



VICTIMIZATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN TWO NOVELS OF CHARLES DICKENS; OLIVER TWIST AND DAVID COPPERFIELD

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ABSTRACT

Charles Dickens is one of the famous writers in the English literature. The day after his death, the London Daily Times praised him as one who is "emphatically the novelist of his age". Female characters acquired an important place in Charles Dickens novels. Although Dickens is not a feminist writer, yet his concern for the women of his times and their victimization definitely puts him as parallel to those of the feminist writers. Dickens, as a moralist, comments on the female oppression of his day in the hope of their improvement. The social rules of Victorian age were unjust to the women conditions. Women were victimized by the Victorian society and the patriarchal oppression. Women were rejected by the society if they rejected the old social institutions and the values these institutions represented. One of the important themes in Dickens novels is victimization of women in Victorian society. The Victorian society refused to give power and authority to women. They identified women only with domesticity, which resulted in their marginalization. In contrast, men were identified as authoritative, dominating and reasonable beings that belong to public domains. In Oliver Twist and David Copperfield, one can see the image of women who victimized in institution of marriage such as Clara, Dora, and aunt Betsey as well as women who victimized by patriarchal society such as Nancy, Emily, and Martha. Dickens challenges the stereotype of the self-sacrificing angel in the house in Nancy characterisation. He breaks the image of sinful "fallen women" in these two novels. Even though fallen women in these novels are prostitutes, we can find kindness and goodness in their character. Dickens finds the root of prostitution in ills of industrialization, poverty and economic problems. Therefore, in contrast to Victorian moral code, he gives them possibility of redemption and forgiveness.

Keywords: Victimization, Patriarchy, Marriage, Fallen women

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Introduction

One important theme in Dickens novel is victimization of women in Victorian society. The relationship between victims – victimizers begin

with the birth of human beings. All relations in human societies are based on the power structure of the society. The individuals who are more powerful victimize the powerless tyrannically. The

victimizer can be an institution, society's rules or person, beliefs, and conditions. The powerful neglects the human values and exploits the victim excessively. The victimizer can survive but the victim is oppressed and is forced to be silent. Thus, the life of the victim turns to a permanent inferno with lots of pain, disasters, and torments. Female's victims acquired a significant place in Charles Dickens novels. The female victims are important parts of Dickens's concerns for women of his time. Dickens as a moralist, comments on female oppression of his time in hope of improvement. Women were victimized by the Victorian society and its male centre rules. Hill argued "the nineteenth-century social systems, like the economic, political, and legal system was founded on male dominance and control. Legislators, police officers, judges, prosecutors, and jurors all were exclusively male, and male-only suffrage withheld from women the possibility of contributing to the legal process on even the most basic level"(113). Thus, if they have repudiated the old social values they are repudiated by the society.

During the Victorian era (1837- 1901) the public and the private sphere were identified with conceptions of gender so that the life of a woman circled around the sphere of home, marriage, and motherhood. On the contrary, men as a superior being were part of both spheres of the private and the public (Benthin, 3).women who could preserve domestic values, morality and purity were described as "the angle in the house" or the ideal women. Charles Dickens' Agnes Wickfield (David Copperfield) and Esther Summerson (Bleak House) embody Victorian domestic values because they were loyal to their family unity. Marriage was one of the important duties of a Victorian woman who wants to keep her chastity (Benthin, 4-5). Purity was a crucial characteristic of the ideal middle-class woman. Sexual abstinence was one of the significant virtues for both men and women in 19th century England. Thus, Sexuality was not seen as a pleasurable activity but it was seen as a way of reproduction in Victorian Era (Perkin, 276). Marriage was one sided issue in which woman has no authority over her property as well as her body. Women ought to endure their husband's violence

and humiliation because until 1891 women were not allowed to leave their husbands. Until 887, when an amendment was made to the Married Women's Property Act, women become part of properties of their husbands. Eventually, women's individualism and freedom do not have any place in Victorian time. Thus, the property and conjugal rights of a Victorian woman restricted her only to the space of the men. In Road to Divorce Lawrence Stone describes the enacted law about a married woman like this:

A married woman was the nearest approximation in a free society to a slave. Her person, her property both real and personal, her earnings, and her children all passed on marriage into the absolute control of her husband. The latter could use her sexually as and when he wished, and beat her (within reason) or confine her to disobedience to any orders. (Stone, 13)

Generally, any woman who rejects restricted boundaries of Victorian society was tagged as fallen woman. In contrast to the angelic perception of women, there were fallen women who lost their purity and chastity through sexual transgression. The accentuation on the women's purity caused to the depiction of the prostitutes as corrupt, dirty, and in need of purifying. In the early nineteenth century, there was a high rate of prostitution, which was considered as the notable social problem of urban life. Since economic deprivation is a main cause of prostitution, many institutions (between 1848 and 1870) was active to "reclaim" these "fallen women" from the streets and encouraged them to work as a domestic servant (Flander). In fact, Prostitution was a means of survival in Victorian society. Marilyn Wood Hill argued, "In a society where woman's status was tied to that of the man on whom she was dependant and a woman with no connection to a man was almost invariably at that bottom of the social scale, class became a function of the gender system. Prostitution was taken up by a relatively broad group of women" (2). These sinful women have no place in society but Charles Dickens as a

social reformer brings criminals, thieves, and prostitutes in his novels. One can see that prostitutes often existed as victims in novels of Charles Dickens: *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*.

Victimization of Female Characters in *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*

Dickens in *David Copperfield* depicted two kinds of female victims: the women who are married according to Victorian code and the women who are called fallen women because they lost their purity outside the institution of marriage. Dickens as a social reformer criticized the institution of marriage in Victorian society in which spouses condemn to continue their failed marriage because divorce is not acceptable in society. He highlighted the consequence of failed marriage, which leads to despair, physical and psychological death. There are three-failed marriage in cases of Dora and David, Clara and Murdstone, Betsey Trotwood and her husband that in all of them women victimized by the society and patriarchal oppression.

David's mother, Clara was a victim in institution of marriage. Since Mr. Murdstone, shows his real face after marriage, Clara was disappointed by his loveless and oppressive manner in her second marriage. They took Clara's identity, and humiliate her in order to impose their power over her. At home, Mr. Murdstone commands her like a child and makes her aloof from her only child. They start to take everything under their control at home, including Clara's own emotions and Copper field's future. Clara was a guest in her own house. Clara defends herself against their insults like this: "it is very hard that in your own house I may not have a word to say about domestic matters. I am sure I managed very well before we were married" (Dickens, 32). However, her anxiety about divorce condemns her to be silent. She is victimized by patriarchal attitudes of Victorian society and sacrificed herself in a way to justify her wrong choice of marriage. In fact, Clara suffers from the result of her own feebleness against dominant patriarchal values (Woollen, 178). The oppressive manners of Murdstones and their pretense of enhancing Clara's firmness eventually makes her ill and kills her spirit. Therefore, Clara is torn between her son and her husband and dies soon after giving

birth to another child. Jane Murdstone was a stone-hearted, cold and cruel woman who emphasizes only on firmness. She tries to humiliate Clara and his child continuously to kill Clara's identity and make her completely powerless. Dickens depicted her inhumane treatment as follow:

'Now, Clara, my dear, I am come here, you know, to relieve you of all the trouble I can. You're much too pretty and thoughtless'—my mother blushed but laughed, and seemed not to dislike this character—'to have any duties imposed upon you that can be undertaken by me. If you'll be so good as give me your keys, my dear, I'll attend to all this sort of thing in future' (Dickens, 64).

The Murdstones always remained her that she had to "Control herself". Later David observed her mother's victimization and emotional alienation that, leads to acceptance of tyranny of Murdstones. Her mother apologizes constantly to her oppressors, begging, "Pray let us be friend, I could not live under coldness or unkindness" (Dickens, 23). However, the Murdersones favor coldness. David observed:

I never knew my mother afterwards to give an opinion on any matter, without first appealing to Miss Murdstone, or without having first ascertained by some sure means, what Miss Murdstone's opinion was; and I never saw Miss Murdstone, when out of temper (she was infirm that way), move her hand towards her bag as if she were going to take out the keys and offer to resign them to my mother, without seeing that my mother was in a terrible fright (Dickens, 66).

David marriage with Dora was another example of female victimization in marriage. At first, he was excessively in love with Dora so, he adores her beauty without criticizing her shortcoming. Later, David begins to analyze Dora's deficiency in domestic affairs and her weakness to understand him intellectually so; David did not accept Dora as she was. David like Mr. Murdstone tried to change Dora to his own ideal woman. His authoritative, compelling behavior makes Dora ill like his mother Clara. Dora was aware of her inability to be David's

ideal wife so; she calls herself as David's "child-wife". She tortured herself by her missing features of perfect wife and comparing herself to Agnes who is depicted as an "angel in the house". Therefore, life became unbearable for her. Dora's death becomes an excuse for David to marry Agnes. In fact, we learned happy marriage is possible only with Agnes as "an angel in the house". Slater stated that Dora's immaturity was because of her conditions and the manners of people around her. (64) In the institution of marriage, Dora Suddenly forced to play the role of a skillful wife, which is oppressive her. Slater pictures Dora's helplessness in this way:

In Copperfield Dora's story dramatizes the plight of motherless middle-class girl [...] being married is supposed to change into a Competent and responsible wife and housekeeper, providing her husband with both inspiration and practical support as he struggles to make his way in the world (Slater, 243).

Betsey Trotwood was David's aunt. Dickens depicted her as an independent woman with strong will. She does not care for public opinion. She drives her carriage herself through the streets in front of public eyes. She speaks sharply to Uriah Heep and, condemns his actions. Betsey is a kind and generous woman who sent David to school and helped financially to Mr. and Mrs. Micawber in order to immigrate to Australia. Although she possesses a high sense of dignity and morality in her character, she suffered a lot in the institution of marriage because divorce was taboo. Betsey was victimized in restricted Victorian institution of marriage so; she prefers the self-divorce as the best way to release herself. She was a victim of domestic violence. Her husband mistreats her and constantly beats her wildly. Because of her separation by mutual consent, she paid money to her husband from time to time. As a result of her fear of divorce in male centre Victorian society, she forces to live alone which leads her to be confused, depressed, aggressive and hostile to the outer world. Davidoff & Hall in their book, *Family Fortunes* remarked that:

At that period a separated wife was in an even more unfavorable position like the

woman starting a business to keep both her house and income intact and whose husband returned demanding funds from his wife, money which was his by legal right" (277).

This law was also surrounding Betsey's life, which discourages her to give up her wild husband. Generally one can see that Dora, Clara, and Betsey have become victims of Victorian and patriarchal attitudes in the gender discrimination world of 19th century England. In *Oliver Twist*, we see victimization of Agnes and Nancy as fallen women. Moore argued that In the Victorian society women's reputation was so important, so sexual relationship outside of marriage was not acceptable. Those women who engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage become demonized as fallen women and were responsible for their own plight. These women isolated from a social context of society as an outsider. (75) Agnes Fleming (Oliver's mother), a retired naval officer's daughter, was a victim of "The old story" because she was an unmarried woman who was pregnant without a wedlock. Hager argued that Oliver is born outside of wedlock because of his father Edwin's failed marriage to an older woman that prevents Edwin from marrying Agnes. "The monstrous marriage" of Leeford, drives Dickens plot in *Oliver Twist* and is the main cause of Oliver's plight in the novel. Since Victorian society prefers to ignore sexually active women, Agnes is symbolically depicted nameless and without an identity at the begging of the novel, which identified her as the same place, as prostitutes. Thus, she cannot continue to live as a good or moral woman in the patriarchal society. The only solution is death, so she escaped, and dies of shame in her loneliness because there is no resurrection for her action. (Houston 40-41). Mr. Leeford forced to marry a woman who was ten years older than him, just because of financial status and social ambition of his parents. Such an arrangement and "ill-assorted" union were guaranteed by the state of marriage law at the time, codified by the Marriage Act of 1753. Therefore, parents could exercise their own desires for marriages of their children. In fact, the disaster of Leeford's marriage and his inability to divorce legally from his wife leads to his adulterous affair

with Agnes. Dickens highly attacks panic of divorce in Victorian Era and consequents of continuing loveless marriage. Until 1857, obtaining the divorce was so expensive, difficult and leads to losing one's reputation. Even once the divorce was legalized, 20 years after the publication of *Twist*; it was only available on the grounds of a wife's adultery or a husband's aggravated adultery, neither of which seems to apply in the Leefords' case. Therefore, their marriage is not only monstrous, but it is also "permanent and binding" (Hager 55-64) Instead of upholding the institution of marriage, Dickens exposes its abuse and dangers. He criticized loveless, materialistic marriage based on 1753 Act in which mostly result in failed marriage (Moor78). In contrast to Monks, who is the result of an economic loveless marriage, Dickens portrayed Oliver, the child of Leeford's love affair, as a virtuous and innocent boy. This shows his disagreement about loveless marriage and panic of divorce in Victorian society. In chapter 53, the very last words in the novel describe Agnes as "weak and erring":

Within the altar of the old village, church there stands a white marble tablet, which bears as yet but one word: 'AGNES.' There is no coffin in that tomb; and may it be many, many years, before another name is placed above it! But, if the spirits of the Dead ever come back to earth, to visit spots hallowed by the love—the love beyond the grave—of those whom they knew in life, I believe that the shade of Agnes sometimes hovers round that solemn nook. I believe it none the less because that nook is in a Church, and she was weak and erring (Dickens, 457).

It was only women that could be weak and erring in the Victorian Era. Men were not considered weak when they had affairs outside of marriage. We can see Agnes victimization in male dominant Society that did not treat women and men equally. Oliver's father did wrong when he as a married man start his affair with Agnes. He is excused only because of the fact that he is a man and because he is unhappy with his marriage. Nevertheless, Agnes mistake leads to losing her reputation and forces her to run away from her family. MacKay and Wells argue that

Dickens believes Agnes's spirit hovers, because that tomb is in a Church and she was "weak and erring". Like the character of Nancy in the novel, it appears that Agnes has won her right to be forgiven. "Agnes dominates the final scene of the novel. She became a sort of Virgin Mary figure; one must go to a church to seek her out"(93).

The second female character is a parentless, working class girl Nancy. She is also Sikes's mistress, a member of Fagin's gang and works as a prostitute. We can see Nancy's role as a surrogate mother for Oliver who helps, protects and saves Oliver from Fagin's gang that her good deeds alter her position to a moral person. When Fagin tries to beat Oliver with the club, Nancy in contrast to thieves' indifference protects Oliver. Dickens portrayed Nancy's affection, warmth as well as her moral conscience when she ignores her own safety by revealing Rose the plans that Fagin and Monks have for Oliver. As Slater notes, "Nancy's inner conflict and the various emotional moods is dramatized by her sudden pity for Oliver and outbursts against Fagin" (221). Thus, Dickens successfully breaks the typical image of the fallen women through his descriptions of Nancy's goodness in saving Oliver (Gold 56). In the novel, she is described as a fallen woman but there is goodness in her:

Society values gold and underrates brass, but brass has much more strength and practical use than does gold house, but a woman like Nancy is much stronger of character and provides more practical service (53).

The above lines demonstrate Nancy's strong and efficient character. She is depicted as brass, which is practical and more powerful than gold. The meeting of Rose and Nancy in chapter 40 represents that two girls hold the same purity and goodness. Both have the same moral goals to save Oliver from a criminal life. When we compare Rose's life with Nancy's life, we can find Nancy's misfortune. Dickens indicates that how different circumstances and social environments affects a future life of a person. Nancy is a fallen woman who lives in the world of poverty, misery, and cruelty but Rose is an angelic woman who lives in the world of richness care and

happiness. When we compare Rose's life with Nancy's life, we can find Nancy's misfortune. Both of them are parentless. In the unfortunate fate of Nancy, she becomes a thief's instrument while Rose as later was identified as Oliver's aunt, is rescued fortunately and loved by Mrs. Maylie and, Mrs. Maylie's son Harry. However, Nancy lives in a criminal world in the street and has never known love from anybody in her childhood. We learned the reasons behind her fall and victimization as a child in the hands of Fagin and later with Sikes. Nancy blamed Fagin as a cause of her downfall who has driven her to a life of crime.

I thieved for you when I was a child not half as old as this!" pointing to Oliver. "I have been in the same trade, and in the same service, for twelve years since. Don't you know it? Speak out! Don't you know it?" . . . "It is my living; and the cold, wet, dirty streets are my home; and you're the wretch that drove me to them so long ago, and that'll keep me there, day and night, day and night, till I die!" (Dickens, 130).

Nancy was alone, parentless and without any friend or family to protect her. She explains to Rose and the old gentleman why she stays with Sikes:

When such as I, who have no certain roof but the coffin-lid, and no friend in sickness or death but the hospital nurse, set our rotten hearts on any man, and let him fill the place that has been a blank through all our wretched lives, who can hope to cure us? Pity us, lady—pity us for having only one feeling of the woman left, and for having that turned, by a heavy judgment, from a comfort and pride, into a new means of violence and suffering (Dickens, 351).

She refused Both Mr. Brownlow and Rose's help because years of abuse have completely shattered her sense of self-worth. She told them: "You can do nothing to help me. I am past all hope, indeed" (Dickens, 399). This feeling of despair and frustration is due to the physical and mental abuse over the years in the hands of Fagin and later Sikes that gives her a sense of worthlessness. Sikes Even in his illness abused Nancy; as she nurses and helps him sits up in

bed, "he muttered various curses on her awkwardness, and struck her", (Dickens, 331). He treats her as less than human by comparing her to his dog. Nancy's death is tortuous and excruciatingly painful like the years of abused she had passed with Sikes. He dehumanizes her in death by obliterating her facial features so that any trace of humanness is destroyed. Nancy begs him for mercy but Sikes denies her request. Instead of shooting her with the gun, Sikes brutally use it as a cudgel, battering her until her facial features are bloodied.

The housebreaker freed one arm and grasped his pistol. The certainty of immediate detection if he fired, flashed across his mind even in the midst of his fury; and he beat it twice with all the force he could summon, upon the upturned face that almost touched his own. She staggered and fell: nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead ;(Dickens, 398).

As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in *The Adventure of the Abbey Grange* noted that:

Dickens ends his novel with the brutal death of the man who abuses a woman. While Dickens depicts Sikes's death as inadvertent, the text strongly suggests that had he not slipped and fallen, the vigilante crowd would have killed him, and no one would have mourned the fact. Although this reader does not believe Dickens wrote this novel with the intent of proposing laws against domestic violence, it may be suggested by his ending that he thinks that those who abuse women should pay a high price for doing so (Wingert, 20).

Dickens highlights Nancy's benefaction in saving Oliver without any attention for her own safety: "something of the woman's original nature left in her still" (360). Dickens presents signs that Nancy can be forgiven in order to reclaim prostitutes to a normal life. In the scene of Nancy's visiting Rose, we can see Nancy's feeling of shame as an "infamous creature" (362). However, these considerations about her own disgrace and corruption in front of Rose show Nancy's honest attitude and make her a virtuous and noble character (Watt, 16). In *Women's*

Studies, Encyclopaedia Helen Tierney explained that how Nancy is portrayed as a victim of the environment where she is living in. She is presented sympathetically as a victim of circumstances of industrial society where there is no option or place for a woman like Nancy who is uneducated, lower class and parentless except prostitution. "In her loyalty to Sikes, though, Nancy parallels the angel because her self-sacrificial death to save Sikes expiates her sins" (1371). Since her childhood, she works on the street. Sikes victimized and abuses her, but she cannot leave him because she has no family and nowhere to go. This shows her victimization, weakness even though she is described as brass in the novel.

Nancy sacrifices herself to save Oliver, that emphasized her purity, goodness and her moral standing, but The Victorians did not accept women like Nancy because she is not a real mother or a wife. Although she falls outside the patriarchal borders, her characterization subverts domestic ideologies of Victorian society. Sikes murders Nancy when he finds out that she has been talking to Rose. According to the dominant culture of the 19th century, such woman could never recover their respectability, so death was the only solution for her. Nancy's murder reflects the wretchedness of criminal life, domestic violence and barbaric act of Sikes, which leads to her suffering. We can see the ritualistic meanings in the scene of Nancy's death that reflects her purifying. Barbara Korte in her book *Body language in literature* points out Nancy's last moral conversion as she is death is also shown within the status of prayer:

She staggered and fell: nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead; but raising herself, with difficulty, **on her knees**, drew from her **bosom a white handkerchief** - Rose Maylie's own - **and holding it up, in her folded hands, as high towards Heaven as her feeble strength would allow**, breathed one prayer for mercy to her Maker (Dickens, 302).

The white, untainted handkerchief, given to her by Rose Maylie, which the dying Nancy is holding up, is a symbol of her redemption. It means Rose's purity

is passed to Nancy through the white handkerchief. As Watt refers; "Rose's white handkerchief describes the ritual's meaning, which is the symbol of purification. In Nancy's death scene, there is Nancy's transformation from the prostitute into the pure girl" (Watt, 17). Although Nancy cannot become another Rose but Dickens presents the possibility of salvation of fallen women through Nancy's death. In comparison with Nancy, I can find Little Emily and Martha in *David Copperfield* as a fallen woman. Emily is the orphaned child of fisherman that was adopted by her uncle Mr. Peggotty. Little Emily was a working class girl who first introduced to us as a young, pure, innocent, attractive girl, and almost as an angel. Dickens noted that how class-based, the materialistic and industrial society of England were the main cause of Emily's fall. She was seduced and become a victim of lechery by upper-class male James Steerforth, as well as her own naivety. As a little girl, Emily expresses unhappiness about her social status. She rather wants to be a Lady instead of a fisherman's wife. She told David in chapter three as follows:

"If I was ever to be a lady, I'd give him a coat with diamond buttons, nankeen, trousers, a red velvet waistcoat, a cocked hat, a large golden watch, a silver pipe, and a box of money"(29).

Dickens vividly declares that how her materialistic wish for a better life and social advancement makes her ready for accepting false promises and subsequently becomes the main cause of her downfall into dishonor (Schuster, 33). She leaves her family and her cousin Ham who loves her dearly, in favor of the rich, spoiled and two-faced character of David's school friend James Steerforth in order to be a Lady. She left a letter before her escape and asserts that:

"It will be never to come back unless he brings me back a Lady. This will be found at night, many hours after, instead of me"(Dickens, 432).

Against the moral code in the Victorian age, she starts to live with him not as his wife but as his mistress because Mrs. Steerforth never allows his son to marry a lower class girl. She wants to become

a wife of high social rank, but Mrs. Steerforth with scorn and hatred told Mr. Peggotty that:

"You cannot fail to know that she is far below him.....it is impossible such a marriage irretrievably blight my son's career, and ruin his prospects. Nothing is more certain than that it never can take place, and never will"(Dickens, 325).

Dickens presents the danger of female passion and vanity through describing the ruin of Emily. The end of the elopement is damage, dishonor and severe attacks on Emily and her family. Emily's elopement with Steerforth signifies her passion and desire for better life. After the sad realization that she has eloped for absolutely nothing and, Steerforth intention of passed her on to his servant, Emily flees the villa in Naples where she had stayed with Steerforth but, she is too ashamed and frightened to return home. She finally recognized that in her uncle's house there are treasures like love and simplicity, which is missing from her current life. Mr. Peggotty opposite of the norms in Victorian society forgives her. It is only due to her uncle's constant searching and the help of the former prostitute Martha that she finally tracked down in London.

Like Emily, Martha as a working class girl is from Yarmouth and orphan daughter of a fisherman. Martha is a double of Emily herself. In the chapters before Emily runs away, we get foreshadowing of Emily's fate in the shape of Martha, who follows Emily one evening like a "black shadow" (63). Martha was a prostitute, socially excluded from the society. She hides and lives quietly. Therefore, she decided to leave for London because she feels ashamed at living in the town. She took help from Emily and said:

"If you'll help me away. I never can do worse than I have done here. I may do better.... Take me out of these streets, where the whole town knows me from a child!" (Dickens, 317).

She was a victim of circumstances. She wants to go to London in hope of new life but she understands that escape is not possible in the restricted Victorian society where she is never forgiven because of her sin. One can see the depth of her pain on the bank of Thames when she wants to commit suicide.

'Oh, the river!' she cried passionately. 'Oh, the river!' ...'I know it's like me!' she exclaimed. 'I know that I belong to it. I know that it's the natural company of such as I am! It comes from country places, where there was once no harm in it—and it creeps through the dismal streets, defiled and miserable—and it goes away, like my life, to a great sea, that is always troubled—and I feel that I must go with it!' I have never known what despair was, except in the tone of those words.'I can't keep away from it. I can't forget it. It haunts me day and night. It's the only thing in all the world that I am fit for, or that's fit for me. Oh, the dreadful river!'(Dickens, 643).

Allen argued, "Dickens uses the filth of the river to define the moral corruption of the miserable woman. Dickens sets up an exact equation between Martha's tainted moral condition and the river's defiled physical condition. In the passage, the figures of the sexually suspects woman and the river are used reflexively to describe and define each other's degeneracy" (64). From the above passage, we can notice the consequences of sex outside of marriage in the society she lives in: it means total isolation and exclusion from one's family and society that never accept these women even if they want to start pure life. Dickens with the purpose of philanthropy portrays this agony to present the readers the social problems of prostitutes. One can sympathize with Martha in chapter forty-seven when she declares her suffering:

"I am bad, I am lost. I have no hope at all.....I should have been in the river long ago. How can I go on as I am, a solitary curse to myself, a living disgrace to everyone I come near.....kill me for being what I am"(Dickens,644-645).

In addition, her victimization leads to her exiled from the rest of society and forced her into alienation, poverty, slum dwelling, and suicide. Dickens asserted that how Victorian society did not empathize with fallen women's economic difficulties and their struggle to survive on the streets. In the *Femme Fatale* in Victorian literature, Hedgecock remarked that "Debilitating guilt and self-blame

internalized by Martha, along with the severity with which society punishes such women, fractures her identity" (50). Martha entreated Emily for help and says; "have a woman's heart toward me. I was once like you!" (Dickens, 327). It was only Emily who sympathizes with Martha's plight regardless of society's norm. Both society and Emily's family shun from associating of a respectable working-class girl with a fallen woman. Moreover, Mr. Peggotty is the only male figure who decided to rescue Martha and Emily from more misfortune. Dickens emphasizes on Mr. Peggotty's humanity when in chapter 47 he raised Martha and says: God forbid as I should judge you. Forbid, as I, of all men, should do that, my girl . . . (Dickens, 643). In the novel, his action was very crucial because he deconstructs all the Victorian attitudes about fallen women in a male centre society. In this respect, David and Mr. Peggotty like a merciful agent trust Martha and did not judge her deed. Instead, they show sympathy and rescue Emily and Martha from more misfortune.

Rosa Dartle is another victim in the novel who is also has a role of victimizer in the novel. Although she is a victim of the Steerforths violence as an upper-class man, she does violence to Emily's character and tries to humiliate her as a fallen woman. Steerforth throws a hammer at Rosa's face, which leaves the scar upon her lip. So, Rosa as a victim of domestic violence became disfigured, desexualized and incapable of dominating her desirable men. In fact, Rosa Dartle desexualisation is a condition of her masochism, and as a masochist, she is re-sexualized by deriving pleasure from pain. Rosa is victimized by Steerforth's rejection both physically and emotionally. This identified her as a woman without status. However, she must come back up again. In doing so, she becomes a cruel moralist, warning Emily "never to come back," echoing Victorian argument that a fallen woman will never be allowed into mainstream society (Hedgecock, 56). She hopes Emily punished heavily after her escape with Steerforth:

I would have her branded on the face, dressed in rags, and cast out in the streets to starve. If I had the power to sit in judgment on her, I would see it done. See it done? I would do it! I detest her. If I ever

could reproach her with her infamous condition, I would go anywhere to do so. If I could hunt her to her grave, (Dickens, 450).

Hedgecock also identified her as a "consumptive femme fatale" but not in a usual way. Her seduction by a selfish young aristocrat leads to her isolation from society. Since Rosa is disfigured and discarded by Steerforth, she spent all her time in the company of Mrs. Steerforth. Thus, Rosa sadistically victimized Emily as working class girl, and scorns her as a fallen woman. Although Rosa is also a "ruined woman", "a spinster", and "outsider", she disguised as a moralist (57-59). Dickens as a critic of class-based society vividly depicted Miss Dartle status regarding Emily who runs away from the Villa in Italy to London:

You know! I thought you a broken toy that had lasted its time; a worthless spangle that was tarnished, and thrown away. But, finding you true gold, a very lady, and an ill-used innocent, with a fresh heart full of love and trustfulness - which you look like, and is quite consistent with your story! - I have something more to say. Attend to it; 'Hide yourself,' she pursued, 'if not at home, somewhere. Let it be somewhere beyond reach; in some obscure life - or, better still, in some obscure death. I wonder, if your loving heart will not break, you have found no way of helping it to be still! I have heard of such means sometimes. I believe they may be easily found. 'or what I say I'll do. Do you hear me, you fairy spirit? What I say, I mean to do!' (Dickens, 680).

As a matter of fact, Rosa's victimization leads to her oppressive manner towards Emily. Her scar "as a symbol of contamination" changes her position to a "marked woman," branded by Steerforth's temper and violence, so she is caught between the status of domesticity and fallenness; she is "neither the fallen woman nor the respectable bourgeois woman" (58).

Conclusion

Through a feminist reading of Dickens's characters, it has been concluded that Dickens intended to bring social awareness in Victorian society. He was sympathetic to the prostitute's plight and tried to change their conditions. Dickens

as a philanthropist recognizes that economic emancipation and poverty leads women into prostitution. By representing prostitutes in his writing, he attacks the Victorian society for failing to include all women as members of society. Jenny Hartley has argued, "The true victim of *Oliver Twist* is Nancy, and the villain is the street-life of London" (qtd. in Moor 79). Dickens and Miss Coutts opened a home for homeless women, known as "Urania Cottage" in 1847, which was established for rescuing fallen women (Collins, 95-6). As Dickens states in his letter to Miss Coutts in 1850:

I shall be very glad indeed to talk with you on the sad subject to which you have—with a moral bravery, which you must forgive my saying I cannot enough respect—directed your thoughts. It is difficult to approach, in pages that are intended for readers of all classes and all ages of life; but I have not the least misgiving about being able to bring people gently to its consideration. You will observe that I am endeavoring to turn their thoughts a little that way, in *Copperfield*. And I hope before I finish the story, to do something strongly suggestive, in that kind of preparation (Dickens et al, 28).

Dickens challenges the cliché concept of the self-sacrificing angel in the house in Nancy characterisation. When Nancy, the sinful fallen woman, meets by the Thames, instead of taking advantage of Rose's offer, she saves Oliver herself and boldly returns to Sikes. One can see, her motives revealed the true womanhood beneath her background. Unlike Fagin and his thief groups, Nancy has feminine and humanistic traits that allow Rose as a respectable woman to come out of the restricted border of Victorian society and talks directly to Nancy. Finally, her death connects with her suffering represents the spiritual salvation of her. In *David Copperfield* Dickens argued that marriage could not guarantee the personal happiness or bring a solution for personal problems. Most marriages with negative and pessimistic tone questioned impossibility of divorce in that time. Clara and Dora victimized in their unhappy marriage. Death was the only way to get rid of their oppressive

marriage, as divorce was not easily possible in that period. In contrast, Dickens provides a happy ending for Emily and Martha. They immigrated to Australia where they can restart a new life. It indicates that the full return to the society and recover their honor completely is not possible in that period. There is no death like Nancy's for Emily and Martha because there is a person like Mr. Peggotty who rescues both of them with love and gives them a chance to start a fresh life. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens attacks the conventions of marriage (represented by the 1753 Act), which allow parents to force their children into loveless marriages and prevent these children from escaping from those bonds. As we can see in the case of Oliver's father, his failed marriage and his inability to divorce his wife legally was a cause of Oliver and his parent's plight. In fact, the death of Oliver's parents was the only solution for their unsuccessful marriage.

As a result, the intention of Dickens in *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* is to bring awareness to the Victorian readers about their social ills as well as moral degradation of his time in the hope of reform. Dickens's female characters in *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* are the victims of society and men. Even though they are seduced or prostitute, we can find kindness and goodness in their characters. Actually, Dickens searched the downfall of women in unfair moral code, class-consciousness and the cruelty of criminal people towards women. Although, we cannot call him a feminist writer but his concern about women conditions and his purpose to improve them parallel him with feminist writers.

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