

BLEAK HOUSE: A STORY OF LIFE BEYOND THE COURTROOM

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Charles Dickens was one of the greatest English writers of the Victorian era. His novel “Bleak House”, published in 1852–1853, is widely considered to be one of his most complex, affecting works. Dickens critiques the English legal system (and the long lines of court cases) so heavily that he could be seen to be destroying people’s lives. He looks at love, kindness, responsibility and family relations at the same time.

From the very beginning the novel carries a dark and mysterious atmosphere. It is not easy to read as it has so many characters and many storylines. But everything has a deeper meaning. Dickens wanted us to not just follow the plot but to think about justice, human kindness, and the consequences of people’s decisions. John Jarndyce is one of the first characters introduced in the novel. He is a rich, generous man who is the protector of Ada Clare, Richard Carstone and Esther Summerson. He provides them a nice home at Bleak House and treats them with kindness without expecting anything in return. John Jarndyce is indeed the kindest character in the novel, because he really wants to protect young people and support them to build a better future.

Later in the story John Jarndyce asks Esther to marry him. And I can understand his decision because he liked Esther and wanted her to have a happy life. He also thought that she needed to feel happiness after all the pain she had had. But I think he could see that Esther respected him more as a father than as a future husband. Although he was kind it put Esther in an awkward situation as she felt grateful to him and she didn’t want to disappoint him. Fortunately, John Jarndyce soon realized that Esther really loved Allan Woodcourt and released her from her promise. This was a good decision, showing that he cared more for Esther’s happiness than he did for his own feelings. Esther Summerson is one of the most admirable characters in the novel. She is kind, patient, modest; she thinks about other people’s happiness before herself. Esther never complains in life, even when she is lonely, sick and disappointed. I admire her strength and her compassion to others while she is suffering from her own. When Mr. Guppy proposes to Esther, she politely refuses him because she does not love him. She makes the right choice and marriage should be based on love and mutual respect and not pressure or sympathy. In later life, when John Jarndyce proposes to her,

Esther agrees as she is grateful for him and feels she owes him everything he has done for her. I think that shows how selfless Esther is but also how she gets lost in her own feelings. She feels that making others happy is more important than her own happiness. In the end she is able to marry the man she truly loves, Allan Woodcourt.

Another important character is Lady Dedlock, who later is revealed to be Esther's real mother. She finally tells Esther the truth, but she believes she cannot work her way into a normal relationship and she fears society's judgment and her past history. On the one hand, I know that Lady Dedlock is scared of her own past. People judged women very harshly in Victorian times for what they did wrong very much. But I think Esther had already been through enough in life without a mother's love from home and with a mother who had no real love. Lady Dedlock could have tried to keep her daughter closer rather than leave her again. This decision protected her reputation, but Esther had even deeper emotional hurt.

My view of Mr. Guppy is mixed. He is honest enough to say he has feelings and ask Esther to marry him but after Esther is infected with smallpox and her face is scarred, he's not his usual way of acting. I think everyone should have the right to choose whom they want to marry and no one should be forced into a relationship. But Mr. Guppy should have been more patient and respectful with Esther so she didn't feel uncomfortable and he would have just wished her good health and accepted her decision. He is a kind, honest, caring doctor who truly loves Esther.