

# Gilded Identities: The Enigma of Ada Clare's Golden Tresses and Their Role in *Bleak House*

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**Abstract:** *In Victorian novels, hair color carries significant symbolic meaning, often depicting contrasting characteristics among characters: blonde women typically represent purity and obedience, while women with darker hair symbolize rebellion and wickedness. In Bleak House, Ada Clair exemplifies middle-class identity and the ideal of the angel in the house. This study, situated within the cultural context of hair representations in Dickens' novels, aims to explore why Ada is depicted as a pure woman with redemptive qualities within the middle class. Through a comparative analysis of Ada's hair color alongside that of other female characters in this fiction, as well as her relationships with male characters, this article seeks to reveal how issues of gender and class intertwine and manifest in complex ways during this period.*

**Keywords:** Golden hair; Middle class; Purity; Redemption.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Hair writing is a significant literary phenomenon in Victorian novels. Writers of the Victorian era (1832-1901) displayed an almost obsessive focus on the portrayal of women's hair. As Elizabeth Gitter notes, no other era's authors have devoted such extensive attention to the depiction of female hair. They meticulously detail every aspect of women's hair—including length, color, and style—while capturing the degree of curl in each lock with remarkable precision; furthermore, the hair characteristics of nearly every female character are presented repeatedly in various contexts [1]. Richard D. Altick, a prominent scholar in Victorian studies, similarly observes that hair emerges as a pivotal element in Victorian literature. The evolving attitudes towards women's hair offer authors a rapid and profound means of characterizing individuals, which undoubtedly constitutes a distinctive and essential feature of British literature during the Victorian period [2].

Hair symbolism represents a significant literary phenomenon in Victorian novels. Dickens consistently employs hair symbolism to portray gentle and devoted female characters as golden angels. Elizabeth Gaskell notes that "Dickens is more adept than any other writer of the Victorian era at incorporating the visions and values of fairy tales into his novels; therefore, it is not surprising to find the golden princess of fairy tales embodied in his golden women" [3]. In *Bleak House*, Dickens does not bestow golden hair upon the protagonist, Esther, but instead focuses considerable attention on Ada's golden locks. Compared to other golden women in Dickens' oeuvre, Ada in *Bleak House* receives relatively less scrutiny. Although scholars have noted the rich and nuanced descriptions of Ada's hair color and its connections to fetishism, beauty, and sexuality, research examining how blondness constructs female identity in "Bleak House" remains insufficient. For instance, Galia Ofek observes that Ada's golden hair reflects the fetishistic themes of the period [4]. Maria Ioannou asserts that *Bleak House* reveals Ada's beauty, defined by her golden hair [5]. Additionally, Natalie McKnight contends that Ada Claire's golden hair carries significant sexual connotations [6].

Ada, as the only golden female character in the novel, occupies a position second only to the protagonist, Esther, with her golden hair mentioned seven times throughout the text. In stark contrast, the author provides no references to Esther's hair color. In the Victorian era, blondness was frequently associated with the pure image of the "angel in the house." However, the angelic qualities that Ada embodies do not receive the same level of attention as those attributed to Esther. The "angel in the house" is typically depicted as a golden woman, representing the idealized, pure, and unblemished female figure of the time. Previous scholarship has largely regarded Esther as the quintessential example of the "angel in the house," while Ada, who shares this attribute, has been infrequently discussed.

This study offers a new perspective: Ada aligns more closely with Dickens' traditional portrayal of the submissive angelic figure, whereas Esther deviates from the conventional notion of the "angel in the house" and is far from the ideal in Dickens' view. This atypical characterization is evident not only in Esther's absence of the commonly

idealized golden trait found in Victorian novels but also more profoundly in the psychological trauma she endures. As Harold Bloom argues in “The Western Canon,” Esther is not merely a victim of a patriarchal society; her trauma is deeply personal, rooted in societal prejudices and stigmas surrounding illegitimate children. Consequently, in *Bleak House* [7]. Dickens appears more focused on Esther’s individual psychological trauma and growth, while Ada serves as a more universal and typical representation of a Victorian wife and sister, with her “angel in the house” qualities depicted as more pronounced and prominent.

This article proposes that Dickens solidifies hair color, particularly blondness, as a prevalent identity symbol and utilizes this symbol to construct Victorian middle-class identities and the femininity idealized by men. By examining hair color within the context of the Victorian social backdrop, the study focuses on Ada’s golden hair as an external characteristic of the “angel in the house” and explores how the author depicts Ada’s internal coupling of identities as a middle-class wife, daughter, mother, and female friend. It delineates the underlying currents that reflect the interplay between the “angel in the house” and the middle class. Furthermore, building on this foundation, the article investigates how blondness, particularly in relation to Ada in “*Bleak House*,” represents feminine qualities associated with sexual purity and redemptive functions, in conjunction with the scientific discourse and aesthetic trends of that period.

## 2. GOLDEN HAIR AS A MIDDLE-CLASS IDENTITY SIGNIFIER

In Dickens’ depiction, golden hair is laden with specific significance as a symbol of middle-class female identity. Within the novel, Ada, with her luminous golden visage, is portrayed as the quintessence of middle-class femininity, while her foil, Lady Dedlock, with her dark tresses, is fashioned as a woman who has relinquished her middle-class standing. Lady Dedlock’s forfeiture of this status stems from her divergence from the fundamental principles of the middle class, having transgressed significant social norms such as giving birth to an illegitimate child and committing murder. Middle-class culture promotes a concept of “self-improvement,” in which individuals, through reason, surmount the shackles of vanity, self-absorption, and fervor, cultivating personal and societal concord [8]. Nevertheless, Lady Dedlock’s conduct fundamentally contradicts this notion, laying bare not only the erosion of personal ethics but also her departure from middle-class tenets. Upon the revelation of her transgressions, her standing as a “Mrs.” disintegrates, relegating her to the periphery of society. Conversely, Ada’s propriety and grace flawlessly harmonize with the archetype of middle-class femininity. Through this stark dichotomy, Dickens effectively lays bare the severe ostracism endured by “immoral” women in Victorian society. This exclusion not only underscores the stringent societal norms governing female conduct.

Golden hair became entrenched as a symbol of middle-class identity, mirroring the aesthetic norms of the Victorian era. In that period, golden hair was esteemed for its beauty [9]. The 1865 edition of “*Temple Bar*” delineates the idealized portrayal of beauty during the 19th century.

The most beautiful object of creation is a golden-haired, fair-complexioned woman, with eyes blue as the periwinkle or forget-me-not. In the absence of any proof to the contrary, we may accept Milton’s assurance that Eve ... had tresses of golden hue; ... the artists of all ages have represented the Madonna as a pure golden [...] [10]

These depictions reveal the close connection between golden hair and beauty, further cementing the crucial role of golden hair as a symbol of middle-class identity. In the novel, Ada’s image aligns remarkably well with the idealized conception of beauty in the Victorian era; she is unquestionably a beauty exemplar in Dickens’ portrayal. Not even the novel’s protagonist, Esther, can resist the allure of Ada’s beauty, expressing genuine admiration for her beauty:

They both looked up when I came in, and I saw in the young lady, with the fire shining upon her, such a beautiful girl! With such rich golden hair, such soft blue eyes, and such a bright, innocent, trusting face [11]!

It is precisely because the Victorian era bestowed upon golden hair a label of beauty that “golden equals beauty” became a societal trend. It is only fitting that the wig merchant Mr. Krook would consider Ada’s hair superior to all he had previously acquired, as Krook himself states:

‘You see,’ said the old man, stopping and turning round, ‘they—Hi! Here’s lovely hair! I have got three sacks of ladies’ hair below, but none so beautiful and fine as this. What colour, and what texture!’ (131)

This trend has played a significant role in driving the growth of the beauty industry, leading to significant

advancements in wig and hair dyeing technologies. Influenced by the fashion culture, women have embraced the trend by adorning themselves with golden wigs or lightening their dark hair with dye, while also utilizing hair care products to enhance its shine and luster. During this era, the consumption of expensive hair care products was primarily limited to middle-class women, as lower-class women faced economic constraints that hindered their participation in this domain. Consequently, the aesthetic ideal of “golden hair is beautiful” quickly gained dominance among the middle-class female demographic under the influence of fashion trends. This phenomenon elucidates the “aesthetic” divide between social classes and consumer levels, aligning with Bourdieu’s theory of social distinction [12]. Similar occurrences were frequently depicted in Victorian novels. For instance, in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, set during the same period as *Bleak House*, Lady Audley suggests to Phoebe, who shares a similar appearance and background, that she should dye her dark hair the same “golden color” as herself, with the aim of elevating Phoebe’s social standing and facilitating her marriage into a more privileged family.

As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall profoundly elucidate in *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850*, the phenomenon of the English middle class aligns closely with Bourdieu’s theory of “Distinction” [13]. This social demarcation not only intensifies class stratification but also reflects a form of “symbolic violence” within the aesthetic standard of golden hair.

Just as Bourdieu argued, 'Symbolic systems' serve their political purpose as structured and structuring tools of communication and knowledge, functioning as instruments that help maintain the dominance of one class over another through symbolic violence, applying their unique power to the underlying power relations, thereby contributing to what Weber described as the 'domestication of the dominated' [14]. Different classes and class segments actively participate in a symbolic struggle aimed at establishing a definition of the social world that aligns with their interests. Consequently, the realm of ideological positions mirrors, albeit in a transformed manner, the landscape of social hierarchies. These classes may engage in this struggle either directly through the symbolic conflicts encountered in daily life or indirectly through proxies.

The effect of symbolic violence exacerbates the classification of middle-class identity, turning golden women into a prominent symbol of middle-class status. Guided by this prevailing aesthetic norm, society increasingly strives for a uniform standard of female beauty, leading to the marginalization of women with hair colors other than golden. As a result, golden hair becomes an unattainable benchmark, widening social inequality. This interplay between social class and fashion creates a standardized and homogeneous beauty ideal, limiting the individuality and autonomy of women and reinforcing the enduring dominance of the ruling elite.

To clearly delineate the boundaries between gender and class and to prevent society from descending into chaos and disintegration, English literary culture began to meticulously define different segments of the population [15]. Hair served as one of the tools for categorizing individuals. As Gitter observes, certain degrading and corrupt language suggests that women’s hair may conceal a potential inherent filth, endowing hair with symbolic significance that reveals moral or sexual impurities. This interpretation of filth is more frequently viewed as a reflection of social relations rather than an intrinsic quality of the hair itself [16]. It highlights the contrast between the dirty, chaotic, and immoral traits attributed to working-class women and the cleanliness, order, and morality associated with bourgeois women.

During this period, the increasing demand for wigs intensified the practice of determining identity through hair. Not only did women require wigs for fashion, but men also wore them—not for aesthetic purposes, but to navigate public spaces and signify their social status [17]. Due to the substantial demand for wigs in England, the domestic market was unable to satisfy this need, resulting in a significant influx of hair from abroad. Before this hair entered the British market, it underwent rigorous washing and sorting processes. The raw materials for wigs at that time originated from various ethnic groups, with reports from the *Hairdresser’s Journal* indicating that up to £200,000 worth of hair, equivalent to approximately 100 tons, flowed into Paris each year.

This hair, regardless of whether it was meticulously crafted or in its raw, unprocessed condition—whether combed, clean, or dusty—was categorized and processed according to length, texture, and appearance before being distributed throughout Europe and even globally. This process involved intricate risks intertwined with issues of class and race, the severity of which extended far beyond simple health concerns. Dark hair from certain ethnic groups was frequently perceived as unclean before undergoing washing and processing, reflecting the transformation of foreign hair into bourgeois property, which ultimately came to symbolize social status. This symbolic distinction became a clear marker for identifying various social classes. The perception of dark hair as impure arose from the phenomenon that such hair tended to lighten after washing. This physical cleansing process

took on deeper abstract significance, signifying that the hair of outsiders, after undergoing a series of treatments, entered the market and ultimately became the property of the bourgeoisie, even serving as a symbol of their identity. Consequently, wig owners, along with their wigs, conveyed a moral implication of cleanliness, which concurrently emerged as a salient indicator of their social class.

In the novel, the “messiness” of the hair of lower-class characters stands in stark contrast to Ada’s hair. The depiction of lower-class individuals is frequently characterized by filth, as though their hair is suffocated by the grim, polluted fog of London, resulting in a dull and muted appearance. In sharp contrast, Ada’s hair is portrayed as radiantly bright, evoking the brilliance of sunlight.

The way women’s hair was portrayed during the Victorian era was a reflection of the social divisions of that time. Popular newspapers from the 1850s to the 1890s often portrayed hair accessories like wigs or hair dye as impure and damaging to one’s physical appearance. In 1868, *The Times* highlighted the lucrative nature of high-quality human hair, which was valued four to five times higher than silver per ounce, leading to illicit practices of acquiring hair from the deceased. The reverence for golden hair originated from its resemblance to the radiant color of gold (Gitter 934). Moreover, during that period, high-quality hair predominantly belonged to the upper-middle class, while lower-class individuals and people of other races struggled to achieve the sought-after “golden or light color” due to inadequate hygiene or inherent racial factors. This correlation between golden hair and social standing further solidified its significance as a symbol of middle-class identity.

### 3. GOLDEN HAIR AS SIGNIFIER OF PURITY

Golden hair not only functions as a powerful emblem of middle-class identity, but also embodies the attributes of purity and redemptive femininity with its distinct hue.

In the 19th-century cultural context, women’s hair assumed great significance as a conveyer of sexual characteristics, with golden hair specifically accentuating notions of sexual innocence. The scientific discourse of the time further reinforced the strong link between golden hair and female purity. Conversely, studies on female criminality in the 19th century suggested a higher likelihood of sexual misconduct among women with dark hair (Cesare Lombroso and William Ferrero 98), thereby accentuating the “non-sexual” qualities of golden women within the middle-class sphere in contrast to groups such as prostitutes. This definition of purity for middle-class women, to some extent, found legitimacy and justification through scientific discussions.

The requirement for sexual purity among middle-class women in the 19th century was closely tied to the prevailing structure of the family. Marriage in the 19th century was seen as the “center and prototype” of the nation, and therefore, the management of the household was expected to mirror the management of the state, with a need to safeguard it from any kind of attack or “contamination” (Bullen 78). As a result, wives, as the core members of the family, were defined as objects in need of special protection. This protection stemmed not only from the legal positioning of wives as their husbands’ property and the subordinate status of women in a patriarchal society (Heaton 101), but also from their crucial role in the reproductive function of the family. Wives were regarded as guardians of the purity of the family lineage, and any harm inflicted upon them had the potential to threaten the purity of the family and the dominance of patriarchal rule. Wives were seen as “the source of threat and contamination within a family” (Ofek 11), and, furthermore, as Douglas writes, they were “the gate through which invasion of the family takes place... through adultery with someone’s wife, unclean blood is introduced into the lineage” (Douglas 122). In this cultural context, wives were strictly confined to the household to avoid any external intrusion. Richard, as the husband of Bertha, not only prohibited her from working outside the home but also took on the responsibility of providing for the family, thus demonstrating not only the value placed on property but also the steadfast defense of the purity of the family lineage. This defense was not only a sign of respect for the individual wife, but also a safeguard for the social status and purity of the entire family. Through these cultural and social practices, golden women, such as Ada, became symbols of purity and nobility, their mere existence serving as the best guarantee of the family’s purity.

Upon examining the corpus retrieval (Table 1), it becomes evident that the verb phrases associated with “golden hair” encompass “shaking,” “passed his hand over her golden hair,” and “put a lock of it to his lips.” These expressions reveal Richard’s protective stance towards Ada and his assertion of ownership over her. Employing a metonymic lens, Ada’s golden hair symbolizes her entire being. During this era, it was a societal norm that a woman’s body and possessions were considered the property of her husband (citation required). Consequently, Richard’s intervention to prevent Crook from “touching the golden hair” transcends mere hair preservation; it

underscores his effort to safeguard Ada's bodily purity.

Upon first encountering Ada, the merchant Crook is immediately captivated by her lengthy golden locks, expressing a desire to touch them: "Look at how beautiful this hair is! I have three bags of women's hair in my basement, but none as fine and beautiful as this. What a lovely color, how soft and smooth!" (70). As a hair merchant, Crook's interest in Ada's exceptional hair stems from his profession, as noted by Ofek, revealing a profound hair fetish (109). Richard, as Ada's romantic partner, intervenes to halt Crook's advances, thereby preventing her hair from being reduced to a commodity and further ensuring the integrity of her person.

Ofek's analysis in *The Mill on the Floss* emphasizes the capitalistic and possessive value of golden hair, viewing it as an asset of the body rather than an intrinsic part. However, it neglects the underlying motivations that drive Crook's commercial interests in golden hair. Beyond serving as a marker of individual identity, golden hair also embodies a male fantasy and object of desire. When golden hair becomes a commodity in the marketplace, it ultimately finds its way into the possession of select women, transforming into objects of admiration or manipulation by their spouses or lovers.

In 19th-century literature and art, golden hair frequently connotes female sexuality, serving as a potent vehicle for artists to articulate their yearnings for both material wealth and sensual female allure (Gitter, 936). The commodification of golden hair not only exacerbates but also entrenches the phenomenon of women being reduced to objects.

#### 4. GOLDEN HAIR AS A SIGNIFIER OF REDEMPTIVE QUALITY

The golden-haired woman not only signifies traits of sexual purity but also plays a redemptive role on a spiritual level. This redemptive aspect is particularly evident in her roles as a middle-class wife and sister. The feminine qualities exhibited by Ada enhance the friendship between Ada and Esther. In the Victorian era, female friendships were regarded as a "social bond," comparable to family relationships and spousal love, fostering women's empathy and altruistic virtues (Marcus 29). One of the factors that solidify the strong bond between Ada and Esther is the feminine qualities accentuated by Ada's golden hair. These qualities encompass gentleness, kindness, and a redeeming nature that focuses on nurturing the family. This feminine disposition sharply contrasts with the feminine attributes embodied by Lady Dedlock, Esther's mother, who has dark hair(). Having forsaken Esther in her infancy, Lady Dedlock deprived her daughter of maternal solace. Consequently, Ada finds refuge in the redemptive feminine qualities personified by Ada, which becomes a sanctuary for her.

Dickens skillfully utilizes this characterization technique to imbue distinct feminine qualities in the golden-haired Ada and the dark-haired Lady Dedlock, effectively contrasting the symbolic meanings associated with their respective hair colors. Ada's portrayal as the epitome of Victorian femininity, the "angel in the house," prevents her sister Esther from embodying traits similar to those of Lady Dedlock. Consequently, the novel repeatedly highlights Esther's innate rejection of her mother, including the physical attributes she has inherited, such as her hair color (89), as an act of defiance against her mother's defiance of societal norms. Only by separating herself from her mother and cultivating a distinct image can Esther, as an illegitimate child, shed the stigma of her birth and justify her role as Ada's cherished companion.

The friendship between Ada and Esther blossoms into a symbolic mother-daughter bond. Esther affectionately refers to Ada as her "darling girl" (514), "pet" (40), and "my angel girl" (544). Esther's endearing terms for Ada mirror a mother's address to her daughter, and the use of "my angel girl" aligns with Mrs. Ingram's affectionate reference to her daughter Blanche in *Jane Eyre* (193). This demonstrates Esther's tender maternal affection for Ada. As Ada and Richard are on the verge of marriage, Esther utters, "Richard, take my child away" (729). Being an orphan without a godmother, Esther craves a female companion or elder who can guide her in embracing the societal expectations of a Victorian woman. Esther fulfills this role impeccably, leading Ada towards becoming an exemplary woman.

At the same time, Ada is highly appreciative of Esther. When Ada sees Esther taking care of household chores, she genuinely compliments her:"

Ada laughed; and put her arm about my neck, as I stood looking at the fire; and told me I was a quiet, dear, good creature, and had won her heart. 'You are so thoughtful, Esther,' she said, 'and yet so cheerful! and you do so much, so unpretendingly! You would make a home out of even this house. (*Bleak House* 117)

This portrayal highlights Ada's deep admiration for Esther and her recognition of her domestic abilities. Esther nurtures and guides Ada, imparting valuable lessons on becoming a virtuous woman and fostering a sense of belonging. In doing so, she fills the void left by the absence of maternal love and guidance in Ada's life. Ada's heartfelt praise for Esther further demonstrates her genuine admiration and profound respect, viewing her as a role model akin to a mother figure. This symbolic mother-daughter bond not only compensates for the absence of a biological mother but also instills in Ada the aspiration to become a respected woman within society.

In a similar vein, Esther holds admiration for Ada's conduct. As Esther eloquently observes, "My dear, innocent girl! She is utterly oblivious to the fact that her words unwittingly praise her own character..." (58). Esther's evaluation of Ada reveals a profound understanding and appreciation of her, echoing the sentiments of American feminist Carol Gilligan, who posits that the intimacy within the mother-daughter bond is deeply rooted in shared similarities.

Relationships, and particularly issues of dependency, are experienced differently by women and men. For boys and men, separation and individuation are critically tied to gender identity since separation from the mother is essential for the development of masculinity. For girls and women, issues of femininity or feminine identity do not depend on the achievement of separation from the mother or on the progress of individuation. Since masculinity is defined through separation, while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is threatened by separation. Thus, males tend to have difficulty with relationship, while females tend to have problems with individuation. (8)

The mutual identification between these two characters showcases their shared dedication to embodying the idealized role of the "angel in the house," as demonstrated by their aligned attitudes and behaviors. This resonance effectively echoes Gilligan's insights on mother-daughter relationships. Although Ada and Esther are not biologically related, their bond resembles that of close kinship, as they imitate and learn from one another, striving to fulfill their respective roles in the mother-daughter dynamic. Brenda Welch has astutely observed that Esther is drawn to Ada due to the stark contrast in feminine qualities Ada possesses compared to her biological mother. Welch suggests that Esther consciously avoids becoming a mere copy of her mother, Lady Dedlock, with the aim of shedding the label of the "shamed illegitimate child" and forging an identity that diverges significantly from her mother's. Even after Esther's disfigurement, her appearance ceases to concern her, as she is already distinctly different from her beautiful mother in terms of outward looks.

However, Welch appears to overlook the significance of the visual disparities between Esther and her biological mother, as well as Esther's deliberate omission of her hair color as the narrator. These choices represent an additional way in which Esther seeks to create distance between herself and her mother. Moreover, they provide a rationale for Dickens' decision to exclude explicit descriptions of Esther's hair color in the narrative, as the third-person narrator is not obligated to portray every character's attributes in detail. While Dickens explicitly mentions that both of Esther's parents have dark hair, he never explicitly states Esther's hair color but frequently depicts Ada's golden hair. This intentional omission can be interpreted as Dickens signaling this impropriety to associate dark hair with Esther's inherently angelic qualities. This approach undoubtedly reflects his adherence to the rigid societal stereotypes linking hair color with feminine attributes prevailing at the time.

The mutual recognition between the two characters reflects their shared alignment in attitude and behavior as "angels in the house." This similarity aligns with Gillian Gillig's notion of a mother-daughter relationship. In Dickens' narrative, although not biologically related, Ada and Esther share an exceptionally close bond that resembles that of a mother and daughter. They look up to one another, striving to embody the qualities of a loving mother and daughter. Brenda Welch highlights Esther's intentional distance from her birth mother, Lady Dedlock, and her closeness to Ada as evidence of Ada's distinct feminine qualities that sharply contrast with Lady Dedlock's. Welch suggests that Esther consciously avoids becoming like Lady Dedlock to shed the label of a "shameful illegitimate daughter" and to forge her own distinct identity. Additionally, Esther's disfigurement doesn't trouble her as she differs visually from her beautiful mother (220). However, Welch overlooks the fact that Esther's detachment from her biological mother and her self-transformation are also reflected in her intimate relationship with Ada. With her golden hair, Ada represents domestic devotion and gentleness, qualities that sharply contrast with Lady Dedlock's rebellious, sinister, and unconventional traits. Ada's femininity embodies the redemptive characteristics that Esther yearns for.

Ada's role as a wife serves a significant redemptive purpose for her middle-class husband, Richard. In Victorian

middle-class families, women were expected to conform to traditional roles, with men working outside the home and women managing domestic responsibilities. They were largely restricted from public life, making the home their sole domain. Ada resembles a princess confined in a tower, waiting for her prince's rescue. However, Richard fails to embody the fairy tale ideal of a prince who comes to save his princess. Instead, he frequently changes jobs—from lawyer to doctor—ultimately depleting his savings. He places his hopes for the future on Ada and her wealth, a dynamic that not only highlights his dependence on her but also reflects Ada's potential to redeem him. As Richard conveys to Ada:

He was leaning on his arm, saying these words in a meditative voice, and looking at the ground, when my darling rose, put off her bonnet, knelt down beside him with her golden hair falling like sunlight on his head, clasped her two arms round his neck, and turned her face to me. O, what a loving and devoted face I saw! (*Bleak House* 983)

As Richard's wife, Ada offers her unwavering support, expressing her commitment to "serve him with complete devotion" even prior to their marriage (233). When Richard faces criticism from the Bajer couple for his inability to become a competent doctor, or when Mr. Jarndyce chastises him for failing to seize the opportunity to assume familial responsibilities and care for Ada, she steadfastly maintains that "Richard is right" (303) and assures him that she will bequeath all her inheritance to him. Ada's devotion to Richard is further emphasized to the reader through Esther's perspective:

Ada praised Richard more to me, that night, than ever she had praised him yet. She went to sleep with a little bracelet he had given her clasped upon her arm. I fancied she was dreaming of him when I kissed her cheek after she had slept an hour, and saw how tranquil and happy she looked. (*Bleak House* 374)

In the Victorian era, wives in middle-class families were regarded as property and extensions of their husbands, primarily existing to support them and facilitate their success within the family and society. Ada's development and aspirations are consequently constrained by these societal expectations. As Alexander Welsh notes, Dickens frequently idealizes women, depicting them as perfect angels—an idealization that serves to create a sense of comfort and security within the home [18], positioning women as the spiritual backbone and comforters of the family. Similarly, Shuttleworth observes that men return home from the tainted world outside to find solace in the presence of these angels, thereby receiving spiritual nourishment [19].

## 5. CONCLUSION

In Dickens's works, hair color serves as a symbol of class distinction, with blonde women representing the ideal of the middle-class "angels in the house." Additionally, blonde hair signifies the sexual purity of middle-class women in the 19th century and their redemptive roles as sisters and wives within this social class. Influenced by the rise of capitalism and aesthetic trends during this period, blonde hair became a highly valuable "commodity." This commodification contributed to the objectification of women, particularly within a male-dominated society, where it became closely associated with the identity of the angel in the house. This objectification acted as a marker for middle-class women, further emphasizing the distinctions between the middle class and other social strata.

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