

The search for happiness and love in charles dickens's bleak house

[People](#), [Charles Dickens](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction

The characters in Dickens's famous, rather long and complex novel *Bleak House*, are all looking for happiness in their short and precious lives, just as all people do, both fictional and real. Everyone in their right mind wants to achieve ultimate happiness, being satisfied with the current state of their lives, seldom feeling down and regretting close to nothing. It cannot be said with absolute certainty that something so idyllic and perhaps naïvely perfect is truly attainable by human beings, but one can always hope, even when everything and everyone proves the contrary. It is this very hope, together with an unwavering drive to achieve goals people set for themselves, that makes the concept of absolute happiness slightly more real and believable than it perhaps is. The root of this ultimate happiness greatly varies, it depends highly on what the particular person values the most in their life – be it money, success, fame, having a positive influence on the world or simply love. The last mentioned is what quite a few characters in the novel crave for the entirety of their lives and what Dickens puts in the foreground as one of the important factors shaping the story. Through this, Dickens also hints to the reader that if ultimate happiness in life actually exists and is ever obtainable, it may as well be closely tied to the very concept and the feeling of love. Despite it being so difficult a process, it is surely a most rewarding one.

Esther as a Narrator

One of the two novel's narrators, Esther, searches for happiness in love very intensely. As a narrator, Esther is very self-conscious and even goes as far as

to tell the reader she is not a good storyteller and she belittles herself. This happens on many occasions throughout the story. What's more, she does this the very first time she appears as a narrator, affecting the development of the reader's opinion about Esther as a character and narrator. " I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever. I always knew that" (Dickens). This makes the reader actually doubt the reliability of her as a narrator. Yet, throughout the pages of her narrative, she proves to be an excellent narrator indeed, going into great detail in everything, from descriptions of characters to commenting on the events taking place. To give an example of Esther's narrative skills, the moment when she and Mr. Jarndyce meet for the first time in the novel, Esther gives the reader a thorough description of his visage, while also articulating her internal thoughts:

' And how did you like the ride? And how did you like Mrs. Jellyby, my dear?' said Mr. Jarndyce to Ada.

While Ada was speaking to him in reply, I glanced (I need not say with how much interest) at his face. It was a handsome, lively, quick face, full of change and motion; and his hair was a silvered iron-grey. I took him to be nearer sixty than fifty, but he was upright, hearty, and robust . (Dickens)

Esther handles most of her narrative the same way, skilfully and in detail.

The Exception

However, there is an exception to this standard. The exception is, based on what the reader can draw from the text, embedded in the fact that Esther is

attracted to Mr. Woodcourt. She does not ever describe what he looks like in too much detail, keeps her internal thoughts to herself and does not really mention him very often. Dickens uses the moments of Esther's clumsy and hesitant narrative, moments which are very easily recognisable when one gets used to the smooth storytelling Esther uses, to point out there is something more to the topic at hand. When Esther seems to be avoiding going into detail, the reader can quickly deduce the obvious – that she is trying to hide her true feelings. To prove this, it is best to demonstrate it on an actual passage where Esther's narrative loses its cohesion:

I have forgotten to mention — at least I have not mentioned — that Mr. Woodcourt was the same dark young surgeon whom we had met at Mr. Badger's. Or that Mr. Jarndyce invited him to dinner that day. Or that he came. Or that when they were all gone and I said to Ada, ' Now, my darling, let us have a little talk about Richard!' Ada laughed and said — But I don't think it matters what my darling said. She was always merry.(Dickens)

It is clear that Esther is indeed very hesitant in this passage and that she most probably did not actually forget to mention all of this, she just chose not to. The narrative completely loses its flow and the reader again begins to question her integrity as a narrator. Eventually, she even experiences a change of heart and decides not to disclose what Ada says in return for her remark about Richard – a man Ada is obviously attracted to. Esther begins to finally acknowledge Mr. Woodcourt in her narrative later in the story, not until they are married.