” (*LD* chapter 34, book 2).

⁶ Dickens, Charles, *Little Dorrit* EBOOK, chapter 5. [Subsequent page references preceded with *LD* are given in parentheses in the text.]

Amy, as “the angel in the house”, negates her own emotions and desires considering Arthur. She is prepared to endure self-deprivation as she wants Arthur to be happy and not cause any troubles. Nevertheless, unlike Esther in *Bleak House*, she is capable of refusing John Chivery and remaining an unmarried woman.

What is interesting to follow is the development of her character when her father is freed from the prison in the second book. The Dorrit family becomes respectable again and starts acting accordingly. Yet, Amy remains the same modest girl. Her old world has been destroyed and her strong sense of her own identity was shaken. She has never experienced freedom and never had a different role than a servant. Therefore she has to search for her new identity, yet it is very difficult. She even refuses to change her clothes and remains in her prisoner’s outfit.

Once Arthur is imprisoned in Marshalsea, she nurses him as she did her father. She is all the time his good angel. When she learns that she inherited an enormous fortune and estate from Mrs Clennam, who was withholding her knowledge about it, she forgives her. Later on when Arthur is released, he marries Amy. “Only through her continuing love for Clennam and her befriending of the woman he had loved and lost, now painfully learning the true nature of the man she married, can Little Dorrit maintain any sense of selfhood” (Slater 257). They both are the most moral characters. Dickens describes them both as “inseparable and blessed” (*LD* chapter 34, book 2). They both “give a mother’s care to Fanny’s neglected children no less than their own... and... give a tender nurse and friend to Tip” (*LD* chapter 34, book 2).

To sum up, Amy is a typical Dickens’s “angel in the house” whose destiny is damaged by the life in prison, yet as the angel she received the best what she could – a loving husband. Amy is the self-sacrificing, probably the most morally pure character in the novel who could sacrifice her own fortune for other people around her to be happy. In addition, with her physical description she reminds of Dickens’s “prepubescent child” frequently called “little” – in this novel Little Dorrit.

The second female character that could be considered “the angel in the house” is Pet Meagles whose beauty is similar to Ada’s from *Bleak House*. Pet is described as twenty

years old, “a fair girl with rich brown hair hanging free in natural ringlets. A lovely girl, with a frank face, and wonderful eyes; so large, so soft, so bright, set to such perfection in her kind good head.” (*LD* chapter 2) She is a daughter of the Meagles, an upper-class family. It is known that she used to have a twin sister, but she passed away. As compensation her parents adopted a girl, Tattycoram, who represents more her maid than a sister and is treated badly. The Meagles try to represent a normal upper-class family and raise Pet accordingly. She is of good manners, yet she is self-centred, hurting Tattycoram unintentionally. With such a beauty no wonder that Arthur falls in love with Pet. Yet, the love is not reciprocated as she considers him just a friend of hers. Pet is in love with a less worthy, younger man, Mr Gowman who she eventually marries.

Pet symbolizes a minor character in the novel. She is not the perfect “angel in the house”. She was raised in those manners as Ada was. Her destiny could be also compared to the destiny of Ada. Ada ended up as a single mother after the death of her husband, Pet ended up with a man who was not approved by the family as Arthur was and who did not have such a great reputation. It could be seen as the way Dickens punishes beautiful women.

Compared to Little Dorrit, her beauty has never been as explicitly described as it was not needed by real “angels in the house” to be pretty. Arthur followed a similar destiny to David from the novel *David Copperfield* as he started with a beautiful, yet unreachable woman Pet and he ended up with the embodiment of sacrifice, Little Dorrit, where he found his happiness.

Flora Finching- The self-reflection of Dickens’s life

Soon after being rejected by Pet Meagles, Arthur meets his ex-fiancée, Flora. She is a woman constantly living in the past when she was left by Arthur who moved to China. Yet, after twenty years she underwent many changes:

Flora, always tall, had grown to be very broad too, and short of breath; but that was not much. Flora, whom he had left a lily, had become a peony; but that was not much. Flora, who had seemed enchanting in all she said and thought, was diffuse and

silly. That was much. Flora, who had been spoiled and artless long ago, was determined to be spoiled and artless now. That was a fatal blow. (*LD* chapter 13)

Flora is a minor character in the novel and she appears only on a few pages after Arthur's rejection. As Slater argues: "...the more we see (and hear) of Flora, and of the genuine kindness and shrewd common sense that lies beneath her foolish manner, the more we come to accept her as a complex and a sympathetic human being" (246). Flora got married but became a widow later. As a consequence, she returned to her father's house to take care of her strict aunt very nicely despite the aunt's aggressive and senile behaviour. She describes herself as an old lady. Once she meets Little Dorrit, she is also very kind and sensitive. At the end of the novel she frankly congratulates her on the engagement with Arthur. "I heartily wish well to both... I would not be ungenerous to either and I heartily wish well to both" (*LD* chapter 34, book 2).

Through this character Dickens pointed out on his own life experience and crisis that he experienced at the time of writing the novel. Flora reminded him of his first love and through this character he could describe his feelings.

Flora is a specific character that does not fit into any category. She symbolizes one of the major themes of the novel - she reminds of the past and makes an impression of a nostalgic character that has to deal with the present and let the past go as Dickens had to do in his life.

Mrs Clennam - A bad, incompetent mother

This chapter is going to be focused on mother of Arthur Clennam who is one of the negative characters of the novel as she treats those around badly. According to Slater: "The most heavily punished of all the passionate women of these middle novels⁷, however, is Mrs Clennam" (270). Mrs Clennam is presented as a cold and bitter woman "with her cold grey eyes and her cold grey hair, and her immovable face" (*LD* chapter 3). She is definitely the most terrifying character in the novel. She seems to be a rigid Calvinist who measures

⁷ middle novels are in this case *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*

everything, as Arthur says that she always “weighed, measured, and priced everything; for whom what could not be weighed, measured, and priced, had no existence” (*LD* chapter 2). Therefore the absence of love is more comprehensible.

Yet, to understand her behaviour, her past, which is revealed later, must be depicted. As a young girl she was personally humiliated when she discovered that her husband had an affair with a singer, who was low on the social scale, and who gave a birth to a child – Arthur. She could never forgive her husband and became really mean and rigid in her religion through which she justified her behaviour. She could be compared to Lady Dedlock who could not be accepted by the society as such and had to change her behaviour. Both women in one moment confess with their mourning to “the angels in the house”, Lady Dedlock to Esther, Mrs Clennam to Little Dorrit: “She not only sinned grievously against the Lord, but she wronged me. What Arthur’s father was to me, she made him. From our marriage day I was his dread, and that she made me. I was the scourge of both, and that is referable to her.” (*LD* chapter 32 book 2)

She rejects mercy as would be typical for the New Testament and prioritises the Old Testament where God punishes people for all their sins without any compassion. She is bound to a wheelchair sitting every day in her dark chamber. Once Rigaud’s blackmailing appears she can no longer bear it and physically collapses in front of the house. “Mrs Clennam dropped upon the stones; and she never from that hour moved so much as a finger again, or had the power to speak one word.... she lived and died a statue.” (*LD* chapter 31, book 2) Her death is a normal way how Dickens punishes those characters. She had to pay for her behaviour.

Forbidding spinsters

Like in previous novels, the character of a forbidding spinster appears in *Little Dorrit*, namely it is Miss Wade. She is from more points of view a unique character. She is a passionate and intelligent woman as she claims at the very beginning: “I have the misfortune of not being a fool” (*LD* chapter 21, book 2). This means that “fool” women would not be aware of the way she was treated, nevertheless she was too clever and did not let others mistreat her. Miss Wade lives as a single woman, which is extraordinary for

Victorian society as marriage was considered natural and normal. When Mr Clennam encounters her for the first time, he describes her as a “handsome young Englishwoman, travelling quite alone, who had a proud observant face, and had either withdrawn herself from the rest or been avoided by the rest—nobody, herself excepted perhaps, could have quite decided which” (*LD* chapter 2).

To understand her current behaviour, her past must be described. She grew up as an orphan in someone else’s family among nine girls where she fell in love with one of them, Charlotte, who wanted to be admired by all. Yet, Miss Wade’s “unhappy temper” caused that they had to separate and went their own ways. In addition, she was always looked at as being less worthy, which she recognized with her intelligence very easily. Later she became a governess in a family of a poor noble man and took care of two children. However, she was being overshadowed by their nurse and humiliated by the lady of the house. Naturally, she could not bear it and left. After that she became a governess of a rich young man who wanted to marry her “as pitying condescension or as some form of exploitation” (Slater 268). Filled with resentment she rebelled against the marriage and fell an easy prey to Mr Gowman. As Miss Wade claimed: “He was the first person I had ever seen in my life who had understood me” (*LD* chapter 21, book 2). She was his mistress as long as it suited him, then he married Pet Meagles. Since then she was full of hatred and jealousy like Rosa in *David Copperfield*. In the company of the Meagles family she found a girl, Tattycoram, who experienced the same destiny as Miss Wade. She describes Tattycoram as follows: “ (...) character I was interested and pleased to see much of the rising against swollen patronage and selfishness, calling themselves kindness, protection, benevolence, and other fine names, which I have described as inherent in my nature” (*LD* chapter 21, book 2).

Tattycoram was also frequently called having an “unhappy temper”, therefore Miss Wade tried to release her from the family and afterwards to live with her.

Miss Wade is, according to Kennedy, a case of “suppressed female resentment and anger” which is caused by “the treatment which she receives because of her illegitimacy and the position of social insecurity and inferiority which derives from it than by any sexual entanglement or feelings (Kennedy). Her anger originated in her hurt pride.

Slater argues that Miss Wade is a “pathological case, a ‘self-tormentor’ ” (269). Whenever she is pitied for her “unhappy temper” it fuels the fire of her resentment. By this character Dickens shows what a woman must undergo to become successfully independent: “an orphan child, a governess, the poor fiancée of a young man of wealth and family, and the discarded mistress of an emotionally brutal flâneur” (Slater 269).

Miss Wade’s frozen life is depicted on the description of her habitation: “A dead sort of house, with a dead wall over the way and a dead gateway at the side...” (*LD* chapter 20, book 2) There is only one still-vital thing in her life, Tattycoram, yet she leaves Miss Wade soon after she gets to know her real living conditions.

To sum up, Miss Wade is an archetype of a forbidding spinster who suffered from her childhood because of her “otherness”. She is a rebel fighting against the values of the Victorian society. When she could marry her superior as a governess, her pride could not get over her humiliation. She rather stays single and not well-off than to be oppressed by her husband. Her character could be considered one of the first feminists as she values her independence above all.

There is one woman more who follows pretty much a path of Miss Wade, but eventually rejects her destiny and comes back to her old family – it is Tattycoram. She is an adopted daughter of the Meagles family. In many aspects she is similar to Miss Wade. Tattycoram is described as a “handsome girl with lustrous dark hair and eyes” (*LD* chapter 2). Yet, she seems to have the same “unhappy temper” as Miss Wade as well as similar childhood. She was an orphan who was supposed to serve as a replacement for Pet’s deceased twin sister. Yet, Tattycoram is handled as “other” which underlines her name as well. She is rather a maid than Pet’s sister and her shadow. She must act always happy to fit into the “perfect” family. She has generally more temperamental than other members of her family and whenever she feels hurt or finds her situation unfair she loses her temper, which is inconceivable for the family as it presents itself as a perfect Victorian family. Once she even exclaims: “I hate you all three... I am bursting with hate of the whole house” (*LD* chapter 27). These words resemble Miss Wade’s hatred towards the whole society.

Kennedy argues that Tattycoram is “both an object of charity and an employee”. And as an

object she is handled as an inferior class. Nevertheless, her escape to Miss Wade is self-destructive as Tattycoram later realizes and comes back.

To sum up, *Little Dorrit* has two main categories of female characters. On one hand there is Amy Dorrit known as Little Dorrit (Dickens's "prepubescent child archetype) who would sacrifice her life for her father and feels useful only when she can serve the men, later to her husband Arthur. When there is a moment in her life when her family is freed and can gain their reputation she never fits into this world as her world is helping and serving to others. She is the real "angel in the house" with all that fits the description. Thus Dickens endows her with a happy future that in no way resembles her unhappy childhood. Agnes had a very similar destiny in *David Copperfield* and Esther in *Bleak House*. All three women were "angels in the house" and eventually had a happy life in terms what Dickens considered happy and had a family with children.

On the other hand, there are negative characters – Mrs Clennam, Miss Wade and Tattycoram who suffered heavily in their past due to their passions and temperament and their destiny must be affected and destroyed. Those negative characters, like those in previous novels Ms Murdstone, Rosa Dartle (*David Copperfield*) or Hortense (*Bleak House*) never reach a happy life.

This novel also has autobiographical features through which Dickens express their feelings, namely in relation to Flora Finching who reminds him of his first love and who behaves as a woman reconciled with her destiny.

4 – Great Expectations

Great Expectations is Dickens's thirteenth novel. He started writing it after publishing his previous novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, in December 1860. It was a serial for *The Uncommercial Traveller* for *All the Year Round* and it was published in weekly instalments from December 1860 to August 1861. (Bloom 172)

This novel is a bildungsroman depicting the life of an orphan child called Pip. Just like *David Copperfield*, it is fully narrated in the first person. Pip describes Dickens's dream to become a gentleman. Throughout his life he comes to the conclusion that there are also other values than wealth that matter in one's life. Ackroyd argues that "the humour is here as much as in any of Dickens's earlier books, but it is darker now and somehow more vicious" (461).

The whole setting of the novel is rather gloomy. As Pip describes: "The marshes were just a long black horizontal line then... and the river was just another horizontal line, not nearly so broad nor yet so black; and the sky was just a row of long angry red lines and dense black lines intermixed."⁸ When he enters Miss Havisham's house for the first time, he feels there is "heavy darkness that brooded in its remoter corners" (*GE* chapter 11). The novel's gothic features stress Pip's feelings in the new world and emphasize the unreciprocated love for Estella and the tragic history of Miss Havisham. The garden of Miss Havisham is like a scene from a gothic novel. This "ruined garden" (*GE* chapter 24) is "overgrown with tangled weeds" (*GE* chapter 8) and is "quite a wilderness" (*GE* chapter 11). The garden in general is a symbol of her life and it could be seen as representing the decay of the upper-class society.

In this novel one can observe Dickens's changing attitude towards women. Whereas in the previous novels "angels" were in the centre of attention, here the only "angel in the house", Biddy, is overshadowed by dark characters, namely by Pip's sister, Mrs Joe, Miss Havisham who is the personification of hatred towards men, and her created heartless femme fatale, Estella. Vergara argues that: "None of the important women in the novel, reveal any true tenderness for Pip, and this lack of a tender maternal figure in his life

⁸ Dickens, Charles, *Great Expectations*, chapter 1. [Subsequent chapter references preceded with *GE* are given in parentheses in the text.]

combined with his lack of a strong masculine figure in his home (both Joe and even Herbert are feminized) render Pip weak as a man.” Moreover, Pip is tortured by beautiful Estella as he is deeply in love with her, yet she is incapable of feelings.

The most curious detail about the novel is the existence of the alternative ending, which is a very rare case in literature. The original ending describes how Estella remarried after her first husband’s death and soon after she met Pip shortly in London and then disappeared forever. Christiansen suggests that after finishing the last chapter of the novel Dickens sent it to the publisher and visited his wealthy friend Edward Bulwer-Lytton who after reading the last passage advised him to change the ending. In one of Dickens’s letters for his friend Wilkie Collins he confides: “Bulwer was so very anxious that I should alter the end of *Great Expectations* - the extreme end... Upon the whole I think it is for the better” (Hartley 360).

The original ending would much better underline the atmosphere of the whole novel and it would better deliver the message that dreams cannot come true, nor a perfect happiness. Pip learnt it through his life experience and it would be a natural consequence of his life if he ended up tragically. The original ending would also better reflect Dickens’s state of mind and his later life which was also unhappy considering his health and personal relations.

In this novel, the main female characters are going to be elaborated, starting with Mrs Joe with whom the main male character Pip grew up, though she was a negative character, the second negative character is a gothic forbidding spinster left by her husband-to-be on the day of their wedding, Miss Havisham, then her adopted daughter Estella, who is an embodiment of the so called *femme fatale*, Biddy - “the angel in the house” who will be compared to Estella, and Dickens’s changing attitude towards women will be portrayed, and last Molly, a character with gothic features who completes the gloomy, gothic atmosphere of the novel.

The mean sister

Mrs Joe is one of the first female characters Pip encounters in his life and from the first

moment she is a mean woman. The initial description of Pip makes it clear:

My sister, Mrs Joe Gargery, was more than twenty years older than I, and had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbors because she had brought me up “by hand”. Having at that time to find out for myself what the expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me. (*GE* chapter 2)

Mrs Joe could be compared to Miss Murdstone. They both raise the boys in very strict and mean way and negatively affect their childhood. Yet, Mrs Joe married one of the kindest characters of the novel – Joe. By matching Mr and Mrs Joe Dickens wanted to highlight the differences between them and distinguish good and evil.

Since she is the negative character, there is no great expectation in her life and one day Orlick struck her on the head, she cannot speak anymore and later she dies from the injury. This is, again, Dickens’s “revenge” for negative characters – death. Due to her passing away Joe can remarry, this time Biddy, “the angel in the house”, who is going to be mentioned later.

The forbidding spinster

With the character of Miss Havisham Dickens depicted the frustration and remorse of women who had to carry the burden of social restraint imposed on their sex. Miss Havisham is described as a grotesque woman with a mysterious background. E.g.: “I sometimes have sick fancies... and I have a sick fancy that I want to see some play” (*GE* chapter 8). Or when she shows Pip: “This...is where I will be laid when I am dead” (*GE* chapter 11).

When he encounters her for the first time in her house, it breathes a Gothic atmosphere:

In an arm-chair, with an elbow resting on the table and her head leaning on that hand, sat the strangest lady I have ever seen, or shall ever see. She was dressed in rich materials,—satins, and lace, and silks,—all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. (*GE* chapter 8)

Later, Pip learns about the tragic incident in her youth. Her mother died when she was a baby and the father, a country gentleman, spoilt her all the time. They both were very proud. Yet, her father remarried a cook secretly which was inappropriate for his social status. She gave him a son, Miss Havisham's half-brother, who detested her probably for the reason that she was the heiress of their father's property. Thus, he conspired with a conman called Compeyson who made Miss Havisham passionately love him and give her brother money from her inheritance. Afterwards they planned to marry, yet on their wedding day he did not appear. Instead of that he sent her a letter. When she read it, all the clocks in the house stopped. It was a symbol for Miss Havisham's life: at the moment of reading the letter, her life has stopped and she has stopped living and from the day on she could never be the same woman as before. "When she recovered from a bad illness that she had, she laid the whole place waste, as you have seen it, and she has never since looked upon the light of day" (*GE* chapter 22).

Her house is described as one old relic that reminds her of her own past, e.g. a wedding cake or a decayed tablecloth.

After such a horrifying life experience she turned against the entire male sex. She adopted a little girl, Estella, and raised her for one purpose: to break men's hearts: "I adopted her, to be loved. I bred her and educated her, to be loved. I developed her into what she is, that she might be loved." (*GE* chapter 29)

The first attempt was Pip. Miss Havisham wanted Pip to adore Estella: "Is she beautiful, graceful, well-grown? Do you admire her?"... "Love her, love her, love her! If she favors you, love her. If she wounds you, love her. If she tears your heart to pieces,—and as it gets older and stronger it will tear deeper,—love her, love her, love her!" (*GE* chapter 29)

Miss Havisham seems to be slightly mentally strange and obsessed by making Pip love Estella. She became a forbidding spinster the day her marriage did not happen and from that day on she planned revenge through Estella.

On one hand, Miss Havisham was a spoilt child and the wedding could serve as a revenge for that, on the other hand, she was an unhappy woman who apparently thrived on Estella's behaviour which was her only life pleasure.

Dickens also raises pity in the readers stressing that Miss Havisham is a victimised woman paying for her affections. He illustrates it in a pathetic scene when Miss Havisham talks to Pip: " 'I'll tell you,' said she, in the same hurried passionate whisper, "what real love is. It is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter—as I did!" (*GE* chapter 29)

All her dreams and perfect life was destroyed the day she received the letter. She realised there is no place for her in the Victorian patriarchal society. Ironically, the terms above like "blind devotion", "self-humiliation" and "submission" are terms describing "the angel in the house" which she failed to be.

Nevertheless, towards the end of the novel, Dickens has no mercy with her character. When she realizes that Estella is unhappy in her new marriage, Miss Havisham begs Pip on her knees to forgive him: " "Until you spoke to her the other day, and until I saw in you a looking-glass that showed me what I once felt myself, I did not know what I had done. What have I done! What have I done!" And so again, twenty, fifty times over, what had she done!" ' (*GE* chapter 49) Immediately after that, her wedding dress starts to burn and despite Pip's effort to save her; she dies due to her serious wounds. When she is dying, she lies on the table where she wanted to remain after her death and keeps asking Pip for forgiveness.

All in all, Miss Havisham was a forbidding spinster who was mean to all around her and as a consequence, her destiny was sealed and Dickens killed her. Miss Havisham's life is a representation of a wealthy young woman who was dreaming about her marriage and happy life, yet she was deceived and ended up tragically. She had to be destroyed not for being exploited by patriarchal society but because in her personal grief she wanted to

destroy all men's happiness.

The femme fatale

In *Great Expectations* Dickens created Estella, the cold-hearted beauty that Pip hopelessly loves and who is the embodiment of femme fatale. Slater describes her as the “unattainable sexual object” (277).

Estella is the opposite to the Victorian ideal of the angel in the house. As a child she was “beautiful and self-possessed” (*GE* chapter 8) not hesitating to insult Pip, calling him a “common laboring-boy” (*GE* chapter 8). She is raised by her mother Miss Havisham, even though the reader later learns that she is adopted. It is not surprising that the combination of the environment, where she grows up, and her mother wearing her wedding dress all the time and teaching her how to break men's hearts, creates a young lady that claims “I have no heart” (*GE* chapter 29). She is embodiment of the 19th femme fatale mentioned in the theoretical part. According to Braun it could be described as follows: Femme fatale “retains control over lovers past and present by turning them into passive and languishing victims” (27). This is what Estella is supposed to do – break men's hearts while being emotionless. To illustrate her frozen heart, in chapter 38 Estella is quarrelling with her mother. Estella is calm and cold as usual; however Miss Havisham is losing control:

“So proud, so proud!” moaned Miss Havisham, pushing away her grey hair with both her hands.

“Who taught me to be proud?” returned Estella. “Who praised me when I learnt my lesson?”

“So hard, so hard!” moaned Miss Havisham, with her former action.

“Who taught me to be hard?” returned Estella. “Who praised me when I learnt my lesson?”

“But to be proud and hard to me!” Miss Havisham quite shrieked, as she stretched out her arms. “Estella, Estella, Estella, to be proud and hard to me!”

Estella looked at her for a moment with a kind of calm wonder, but was not otherwise disturbed. (*GE* chapter 38)

This is the moment when Miss Havisham could be pitied. Her aim was to bring up a girl who will break men's hearts, not hers. Estella rebels against her eventually. She is tired of her old life with her mother. She marries the vicious Bentley Drummle, which should change her life. It does, indeed, yet probably not according to her expectations. She failed to foresee the consequences of living in a patriarchal society, in a loveless marriage. Pip says:

I had heard of her as leading a most unhappy life, and as being separated from her husband, who had used her with great cruelty, and who had become quite renowned as a compound of pride, avarice, brutality, and meanness. And I had heard of the death of her husband, from an accident consequent on his ill-treatment of a horse. (*GE* chapter 54)

After that the edited known ending is portrayed as an expectation of a better future for both Pip and Estella, yet there is never clearly expressed they will marry each other and have children as it would be a typical happy ending for Dickens's positive characters. The original ending is presented in the introduction of the novel in this thesis.

“The angel in the house”

Like in previous novels, “the angel in the house” is also to be found in *Great Expectations*, however there is not much attention paid to it. It is Biddy, a girl who Pip encounters as a boy and then later in his adult age. She as an angel is described as an ordinary girl that is very typical for Dickens: “She was not beautiful, - she was common, and could not be like Estella, - but she was pleasant and wholesome and sweet-tempered.... she had curiously thoughtful and attentive eyes; eyes that were very pretty and very good” (*GE* chapter 17).

From this part it could be seen that Biddy is only compared to Estella and is the complete opposite from both physical and mental point of view. Additionally, “common” sounds quite pejorative for Pip as he wants to become a gentleman.

In previous novels, the main male character would encounter some women in his life and end up with “the angel in the house”, realizing this is the best for his happy life, yet *Great Expectations* differs. Biddy is the personification of the angel and Pip tries to make himself love her but he cannot. His heart belongs to beautiful, yet mean and cold-hearted Estella. Pip's choice shows the desire to get a rich and beautiful girl despite her character which is in his eyes low-graded.

This untraditional ending with Estella, not with Biddy as well as the whole plot underlines the dark and unhappy endings of the later novels of Dickens. No longer longs the main male character to achieve “the angel in the house” and lead a good life. He sacrifices his life unreasonably and suffers in order to gain an unachievable woman. With the original ending, the tragic story would be accomplished with no happy ending. From a general point of view, that ending would be quite realistic without creating any fairy tale endings as in the previous novels. Yet, Dickens was urged to change the ending and create an atmosphere of hope. Comparing it with previous novels, Miss Havisham can be considered a forbidding spinster and therefore she encounters the same destiny as other forbidding spinsters in previous novels.

Nevertheless, there is a traditional happy ending for the angel – Biddy. For her good life she is rewarded by, though common, a big-hearted man, probably one of the best male characters – Joe. They eventually marry and lead a happy life, yet their story is in the background.

The gothic character

One of the minor characters that most of the story is in the background is Jaggers' housekeeper, Molly. The reader learns her life-story towards the end of the novel and must be shocked to learn that she is the biological mother of Estella.

Her appearance is quite striking: “She was a very handsome young woman, and I believe

had some gypsy blood in her” (*GE* chapter 48). Gypsy blood creates an impression of otherness, some gothic features that are typical for this novel. She was accused of killing a strong-looking woman who was a possible match for a man. Molly was of a tiny figure, Dickens’s “prepubescent child”, so when she came to trial and was dressed innocently no one believed she could have murdered someone for jealousy. Yet, her wrists were remarkably strong, but it was only Mr Jaggars, who was aware of it and who made her later her housekeeper. Molly was also accused of killing a child of the man. It was revealed later that the child did not die; it was Estella, Molly's daughter. From the day on, Molly was in the background working as a housekeeper of Mr Jaggars.

Molly reminds of Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre*. Brontë belongs to the writers of the same century as Dickens and her character Bertha Mason is similar to Molly. Both women are marked as “other” and “dangerous” and therefore are kept under surveillance. Both novels contain this gothic feature, too.

Due to the character of Molly, Dickens completed the gothic and gloomy story of the entire novel.

To sum up, the last examined novel which belongs to Dickens’s later novels differs from his previous works. The most striking point is more pessimistic tone in which it is written. There is also no happy ending for the main male character as it was in the previous novels, at least not in the original version which was eventually edited.

“The angel in the house”, Biddy, is not rewarded by the love of the main hero since she was just common and he prefers a cold-hearted femme fatale, Estella. Biddy is all the time in the background of the story. Although she does not gain the main male character, she is rewarded by the kind-hearted Joe and lives a happy life with him.

The main male character in this novel does not end up well. He wants to become a gentleman for all costs and courts heartless Estella. As typical for characters that treat their surroundings badly, Estella does not marry a nice husband and his destiny is ended up tragically with death.

Miss Havisham, the forbidding spinster of this novel who is also the negative character of the novel is due to her character sentenced to death as well. Even though, she was not a

mean character as a child, when the injustice with her wedding day happened, she turned into a revengeful woman and therefore had to die.

The endings of the characters only stress the whole tone of the novel.

Conclusion

The thesis is focused on selected female characters in *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit* and *Great Expectations*. Through this theme, the theoretical and the practical part approach the Victorian archetypes, such “the angel in the house”, “fallen women”, classical maternal Demeter, the romantic femme fatale or Dickens’s “prepubescent child” and forbidding spinster.

The Victorian archetype of “the angel in the house” was a woman who was submissive, pious and domestic. It was an ideal that was not always achieved in real life, yet in the novels it was common. In all novels “the angels in the house” eventually find a love which is reciprocated and are rewarded by an ideal husband and lead a happy family life according to Victorian values and expectations. The angel is raised as the right way of behaviour for women. In the analysed novels there are Agnes (*David Copperfield*), Esther (*Bleak House*), Little Dorrit and Bidley (*Great Expectations*) who portray the angel. The three first women had a difficult childhood but for their good heart and helpfulness they are eventually rewarded with a good husband and a family.

Yet, there is an immense difference between the three first novels which were written in the middle period of his life, and the last one, *Great Expectations*, which was written in the later period and it is much more gloomy. In *Great Expectations*, the main male character refuses the angel and prioritises a suffering life due to femme fatale Estella instead of a happy family life with Bidley. In other words, Dickens does not give such importance to the angel in the last novel and he is more sceptical about happy endings, in this novel the ending is open, yet definitely not happy as in the previous novels.

Dickens came with a new archetype of women the “prepubescent child” that frequently occurs in his novels. It is a woman of a diminutive childlike figure who is often confused with a child and who is often called “little” in the novels, in Dickens’s novels Little Emily (*David Copperfield*), Esther the so-called “little housekeeper” (*Bleak House*) and Little Dorrit. In the novel of *David Copperfield* there could be found a special type of this “prepubescent child”, Dora, the “child-wife” as she calls herself. Not only is she a diminutive figure, she behaves like a child, too. Similar character is David’s mother Clara Copperfield who is of the same figure and is called by Peggotty “a very baby” as she acts childishly.

There is also a figure of a forbidding spinster, a spinster that handles others usually badly. Dickens comes out from the reputation of spinsters at his time who were perceived negatively and therefore his spinsters are usually described negatively as well, e.g. Miss Murdstone in *David Copperfield* or Miss Wade in *Little Dorrit*.

The author of the discussed novels was devoted to his project helping fallen women. In real life he was helping them in Urania Cottage and in *David Copperfield* he expressed his idea about a second chance for the women scorned by society, i.e. Martha and Emily who could start a new life in Australia.

All in all, Dickens created immortal female characters that became a part of English literary canon and are familiar to readers all around the world until today

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