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The Anti-Utopian Dimensions behind the Real-Life Utopian Individual and Home in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*

Aya Walid Akkawi[1]

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Abstract:

Charles Dickens consistently evaluates the socio-economic and political conditions of England and reports on cultural developments. In *Bleak House*, Dickens shed light on some crucial social, political and legal problems found in the systems that governed Victorian English cities and rural areas. Dickens, however, has seen a silver lining in the value of Home and the image of the philanthropist. In this paper, I argue that Dickens portrays England in *Bleak House* as an antithetical country holding both utopian and anti-utopian notions. The utopian element is symbolized in the ideal house of John Jarndyce, although there are glimpses of anti-utopian techniques within in it. The anti-utopian notions, epitomized in the social and legal conditions of Victorian England, may hold utopian traces, but they also surround the idealistic state and penetrate to disturb its perfect image leading the readers to question the future of real utopian elements in England at that time.

Keywords: Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, Utopia, Anti-Utopia, Home.

(1) Faculty of Arts - Yarmouk University (Irbid - Jordan)
aya-aka@yu.edu.jo

The Anti-Utopian Dimensions behind the Real-Life Utopian Individual and Home in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*

In his novels, Charles Dickens consistently evaluates the socio-economic and political conditions of England and reports on cultural developments. As shall be discussed in the forthcoming sections, it is surprising to find out that Dickens did not consider himself a reformist nor did he, as many critics reported, hold an agenda for social reform in England during the Victorian era. Jerome Meckier (1987: 27), for example, finds Dickens a "merely biased [advocate], one-sided [proponent] in a controversy, hence no more fair-minded lawyers arguing a case or a Member of Parliament sponsoring a bill." Thus, in *Bleak House*, Dickens shed light on some crucial social, political and legal problems found in the systems that governed Victorian English cities and rural areas. Dickens, however, has seen a silver lining in the value of Home and the image of the philanthropist. *Bleak House* provides tools for crafting a blend of utopian and anti-utopian society and paving the way to a fully established dystopian society(1) in his next novel Hard Times. The utopian aspect in the novel may only be manifested in the benevolent attitudes of upper class characters like John Jarndyce and in the idealistic form of a remote or an isolated "home," which, as Elaine Ostry (1998: 60) suggests, is Dickens's "social vision" of how "the perfect society should be." On the other hand, the themes of a disturbed, panoptic society of England, of a carceral system, of the downfall of aristocracy, and of a desperate need for reform draw the reader's attention to the hidden hegemonic forces of the modern world and the manipulative techniques with which they distort reality. In this paper, I argue that Dickens portrays England in *Bleak House* as an antithetical country holding both utopian and anti-utopian notions. The utopian element is symbolized in the ideal

(1) *Hard Times*, the novel that follows *Bleak House*, is viewed by many critics such as Philip Rogers and Darcy Lewis through a dystopian lens. Thus, I suggest here that if a program for reform fails to take place in the world of *Bleak House*, the society formed next will be a dystopian one like Coketown in *Hard Times*.

house of John Jarndyce, although there are glimpses of anti-utopian techniques within it. The anti-utopian notions, epitomized in the social and legal conditions of Victorian England, may hold utopian traces, but they also surround the idealistic state and penetrate to disturb its perfect image leading the readers to question the future of real utopian elements in England at that time. The researcher will depict the anti-utopian visions in the idealistic state of Esther's *Bleak House* and the ideal elements in the system of law – epitomized in the House of Chancery – in order to show that Dickens understands that it is impossible to isolate those worlds from each other: they are willing to be integrated in order to form so-called antithetical modern society.

The term 'Utopia' has to be recognized. In 1516, Sir Thomas More coined the word 'Utopia' from the Greek as 'ou-topos' which means no place or 'eu-topos' which means good place. Utopia, then, follows an ideal program that involves helping men and women to envisage an ideal social order, to found harmony between humankind and nature, to evaluate problems and to reform them. With the birth of this 'adjectival form' before the end of sixteenth century, the term also connoted "an ideal psychological condition or… and idealizing capacity" (Manuel and Manuel 1979: 2). In 1642, John Milton "used Utopia in the sense of a model for an ideal commonwealth" (Manuel and Manuel 1979: 3). With the passage of time, utopia lost its geographical location as a remote island—as it appeared in More's and Bacon's works— or an isolated place from the real world to become entangled with the actual world. Chris Ferns (1999: 2) states, "This separation of utopia from the all-too-imperfect real world can never wholly obscure the links between the two. In theorizing a more perfect world, the writer remains governed by the realities of his or her own society, extrapolating from its more positive aspects, reacting against its more negative ones, recasting it in the light of social and political theories generated by the imperfect reality from which utopia separates itself." Therefore, creating such an idealistic society separated from the actual

world is just a dream. Utopians waste much effort in imagining a Platonic utopia of a flawless system while dismissing out of hand the idea that the mere component of any system is the individual himself. Peyton Richter (1975: 4) indicates that, "utopians continually wonder why human beings can be so absorbed in the gross pursuit of material things that they fail to take the time to reflect on the glorious possibilities that lie everywhere around and within them." In fact, these undefined 'glorious possibilities' may start with focusing on the individual's glorious possibilities. If one can envision a world in which everything is beautiful, clean, filled with satisfaction, and in which pollution, suffering, and despair have been eliminated, then we are living in a utopian world basically defined as imaginary and fictional. This world does not exist: there are no "philosopher-rulers," nor are there "techniques of behavioral engineering" to take place and to be developed to achieve this idealistic state (Richter 1975: 4). On the other hand, Aristotle undermines the efforts of utopians who are working hard to achieve an ideal society by warning them that sacrificing the values of individual self-fulfillment in order to achieve the values of group cohesion can lead to social defects such as the loss of corporate security and order(1). After the end of the eighteenth century, a utopian, as the Manuels (1979: 4) claim, "became a person who inhabits a utopia or one who would like to be in a utopia or has a utopian cast of temperament."

Charles Dickens was not an 'utopographer'—a seventeenth century word for the writers or inventors of utopia. Dickens, to the contrary, can be seen as a writer who holds utopian thoughts and attempts to suggest alternative forms of reformation or else, he can be seen as following the trends of many 19th century "researchers" who delved "into the utopian propensity of mankind" (Manuel and Manuel: 1979: 4). What best

(1) In *Brave New World,* Aldous Huxley criticizes the utopian system since it directs human efforts toward identity, self-denial, and self-stability without caring what might happen in the outside world. From this point, dystopia emerges to disturb the stability and the created identity of the individual. This leads us to notice that every dystopia contains its own implicit utopia and vice versa.

described those polemists was their "[engagement] in the formation in a social movement or a political alliance" (Manuel and Manuel 1979: 759). Dickens, however, was not like most of those who "[painted] pretty pictures of the future" (Manuel and Manuel 1979: 759). He envisaged a harmonious society that would rely on the charitable nature of society's individuals where the wretched are rescued by the benevolent, rather than following calls for reforming society's institutions. This exact vision of Dickens's "can be called utopian" (Ostry 1998: 331), with social harmony and the individual's moral force as its pillars. Thus, Dickens's utopian vision would not follow a program of institutional reform. Although Dickens, throughout his novels, seeks to expose abuses in social and political conventions, he "rejects proposals for their elimination" (Julius 1998: 54). Some critics have hailed Dickens as a revolutionist or, more precisely, as a reformist in his critique of the catastrophic outcomes that accompany the corruption found in society's institutions and values. Dickens, on the other hand, did not see himself as a subversive or a reformist because he did not establish a reformist agenda in the way that Karl Marx, for instance, did. George Orwell depicted Dickens's subversive thrust, if there was any, as "bereft of any 'constructive suggestions,' lacking 'even a clear grasp of the nature of the society he was attacking'" (quoted in Welch 2014: 217). Moreover, Elaine Ostry (1998:60), to put a further spin on the discussion, argued that:

> […] in his social dream, Dickens did not envision a classless society, but he did imagine one in which classes lived in greater harmony, and the most degrading aspects of poverty were eliminated[…]He protested aspects of industrialization such as unsafe practices and pollution, but also praised its technology and the wealth it created. He wanted a better life for the poor, but not through collective action. He preferred a less direct route to social betterment: the fostering of social sympathy.

Thus, by endorsing Ostry's claims, I do not attempt to refute all of Dickens's endeavors to offer essential resolutions to the murky social

conditions of Victorian England. However, his reformist policies – or let's say his utopian vision – it seems, are more dependent on 'social sympathy,' the attempted valuable energy of individuals to construct a utopian vision, and their construction of a sacred domestic home while temporarily leaving out attempts to reform the wrongs of society's institutions.

As the title of the novel suggests, the reader expects to read about a house that is bleak, in which its residents reflect the turbulent conditions of the period. However, Dickens is driven by his utopian vision so that one can discern notions of optimism from the surrounding stagnant conditions once an ideal house, though named 'Bleak,' is constructed. Alice Van Buren Kelley (1979: 253) notes that, in calling his novel *Bleak House*, Dickens:

> […] left room for a general reading of the title which would include every form of gloomy housing to be found in the course of the story; he presented in his title a symbol set somewhat apart from the widespread desolation of the book, a symbol which emblemizes the state of Victorian society found in the general world of *Bleak House* and yet rises above this state to offer in the particular *Bleak House* world a certain perspective and glimpse of solution.

Dickens, therefore, portrays an image of an ideal/utopian home that is first John Jarndyce's *Bleak House* and later Esther Summerson's *Bleak House*. This represents a picture of laughter, sunlight and color, while, on the other hand, Dickens sheds light on the counter houses – the disintegrating, despairing, decaying houses of Chesney Wold and the High Court of Chancery – that are deployed to symbolize the hegemonic system.

Leaving behind the foggy, disintegrating houses of the Court of Chancery and Tom-All-Alone's in London, Esther Summerson starts her narration at Chapter 6 by describing the brightness of the day she is enjoying while heading towards her new life, or the utopian vision she will create as she promised herself when she was a child. She says, "The

day had brightened very much, and still brightened as we went westward. We went our way through the sunshine and the fresh air" (6, 75). The description of the setting continues to show the somewhat hard time the three travelers, Esther, Ada, and Richard, experience while they climb the hills, but they end up glimpsing "a light sparkling on the top of a hill" (6, 76) to indicate their arrival at *Bleak House*. *Bleak House* is built on the top of a hill and, despite its gloomy name; it projects an ideal state that resembles the utopian cities that so many philosophers dreamt of, although it appears to disappear among the trees. Esther's first impression of the house is of a kind of labyrinth. She says:

It was one of those delightfully irregular houses where you go up and down steps out of one room into another, and where you come upon more rooms when you think you have seen all there are, and where there is a beautiful provision of little halls and passages, and where you find still older cottage – rooms in unexpected places with lattice windows and green growth pressing through them. Mine, which we entered first, was of this kind, with an up and down roof that had more corners in it than I ever counted afterwards and a chimney (there was a good fire in the hearth). (6, 80)

In her description of the house, Esther indicates that the beauty of the house and its utopian setting is disturbed by 'unexpected places' in which one can get lost. Once she enters her room, which resembles *Bleak House* in a way, she notices its 'up and down roof,' echoing the ups and downs of Esther's way of apprehending situations later in the novel. As mentioned earlier, Dickens relies on the individual's valuable effort to follow the utopian vision without being influenced by the disturbed conditions that surround him or her. Esther is an epitome of this Dickensian individual – she is an idealistic character who is out of touch with the real world, although she has encountered many obstacles and has tremendously suffered from being an illegitimate child. She always looks at the brighter side in life, even

in her relationships with men. Yet, as an idealist, she cannot find her true identity, nor is she able to find connections between coincidences when she encounters them. Esther sets a plan to create her own utopian world and to establish the moral motivations in it while refusing to think that she might face some troubles in the midst of it. Esther takes on the role of an observer to incidents and relies on her logic to interfere in correcting mistakes when they happen. She accepts Jarndyce's world and his invitation to enter this utopian world with Richard and Ada:

The world is before you; and it is most probable that as you enter it, so it will receive you. Trust in nothing but in Providence and your own efforts. Never separate the two, like the heathen waggoner. Constancy in love is a good thing, but it means nothing, and is nothing, without constancy in every kind of effort. If you had the abilities of all the great men, past and present, you could do nothing well without sincerely meaning it and setting about it. If you entertain the supposition that any real success, in great things or in small, ever was or could be, ever will or can be, wrested from Fortune by fits and starts, leave that wrong idea here. (13, 119)

What Dickens inserts here is a support of the pre-emptive attitude practiced by John Jarndyce, described as a "benevolent man who won't be thanked – an impersonation of goodness, the good genius of *Bleak House*" (Collins 1995: 716), who continues, throughout the novel, to protect the inwards and Esther from mingling with the outside world. He intends to keep them pure and idealistic. No matter what Mr. Jarndyce's affectionate and effusive welcome to the new residents of *Bleak House* means, the trio, specifically Esther, are still overwhelmed with the chaos and overload of their first impression.

However, despite *Bleak House*'s warmth and welcoming sphere, it is obvious that Mr. Skimpole's arrival at the house is a cautious warning to the peaceful arena of this warm place. He is a dear friend to John Jarndyce, always refers to himself as a 'child', and claims to have no idea about time

or money. If we might describe *Bleak House* as a utopian place, with its warmth and avoidance of the foggy atmosphere of the political sabotage and systematic injustice of the cosmopolis, Harold Skimpole represents the implicit anti-utopian interference of the peaceful arena of utopia. This suggests that no matter how the citizen of utopia attempts to avoid the 'east winds' brought by Skimpole, the injustice and mischievous efforts of a callous friend might destroy the harmony of such a place. Tanya Agathocleous (2011: 109), in her book Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible World, argues that, "Skimpole claims he is a cosmopolitan and is associated with many of the negative definitions of the term." A cosmopolitan person would be equally at home living anywhere in the world, surrounded by any culture and language. He would be well educated, sophisticated, urban, multilingual, multicultural, intelligent, and attractive. Skimpole would fit this description perfectly, albeit in a negative rather than a positive way. The multiple attitudes he holds suggest that he has a divided self and cannot be a reliable person since there is no safe anchor to his personality. He is disloyal to his family and friends and uses the nonsensical claim that he is merely a child to refuse the moral and financial responsibilities of adulthood and citizenship. Another sign of his relentless and deliberate carelessness lies in his incomplete and fragmented artistic works and achievements, which demonstrate "his lack of commitment to any project or person himself" (Agathocleous 2011: 109).

When Esther meets Mr. Skimpole for the first time, he addresses himself in the third person and claims that:

[…] all he asked of society was to let him live. That wasn't much. His wants were few…. Go your several ways in peace! Wear red coats, blue coats, lawn sleeves; put pens behind your ears, wear aprons; go after glory, holiness, commerce, trade, any object you prefer; only – let Harold Skimpole live! (6, 85)

Esther is dazzled by Skimpole's "brilliancy", "enjoyment", and "vivacious candour," and this reaction reveals her short-sightedness in receiving the powerful attraction of the obtrusive Skimpole. Her awareness, however, that Skimpole is referring to himself as a "third person, as if she knew that Skimpole had his singularities but still had his claims too, which were the general business of community and must not be slighted" forewarns the readers especially as we go further in the novel (6, 85). Later, when Richard becomes embroiled in the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit with the help of Skimpole, Dickens suggests that although the moral commitment is motivated by profit, the problem is that good motivations almost lead to the destruction and unjust treatment of others.

How come that *Bleak House* and Mr. Skimpole become entwined in Esther's first impressions? Critics assert that recent changes in the "attitude of modern readers toward Esther Summerson reflect both the pressure the novel asserts and the paradigms we find satisfactory." (Frank 1989: 64) Unlike the Victorian reader, who follows the incomplete information given by the novelist, the modern reader can sense the pressure that affects the hero(ine) without falling into the trap set for the hero(ine) by the writer. Lawrence Frank (1989: 64) argues that "Esther's responses to the world she encounters, the fictive world of *Bleak House*, grow more inadequate, evasive, faintly, self-righteous in this persistent humility and self-negation." Frank directs our attention to a very important point regarding Esther's self-negation. I would approach it from another perspective. Esther not only falls under self-negation, but also tries to apply her ideological negation upon the facts she encounters in the novel. She refuses to follow the real sense she feels towards this. For example, the bright day in the country does not exclude Esther's bewilderment about *Bleak House*, and Skimpole's cosmopolitan nature prevents Esther from realizing the dividedness of Skimpole's identity. She finds her refuge in the private domain of her goodness, of her self-negation, and her negation of others' imperfections. She seeks refuge and safety by clinging to the inner boundaries she creates

within herself after denying the past and trying "as hard as ever I could to repair the fault I had been born with (of which I confusedly felt guilty and yet innocent)." (3, 20) To scholars like Lawrence Frank, Esther's narrative serves to emphasize the limitations of her perspective. I would add that her suffering as a child affects her way of perceiving the world once she is an adult and limits her perspective towards the fictive life of *Bleak House*.

As mentioned above, whatever might happen to Esther, her childhood self will continue to insinuate itself in her judgment of the world and others. Her godmother (later found out to be her aunt), her unhappy birthdays, and the guilt and disgrace she is ignorant of follow her although she tries hard to deny and forget the past. She seeks to bury the past as she buried the doll that was her only real companion in childhood in order to stay in the realm of innocence forever. At the beginning of her narration, Miss Summerson claims to her godmother and the housemaid that she was "no one" (3, 15). John Jarndyce and *Bleak House*, on the contrary, provide Esther with an opportunity to create her ideal space and shift to the stage of being "someone." After becoming the housekeeper of *Bleak House* and the holder of the house's bunch of keys, Esther pledges "to be industrious, contented, and kind hearted, and to do some good to someone, and win some love to myself if I could." (3,18)

Esther's attempt to understand and define her own nature leads her to understand human nature based on her own perspective; she then comes to judge human conduct according to her own moral norms and to conceive of idealistic, perfected humanity. What occupied utopians for ages was "man's quest for psychic wholeness" (Ritcher 1975: 16). Esther, while we continue reading her narrative, achieves this psychic wholeness but without indulging in politics and social laws. She prefers to remain within her own domain and receives what she chooses from the outside world. She helps the Jellybys, Jo the crossing sweeper, Ada and Richard, and whoever else asks for her love and support while refusing to become involved with the

Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit, the lawyers and Mr. Skimpole. In this antithetical society, Miss Summerson and Dickens resemble each other in trying to call for rescuing the wretched yet dismissing any idea of eliminating the wrongdoings of the political and juridical institutions depicted in the novel as 'carceral institutions.'

Furthermore, *Bleak House*, to Esther, attacks the power of the outside world and the disharmony that happens inside it. For example, the Growlery – Mr. Jarndyce's room, in which he resides when he is in a bad mood or when the wind blows from the east – works as a dystopian landscape within the utopian state. Anything that might affect the harmony and grace of *Bleak House* is taken to the Growlery, being discussed, analyzed, and finished there. After leaving that place, the heroine and her guardian leave behind the negative effects of troubles and go on living within the house's wholeness and conformity. What Dickens shows in this overlap of two different worlds, in which the darker resides within the brighter one, is that limiting and stifling the dark problems of our own self and dragging them to a narrow, closed space is a good way to cure the problems that attack you from outside in order to live in the private domain.

I find it fruitful here to turn to D.A. Miller's (1983) article 'Discipline in Different Voices: Bureaucracy, Police, Family, and *Bleak House*.' Miller is influenced by the writings of Michel Foucault and Marxist theories. He argues that *Bleak House* lies under the effect of the carceral system, especially in Dickens's depiction of the High Court of Chancery – an argument I will deal with later. Miller (1983: 60) indicates that carceral institutions exercise power violently over "collectivized subjects" and give space to "liberal society" and the family to act freely if they are able to take care of their internal regulations.

What Miller tends to say here is that the system allows the family to act freely in its own domain as long as it conforms to the rules and regulations of society. However, what might cause some grief is the question of Esther's

position in a family as an illegitimate person. John Jarndyce legitimates Esther's position by making her housekeeper of *Bleak House*. This gives her the chance to uphold the rules and be responsible for the protection of everyone involved, and helps her to shape "her tacit ambition to install herself securely within such a structure" (Miller 1983: 82). Among the families described in the novel are the Jellybys and the Pardiggles, in which women are dominant figures, and where one can find a contrast from the harmony and conformity of *Bleak House*. Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle are obsessed with their missions to build a good society; Mrs. Jellyby is fascinated with the coffee plantations of Borrioboola-Gha in Africa, and Mrs. Pardiggle is a local do-gooder. Both women neglect their own families and children and focus on helping others, yet their efforts are misguided and unwelcome. Dickens advises women to address their philanthropic efforts to their families so that they could face the misery of the institutions. On the other hand, Dickens shows that the insecure state of Esther opposes the instability of the family structure. The heroine's solution is to isolate herself and others, if she can, from the outside world while building a structured world within John Jarndyce's house. The question, though, might be: is it a good thing to isolate herself and prevent her new family from interacting with the outside world? Does it fulfill the goals of her mission and help her fit in society? If a person blocks himself from dealing with the miseries of the world, those troubles will still find a way to insinuate themselves into the perfect world in order to disturb its perfection.

Answers to these questions are reflected in Esther's contracting smallpox from Jo, the crossing sweeper. Smallpox appears in many Victorian novels since this disease was endemic throughout the nineteenth century. Mary Wilson Carpenter (2010: 92) suggests that twenty-first-century readers of Victorian novels may never have heard of such a disease because smallpox "was eradicated from the globe by a worldwide campaign of vaccination that ended in 1979." She adds that Esther Summerson's illness is a very realistic representation of smallpox as experienced in Victorian

England (2010: 93). What strikes the reader, however, is that Esther never mentions the name of her illness, although Esther's noticeable scarring and temporary blindness leads the reader to assume that it is smallpox. Dickens did not specifically name this disease because it was so well known to the Victorian reader. Moreover, the multiple uses of the word "scarred" in the novel suggest both a literal and metaphorical meaning to the reader. The literal meaning refers to the disease itself, while the metaphorical meaning indicates the sabotage of the perfect family structure established by Esther, which I mentioned previously. Still, in her sickness, Esther remains the protecting figure of this family when she threatens Charley, her thirteen-year-old maid, with the worst threat she can command, her own death, if Charley allows Ada anywhere near Esther during her illness. Dickens shows that Esther's disfigurement as well as the multiple nicknames she receives from her loved ones—little woman, Dame Durden, to mention a few— are a means of pushing the heroine to the outside world to create another identity and establishment, since isolation proves not to protect her from the complexities of the outside system.

Dickens's *Bleak House* perfectly represents how Victorian England was a country divided by class conflict, depicted in the novel by the conflict between the upper and the middle class as well as between the omniscient narrator and the first-person narrator (Esther). Each side of the division wants to prove its authority over the other. The public and the private spheres are in collision. In Victorian England, the upper class, represented in the novel by Sir Leicester Dedlock, was anxious to see the 'Old England' being subverted by so-called reformers. Dickens is aware of the political changes of his age; therefore, he weakens the boundaries between the upper class in his novel and focuses more on the powerful boundaries of the middle class. For example, Sir Leicester Dedlock, aristocrat though he is, has poor relatives. Moreover, he is childless, as are his relatives. This foreshadows the decline of the power of the upper class. In Chapter 26, we are introduced to Mr. Rouncewell, who represents the middle class, and

who achieves his way in the world by getting an education and becoming an 'ironmaster.' Rouncewell is the opposite of Dedlock, who is in his late sixties, very class-conscious, and intellectually limited. Dickens clearly demonstrates what happens when a social structure such as the upper class attempts to live beyond its means. What Sir Dedlock looks for is the stability and monotony of the social system, in which nothing must change. Within this notion, where the power holders of the system as well as society itself is hampered and the ability of change is hindered, *Bleak House*'s plot revolves around the fact that the system and its agents refuse to see the value of human beings and the need to change.

Dickens draws an analogy between the carceral system typified in the High Court of Chancery and Chesney Wold. The novel starts with a gloomy scene of the city of London in which "fog is everywhere." Dickens says:

The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense of fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest near the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation, Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in His High Court of Chancery. Never can there come fog too think, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds this day in the sight of heaven and earth. (1, 18)

Dickens's fog dramatizes the "pervasive presence of society," which profoundly affects and enslaves its victims (Gay 2002: 43). The fog, moreover, asserts the pressure that nature imposes on society. The whole picture is that nature and the Chancery play an important role to assert themselves as victims and suitors, which reminds us strongly of Sir Dedlock's attachment to Lady Dedlock. Everyone involved in the Chancery and Chesney Wold remains attached to them till the end. The suitors are consumed in their suits for decades, yet never achieve their goals. This picture indicates the rottenness and injustice of the entrenched system that

refuses to create reform for the benefit of others except itself. The main goal of the carceral system found in *Bleak House* is system preservation: "The one great principle of the English law is, to make business for itself" (Dickens, 621). Some responsibility, though, falls on the victims themselves who allow the carceral system to control the way their lives are driven. Dickens asks the reader to find a way to understand injustice that might help us recognize it as such.

Joyce Kloc McClure (2003: 29) states that Dickens's technique "reinforces the novel's view of a world where the evil effects of social injustice utterly provide existence." And since anti-utopia also implies utopian energies within it, it is the responsibility of the parties in Chancery to eliminate the blindness and chaos caused by the system through partially accepting it. On the other hand, Dickens makes us realize that, as McClure (2003: 30) puts it, "it is the specific failure of the system of justice to see" and heal the agony of the suitors and that the latter also fail to rebel against the system. The suitors allow the Chancery's injustice to insinuate itself in their lives and to consume their abilities until they reside and find peace in death. Richard, who has battled hard to win justice in the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit yet without corresponding to the right decision, is on his death bed when John Jarndyce alleviates Richard's misery by saying, "My dear Rick…the clouds have cleared away, and it is bright now. We can see now. We were all bewildered, Rick, more or less. What matters!" (65, 820); the wards of Jarndyce and everyone involved in this suit can see the truth now. The truth, to John Jarndyce, is to leave the suit and look for other ways to create your own status, as he did before; this is a peaceful way of submitting to the system without fighting it.

Gridley, another suitor involved in the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case, puts us as well as the other suitors in a state of bewilderment and despair with his opinion on the system:

The system! I am told, on all hands, it's the system. I mustn't look to individuals. It's the system. I mustn't go into court, and say, 'My Lord, I beg to know this from you – is it right or wrong? Have you the face to tell me I have received justice, and therefore am dismissed? My Lord knows nothing of it. He sits there to administer the system. I mustn't go to Mr. Tulkinghorn, the Solicitor in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and say to him when he makes me furious, by being so cool and satisfied as they all do;…I mustn't say to him, I will have something out for my ruin, by fair means or foul! He is not responsible. It's the system. But if I do no violence here… I will accuse the individual workers of that system against me, face to face, before the great eternal bar! (15, 202–203)

Gridley is the only one willing to face the injustice of the suit represented by its lawyers. He wants to face them, "cool and satisfied" at the beginning, but furious and violent at the end. He is like the dystopian hero who has been used and abused by the political policies of the panoptical society. The leitmotifs of dystopias have always been oppression and rebellion. Here, in the High Court of Chancery, people who are involved in suits like the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case are oppressed, poor, in debt, consumed to death, and bewildered. In this disciplinary society, the oppressor is almost always much more powerful than the rebel. That is why Gridley and Richard die before attaining justice. Miller (1983: 68), on the other hand, states that "the nature of Chancery affects the nature of resistance to it" and thence the Chancery resists its suitors by procrastinating and delaying judgment while the suitors are trapped in their expectations in hope for reforms that are never achieved. What Dickens shows here is that the system gives fake hope to the rebels; this is a new way of punishing the rebels instead of dealing with them physically. Therefore, whoever is trapped in this dilemma tries simply to stay alive, stay human, or remain an individual with his own thoughts. Gridley and Richard were not clever enough to remain alive – on the contrary, they were consumed by the court – while Esther, after carefully scrutinizing the miserable conditions of

the suitors, decides to live according to her own perseverance in order to survive in this disciplinary society.

As an advocate of social reform, Dickens is aware of the inadequacy of any system, no matter how long it remains. Dickens starts his novel with a foggy scene in the city of London and the High Court of Chancery, which sits in the heart of the fog. In Chapter 2, the author drags us to see the downfall of an important agent of the system, Chesney Wold. The narrator says, describing Lincolnshire:

There is much good in it; there are many good and true people in it; it has its appointed place. But the evil of it is that it is a world wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds, and cannot see them as they circle round the sun. It is a deadened world, and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air. (2, 24)

The Chancery and Chesney Wold are two sides of the same coin, as they are the agents of this society. They are both in a deliberate state of oblivion, refusing to see the social problems around them, especially Tom-All-Alone's, the poor area in which miserable people reside. Therefore, both systems can be "safely trusted to collapse from [their] own refusal to release what is unhealthily accumulating in [their] system" (Miller 1983: 70). Sir Leicester's estate and grandeur makes him Chancery's loyal guardian. His landed estate "resembles the court as a realm of old precedent and usage"; the rain that keeps falling in Lincolnshire resembles the fog of Chancery (Blake 2009: 16). The collapse of such a system is induced in the narration, as Miller puts it, in a wish for its wholesale destruction by fire. Krook's spontaneous combustion fulfills this wish, as Dickens desires for a natural or spontaneous eradication, or combustion, of the old rotten system after exposing it.

Mr. King's statement that "we are a great country" doesn't match with Esther's realization, expressed in the middle of the novel, that there is "no reality in the whole scene" (24, 308). On the surface, she notices the unpleasant facts that are blocked from consciousness (none of the officials of Chancery seem to have the slightest awareness that their court is "held in universal horror, contempt, and indignation") (24, 308). Thoroughly, the whole working of Chancery is wrong and farcical; the goal is to indulge whoever is involved in the system in a state of discipline in order to avoid anarchy. Everyone, from the power holders to the suitors, seems to look at the results from his or her own perspective. The former rely on their power to avoid anarchy; the latter find in rebellion a refuge to achieve justice, yet no one knows what the absolute truth is.

Utopia, anti-utopia and more or less dystopia tend to explore the concept of reality and the truth behind the behaviors of people in it. Dickens's two narrators in the novel – the omniscient narrator and Esther – put us in the dilemma of not knowing the ultimate truth and which voice to believe. The omniscient narrator speaks in the present tense, merely relating to us what is going on in the novel's chaotic world. Esther's narrative is weak, reluctant, and never satisfies the reader's search for the truth, no matter how she tries to establish order in the chaotic world of the novel or the reader. In many places in the novel, Esther hides parts of the truth, which becomes a disappointment instead of a balm to us. For example, after meeting with Lady Dedlock, who announces to Esther that she is her mother, Esther receives a letter from her and never reads it or gives a glimpse about it to the reader. We want to know the secrets of this letter, but our attempts fail and the trust we have given to Esther about her telling the truth is betrayed. This act resembles the act of the Chancery, which hides information from the suitors and lets them gasp for the truth. It seems that everyone in power is eager to apply some bureaucratic voice in dealing with the less powerful in order to apply discipline and to teach them how to accept and deal with the system's suppression.

As Esther, Dickens has some hidden facts in *Bleak House*. Some critics have accused Dickens of exaggeration and of his willful perversion of facts. The system depicted in the novel, Esther and even the author, mislead the reader although the three endeavor to grapple with the great social and political problems of the age. As Dickens's dark view of the city and its overlapping patterns departs from the tone of utopian vision, the author creates a new *Bleak House* – Esther's own house, which is set a safe distance from the city in order to create this utopian vision. It is an unrealistic creation to set all the evil deeds in the city as if there is no hope and to put all the harmony in the depiction of country life.

Tanya Agathocleous (2011: 113), argues that "Jarndyce's second *Bleak House* no longer threatens a metonymic resonance with the world and can comfortably stand in for an idealized version of the nation instead." Agathocleous's statement implies a little disturbance about the reality of things. If we head to the country in order to create an idealized place, this means we are isolating ourselves from the core of the city, where all the institutions and organizations of society reside. This notion envisions Foucault's description of the attitude of penal societies to suppress the citizen. In his book Discipline and Punish, Foucault (1977: 11) clarifies that "imprisonment, confinement, forced labour, penal servitude, prohibition from entering certain areas, deportation – which have occupied so important place in the modern system" are the techniques used by the system to punish and subjugate people to follow the rules. Isolating the people involved in the Chancery and deporting them to the countryside becomes a new confinement and rehabilitation of the individual, although what actually need reform are the legal and punitive systems.

Dickens provides three different views of *Bleak House* and the High Court of Chancery: past, present, and future. These views present themselves as predominantly topical situations that can be found in hundreds of places in past, present, and modern societies. Therefore, I suggest that this novel

is the first step taken by its author to convert his narratives toward an antithetical English system, revealing, for example, how these reforms turn to be foggy the way every tangible thing in *Bleak House*'s London is approached by and submerged in fog. I think this supports critics' perception of Dickens as a social novelist who observes and writes about the social problems but never a reformist, socialist, or revolutionary to the existing systems in the Victorian period. Dickens does not give a description of social and legal issues the way they appear in contemporary England but as he imagines how they would turn out if social and legal reforms were ignored by authorities and reformists. Even though reforms of the Victorian legal system were conducted following the calls of Jeremy Bentham and his supporters, additional reforms on much legislation such as civil litigation were still needed because of the delay and expense of such suits. *Bleak House* foregrounds these actions when tackling the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit, representing nothing but Bentham's warning of the rotten behaviors found in the English Courts of Law, such as admission and exclusion of evidence, the court's lack of coherence, judge-made common law that was tyrannical, and legal fiction, to mention a few. Furthermore, Jerome Meckier (1987: 85) claims that England, by the late 1840s, was depicted as both "utopia and dystopia":

> By the late 1840s, England was on the verge of becoming an industrial kingdom, incredibly rich and energetic, in which, however, a million people were in danger of starving and half of the women could not read. In short, the country was, potentially, both utopia and dystopia.

Digging deep into Dickens's narration and his themes discussed in *Bleak House*, one will notice that Dickens is aware that no one can eliminate the existence of a bureaucratic system. Yet, he urges his characters and advises the reader to cooperate with the system to avoid anarchy. It seems that the agenda of social reformism of which Dickens argues in *Bleak House* lies

under the totality of the carceral institution. His ideas do not collide with the powerful system because he does not want to shake the stability of the family first and then the state. Dickens, from my point of view, oscillated between providing Marxist ideas and/or capitalistic ideas in the novel. After arguing that the Chancery protracted the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit for business purposes only, Dickens asks the individual to beware of the acts of the system that can monopolize the whole life of the individual and to replace the public system with a private yet legitimate individual enterprise that can lead gradually to the destruction of the whole society.

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أبعاد النقائضية فيما وراء الحياة الطوباوية للفرد والمسكن في رواية تشارلز ديكينز «البيت الكئيب»

آية وليد عكاوي[1]

ملخص البحث:

يطرح تشارلز ديكينز باستمرار في رواياته تقييما للظروف الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والسياسية لإنجلترا ويبين التطورات الثقافية التي تحصل في مجتمعه. وفي روايته «البيت الكئيب»، سلط ديكنز الضوء على بعض المشاكل الاجتماعية والسياسية والقانونية الحاسمة التي وجدت في الأنظمة التي تحكم المدن الفيكتورية الإنجليزية والمناطق الريفية. ومع ذلك، فقد سلط ديكنز الضوء على الجانب المشرق لقيمة المنزل وصورة الرجل المحسن. يتطرق هذا البحث ومن خلال التركيز على رواية ديكينز «البيت الكئيب» على عرض إنجلترا كدولة متناقضة تحمل مفاهيم طوباوية ونقائضية على حد سواء. يمثل جون جارنديس، إحدى الشخصيات الرئيسة في الروائية، العنصر الطوباوي للرجل المحسن في المنزل المثالي، على الرغم من أن هناك لمحات من الصفات النقائضية في داخله. إن المفاهيم المعادية للطوباوية، والتي تجسد في الظروف الاجتماعية والقانونية لإنجلترا في العصر الفيكتوري، قد تحمل آثارا طوباوية، ولكنها تحيط أيضا بالدولة المثالية وتعمل على تعكير صورتها المثالية التي تقود القراء إلى التشكيك في مستقبل الطوباوية الحقيقية في إنجلترا.

الكلمات الدالة: تشارلز ديكينز، البيت الكئيب، الطوباوية، النقائضية، المسكن.

(1) كلية الآداب - جامعة اليرموك (إربد - الأردن)

aya-aka@yu.edu.jo