

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Literature consists of many forms, such as poetry, plays, short stories, and novels. They are all interesting to read and analyze, but the thesis writer finds it more interesting to read and analyze a novel rather than the other forms of literature. The thesis writer chooses to study novel because she feels that by reading novel she can enjoy the great amount of details inside the story. By reading the large amount of details, the thesis writer can understand more about the characters and the problems that exist in the story. “For most readers, the primary attraction lies in the character whose experience and adventures in life form the plot of the stories and the novels in which they appear” (Pickering, p.19).

The novel the thesis writer chooses to discuss in this thesis belongs to the Victorian Era. The Victorian Age is a great age of novels due to its great leisure time, wider education, and the absence of other forms of entertainment (Unstead, p.42). There are many great novelists from that era whose popularity last up to the present, such as George Elliot, William Makepeace Thackeray, the Brontë sisters, and Charles Dickens.

The Victorian Era in England (1830-1901) was believed to be the golden age of the British Empire. England developed rapidly in economy and industry under the reign of Queen Victoria. However, the Victorian Era was also known as a hard period after the booming of Industrial Revolution in the previous era. Man power was replaced by machines. It resulted in a great unemployment because the factory owners no longer needed people when they could have machines to do the work. This caused a great shock in the economic and social life of the people because the wages of the labor force decreased a great deal. The rich, who had power over finance, invested in

industries and became wealthier everyday, while on the other hand, the poor lost their jobs and had to earn a hard living. Victorian Era was marked by a great gap between the rich and the poor, the corruption of the government, the winding bureaucracy of the law, and injustice toward the poor.

Among the Victorian great novelists and their works, the thesis writer chooses to analyze a novel by Charles Dickens. The first reason why the thesis writer chooses Charles Dickens is because Dickens has a never ending popularity; his works are still widely read as they were first published (Clarke, p.81). He was the most acceptable to readers of all ages and the subject of his books is more than any other novelists (Obermier, iv). The second reason why the thesis writer chooses Dickens is because Dickens' novels are rich in their social contents. His novels can broaden up the readers' understanding and knowledge of England in the Nineteenth Century, especially about the social life and problems of the people living in that era.

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) belongs to the Nineteenth Century England. He was born in Portsmouth on 7 February 1812. From 1817 up to 1822, Dickens and his family settled in Chatham. After those years, the family moved to London and there they fell into bankruptcy. In 1824 his father was imprisoned for debt. As a result, the Dickens family suffered much humiliation and had to live in poverty. Charles Dickens had to earn a living in a very early age and survived through the difficulties of life in the Victorian Era.

Charles Dickens grew up in that hard period as a member of the lower class society. At eleven years old his father was imprisoned and he had to work in a blacking warehouse. At seventeen he became a court stenographer, and later he became an expert parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*. His background and bitter past brought great influence toward the works he wrote. In the next stage of his life, Dickens wrote great literary works that concern much about the hard life of the lower class society, such as *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Nicholas Nickelby* (1839), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), and

Barnaby Rudge (1841). His works often serve as “a protest against the abuses of the social and political life at his time, a protest against the injustice that happened in England in Nineteenth Century” (House, 1942 p.10).

Dickens spent his life moving from place to place. This inspired him to write a great deal of his own experiences. In 1842 Dickens went to America and was displeased at the slavery he saw. He then wrote *American Notes* (1842) as a sharp criticism and an idea for the abolition of slavery. In 1844 Dickens lived in Italy and in 1846 he moved to Switzerland. He often worked on more than one novel and created many great and famous works, such as *Bleak House* (1853), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectation* (1861), *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), and many more. Dickens never seemed to stop writing. He left his last novel unfinished (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*) when he died in 1870. All his novels describe the facts of the society he witnessed and experienced. In fact, some of his works are considered as semi-autobiographical, such as *David Copperfield* (1850).

One of the examples of Dickens’ experience which later inspired his work is when his father, John Dickens, and his family had to be put into the Marshalsea prison in a single, cramped room for three months. Charles, who was only eleven years old, had to live alone in lodgings and was sent to work at Warren’s Blacking Factory. Those three months changed Dickens as a person and shaped his outlook as a writer and social critic. He then used this experience as a background in his novel, *Little Dorrit*, which is the novel the thesis writer, has chosen to analyze in this thesis.

Little Dorrit has the distinction of occupying a special place in the oeuvre of Dickens (Wain, p.175). All the details of the Marshalsea prison, which are described in a marvelous way in the novel, are taken from the memories when Dickens’ father was imprisoned there (Trilling, p.364).

The reason why the thesis writer chooses the novel *Little Dorrit* is because it shows the setting of human society that includes nearly everything of importance, lovingly shaped, and also Dickens’ greatest efforts in solving the

specific problems of a long fictional story. Dickens is great in describing and giving solution to social problems; he is a great social novelist (Sanders, p.95). *Little Dorrit* is one of Dickens' most profound novels and also one of the most significant works of the Nineteenth Century. It will not fail to be thought of, as speaking with a peculiarity and interest to our own time (Wall, 1970p.34).

The novel *Little Dorrit* is divided into two books (or parts): the first is Poverty, and the second is Riches, which are connected to each other. For this novel, Dickens sets a man (Arthur Clennam) and a woman (Amy Dorrit) as his protagonist, a failed father (William Dorrit), and his three children (Fanny, Tip, and Amy), the youngest daughter being the most faithful. Amy is said to have a small appearance, and because of that she is called Little Dorrit. She is the youngest daughter of William Dorrit, a prisoner in Marshalsea. Her mother died when she was a child. Amy has an arrogant elder sister, Fanny, a theatrical dancer, and a lazy brother, Tip. Though she is the youngest child, Amy's elder brother and sister depend on her. Her father, William, is the first man who enters Marshalsea prison and has been living there for more than twenty years for the debt he cannot pay to the circumlocution office. The circumlocution office is the most important department under the government in that period of time. Dickens describes Mr. Dorrit as "a captive with jail rot upon him, and the impurity of his prison worn into grain of his soul" (Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, p.222). One of the ironies of the Dorrits is that the father's childishness forces his youngest daughter to play the role of a parent (mother). Dickens also portrays Amy Dorrit as the savior of the main male character, Arthur Clennam. The love and affection that Amy shows can be seen at the end of the novel when Arthur falls into bankruptcy and is imprisoned in Marshalsea debtors' prison in a hopeless situation. It is Amy who comes to give Arthur affection and comfort in his time of need and desperation. She helps Arthur solve his problem and manages to get him out of prison. The two then get married after Arthur is released from the Marshalsea prison.

Although one of Dickens' characteristic is to put boys or men as his protagonists, somehow his novels seem to have a certain belief about the Victorian women: what her limitations should be, how she should fulfill her domestic role and moral attitudes, and what part she should play in the society. The ideal Victorian feminine figure is to be the "angel of the house" (Coventry Patmore, 1823-1896, taken from www.sprog.auc.dk). The "angel of the house" is what a Victorian woman should be and it is reflected in the lives of Victorian women and it is also surely connected that the husbands have to be the master (Abrams, 1993,p.1599).

The female figures in Charles Dickens' novels mostly seem to represent his ideology of womanhood. Dickens divides the ideology of womanhood into two types: the first is the angelic female figures who are associated with selfless devotion and maternal duties, while the second is the dangerous female figures who are associated with sexuality or passion (Slifsgaard, www.sprog.auc.dk).

In Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, the thesis writer does not find the representation of the second ideology of womanhood in the figure of the main female character. Instead, Dickens appears to show the ideology of an "angel of the house" in the figure of the childlike heroine Amy Dorrit (or Little Dorrit). Therefore, the thesis writer is interested in analyzing Amy Dorrit's character traits to prove that Amy can be interpreted as the representation of an "angel of the house."

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The thesis writer would like to know how Amy Dorrit fulfills the ideal Victorian female figure as an "angel of the house", both for her family (especially her father) and her lover, Arthur Clennam.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The thesis writer would like to find out and prove that Amy Dorrit is a representation of an “angel of the house.”

1.4. Significance of the Study

The thesis writer hopes that the students of Petra Christian University and other readers will know more about Dickens’ works and ideas. The thesis writer hopes that through this thesis more students will be interested in reading and analyzing Dickens’ other works.

The thesis writer also hopes that this thesis will encourage other students to analyze Dickens’ works because they give many inputs and knowledge of the culture, norms, standards and social life in the previous era. By analyzing these aspects, students may take values and lessons from the past and compare them to the present days.

As for the readers, from the analysis the novel *Little Dorrit*, the thesis writer hopes that it can give the the readers an important input as a woman and member of the society. There are many moral values that the readers can take from the novel and from analyzing Amy Dorrit’s character traits. The thesis writer also hopes that the readers could learns that it is proper for a woman to behave according to the demand of her era, especially concerning her role in the house. The standard and concept of an ideal female figure change from one era to the next. Amy Dorrit is able to fulfill the standard demanded in her era. As for the conclusion the thesis writer hope that the readers could get from this

lesson that she should also behave in accordance to the standard in the modern era to be regarded as an ideal woman.

1.5. Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study is on the figure of Amy Dorrit as the “angel of the house” who represents an ideal Victorian female figure. The study in this thesis is limited on the topic of Amy Dorrit’s loyalty and affection toward her family and lover. The analysis includes William Dorrit as Amy’s father and Arthur Clennam as her lover. The thesis writer also puts other members of Amy’s family into discussion: her elder sister (Fanny), elder brother (Tip), and uncle (Frederick Dorrit) to support the analysis.

1.6. Methodology

In writing this thesis, the thesis writer makes researches both in the library and in the internet. The primary data source that the writer uses in this thesis is Charles Dickens’ novel, *Little Dorrit*. The secondary data source that the writer uses is the criticisms about *Little Dorrit*, the information concerning the concept of the “angel of the house,” and the biography of Charles Dickens, the thesis writer uses literary approach to analyze the novel. In this thesis, the thesis writer uses the theory of literature on characterization. The thesis writer considers that it is important to apply the theory of characterization because the thesis writer needs to find out about Amy Dorrit’s character traits. Besides, the thesis writer also needs the concept of the “angel of the house” as the criteria that fit to Amy’s characteristics.

1.7. Organization of the Study

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is the introduction, which contains the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitations, and methodology. The second chapter is related to the theory of literature used to analyze the topic and the supporting data that the thesis writer considers important for the analysis. The third chapter is the analysis and the findings of the study. The fourth chapter is the conclusion of the study.