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SERVANTS IN DICKENS'S *DAVID COPPERFIELD* AND VICTORIAN CULTURE

Dickens'ın *David Copperfield* Adlı Eserinde ve Viktoryen Kültüründe Hizmetçiler

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Abstract

The Victorian middle class kept servants to define their identity as middle class. The ideology of the period dictated that servants must not make their presence felt, so that the private sphere may be properly separated from the public one. Traces of business must be effaced from the domestic space, so servants must not be conspicuous. At the same time, the Victorians ascribed to working-class women conspicuous bodies in their cultural imaginary and their middle-class counterparts appeared ethereal. Charles Dickens's novel *David Copperfield* responds to these gender and class ideologies through its eponymous narrator's portrayal of servants. David conforms to and challenges these norms by correlating the servants' visibility to their masters' place in the class hierarchy. Peggotty, Littimer, and other servants in the novel show that the process of narration for David reflects a negotiation between his spontaneous psychic needs and the impositions of class ideology.

Keywords: Charles Dickens, David Copperfield, Class, Domesticity, Servants

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Öz

Viktoryen devrin orta sınıf ailesi, sınıf kimliğini tanımlamak üzere hizmetçiler tutmuştur. Dönemin ideolojisi, hizmetçilerin varlıklarını hissettirmemesini gerektirirdi, böylece mahrem alan kamusal alandan ayrılmış olurdu. Bütün iş alametlerinin ailesel alandan silinmesi gerektiği için, hizmetçiler göze batmamalılardı. Aynı zamanda, kültürel hayal gücünde, Viktoryenler, işçi sınıfı kadınlara belirgin vücutlar, orta sınıf kadınlara ise zarif bir hafiflik atfettiler. Charles Dickens'ın romanı *David Copperfield*, romanla aynı adı taşıyan anlatıcının hizmetçi tasvirleri aracılığıyla bu toplumsal cinsiyet ve sınıf ideolojilerine tepki gösterir. David, hizmetçilerin belirginliğini patronların sınıf hiyerarşisindeki yerine göre belirlemek suretiyle, bu diktelere hem uyar hem karşı çıkar. Peggotty, Littimer, ve romandaki diğer hizmetçiler gösterir ki, David'in anlatı süreci onun içsel ruhsal ihtiyaçları ve sınıf ideolojisinin dayatmaları arasında geçen bir pazarlık sonucu şekillenir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Charles Dickens, David Copperfield, Sınıf, Evcimenlik, Hizmetçiler.

I. Introduction

David Copperfield, the most autobiographical of Charles Dickens's novels, was published serially in 1849-50. In this novel, the eponymous protagonist narrates the turbulent events of his life retrospectively, starting with his birth. After the death of David's father, his mother Clara marries a Mr. Murdstone who is sadistic in his dealings with the boy and sends him away from home. At school, David befriends a young man named Steerforth whom he introduces to the family of the Copperfields' old servant, Peggotty. Emily is a member of that family, and as it will become apparent later, Steerforth has designs upon her. Upon his mother's death, David has to work in a warehouse, but later is saved from poverty by his aunt. With his aunt's help, he moves to London and resides with Mr. Wickfield and his daughter, Agnes, while he attends school. Mr. Wickfield's clerk, Uriah Heep, is a disturbing presence in that home. Later, David falls in love with and marries Dora, who dies not long thereafter. In the meantime, unbeknownst to David and others, Uriah Heep fraudulently makes money at the expense of Mr. Wickfield. David's childhood friend Steerforth runs away with Emily, dishonoring her, and is subsequently killed in a shipwreck. David marries Agnes and saves Mr. Wickfield from being ruined by Uriah Heep. At the end of the novel, Emily with her family sails to Australia, and David lives happily with his wife and children as a famous author.

Through the course of his long narrative, David recounts various dealings with domestic servants. The prominence of servants in the narrative reflects the his-

torical situation in which middle-class families kept multiple servants. For the Victorians, keeping servants meant they did not have to perform household chores, but it also meant much more: it established their class identity. As Leonore Davidoff writes, domestic servants played an essential role in "*defining the identity*" of the masters in the Victorian age (Davidoff, 1973: p. 412). The sine qua non of being middle-class was keeping servants. Bruce Robbins notes that modern social historians have "*defined the Victorian middle-class as the servant-keeping class, for the desire to be defined as middle class was a major reason for keeping servants*" (Robbins, 1986: p. 14). Servants were signs of their master's status. Having a series of disobedient servants threatened the master's status. Davidoff argues that masters kept servants not only to convince society that they were middle class, but also to convince themselves of their own worth. Thanks to domestic servants, masters got to feel respected while at home. Domestic servants secured their masters' sense of self-worth even as they enabled outsiders to view the household as middle class.

It was not enough, however, just to keep servants to establish one's middle-class identity. How one kept one's servants was significant as well. John Ruskin wrote, "*If you keep servants, properly cared for, to furnish you with what you verily want, and no more than that—you are a civil person—a person capable of qualities of citizenship*" (Ruskin, 1867: p. 86). His argument implies that if one cannot take good care of one's servants, one is not civil. Ruskin added that if the "*persons in the kitchen appear to be ill-dressed and squalid," "one cannot help imagining that the riches of the establishment must be of a very theoretical and documentary character*" (Ruskin, 1867: p. 86). The present paper maintains that Dickens was aware of the class dynamics involved in servant-keeping, which Ruskin describes succinctly. For example, as David narrates the failure of his and his first wife Dora's domestic servants, Dickens communicates a consciousness of—or an obsession with—class that is mediated through the servant's bodies.

My analysis of servants in David Copperfield hinges on two theoretical pivots. The first one concerns Victorian gender ideology as it is refracted through the lens of class, which dictated that middle-class women be ethereal, as if they did not even have bodies. As supposedly ethereal creatures, they were understood to be free of bodily needs that included sexual ones and were idealized as "*angels of the house*" (Patmore, 1866: *passim*). Their presumably ethereal existence was defined over and against the working-class female body, which was understood to press its needs upon working-class female subjectivities (Michie, 1987: p. 30). It was as if middle-class women had no body, and working-class women had too much of it. As Tess O'Toole writes, "*much of the [nineteenth-century] discourse about class, both sociological and explicitly fictional, posited distinctly working-class physiognomies and physiques. The female body was a favored site of for the registration of such distinctions*" (O'Toole, 1996: p. 337). In *The Flesh Made Word*, Michie notes that "*by the middle of the nineteenth century, physicians had constructed two entirely different*

bodies for working-class and leisure-class women" (Michie, 1987: p. 30). While the bodies of middle-class women were thought to be frail, working-class women were thought to be robust, with coarse bodies. The "*vision of the delicate young lady*" certainly had a "*gender component*" (Michie, 1987: p. 17). A lady would have a delicate body. Her delicate appetite and the resulting figurative and literal diminishment of the body would dissociate her from bodily desires, especially sexual ones. Meanwhile, as Michie argues, "*women who earned their bread . . . inevitably made their bodies, as well as their work, public*" (Michie, 1987: p. 31). The materiality of the female servant's body reinstated class distinctions and underscored the chastity of the middle-class woman.

In this manner, the middle-class woman was idealized in a way that the working-class woman was decidedly not. Dickens both abides by this ideology and deviates from it in his portrayal of the Copperfield family's loyal servant, Peggotty. She exists as body and flesh in David's description, yet this corporeality is not a deficiency. Instead, her very bodily presence is such that she meets David's psychic needs. In Dickens's vision, the working-class woman's corporeality is not a source of anxiety.

The second strand of theory on which this study hinges concerns liminality, defined as the state of being in-between. Servants were famously liminal, located, as it were, on the threshold of the Victorian home (Michie, 1987: p. 30). They were both inside and outside the domestic space. They were in the domestic space as professionals, even though through the lens of Victorian domestic ideology, home was to be free of the influence of the external world. They were constant reminders that the project of isolating one's home from the influence of business lives was doomed to fail (Robbins, 1986: p. 14; Jordan, 1998: p. 80). It is for this reason that servants were supposed to make themselves invisible. To efface the traces of the external world from inside the domestic space, servants were supposed to be quiet and not get in the way. As the middle and upper classes relied on them for housekeeping, the servants had to be present, but it was best when they were physically inconspicuous. *David Copperfield* assumes that the upper-middle class is more successful than the middle-class in this ideological quest: while the upper-middle class servant Littimer is inconspicuous in the household, the lower-middle class servant Peggotty is not. Yet Littimer's way of hiding himself turns out to be part of a sinister existence; his designs on Emily are despicable to David, and in all likelihood to the reader. Littimer sneaks up from the background to claim David's beloved Emily. Dickens's genius turns the desirable inconspicuousness associated with upper-middle class servants into a sinister sneakiness.

Charles Dickens's fiction has much to reveal not just about the ideologies of gender and class that were prominent in the mid-Victorian period, but also the author's own peculiar response to these ideologies. The way domestic servants' characters are shaped in the most autobiographical of his novels, *David Copperfield*, is

especially telling in this respect. The bodies and voices of the servants in that novel reflect the salient gender and class ideologies of the time; yet at the same time, they serve the eponymous hero's psychic needs. Through this dynamic, the novel shows how an individual's needs are perpetually negotiated with the dictates of the outside world. James Buzard's recent comment that "*David Copperfield appears to be a text centrally concerned with the emergence of the modern subject*" is relevant here (Buzard, 2019: p. 228). Modern subjectivity involves the belief that one controls one's own circumstances, and David controls his life by narrating it in the manner he likes. The narrative representation of servants is under his control. Yet external dictates vie with David's innermost longings in shaping his representation of the servants.

In *David Copperfield*, the need for affection and the longing for praise mark the fictional author David's psyche. This is perhaps aligned with Dickens's own needs and desires. Cultural beliefs and ideals such as the construction of female bodies, the separation of spheres, and the maintenance of class structure form an intricate matrix for tailoring the bodies and voices in David's narrative. David's portrayal of his family servant Peggotty's body and voice is a significant instance in which the demands of class ideology are at odds with the autonomy of the master, whose unique psychic needs mold the situation. In other words, Peggotty's portrayal does not fully match Victorian notions of the working-class women's bodies. In the portrayals of Steerforth's valet Littimer and other domestic servants, the opposite is true. The urges of the autonomous individual are in harmony with ideological dictates. David's admiration for the upper-middle class causes him to embrace the separate spheres ideal, according to which the private and the public are mutually exclusive spheres that should not influence one another. Littimer's character obeys those dictates.

II. The Distinction between the Middle- and Working-Class Female Bodies

Peggotty, the servant who is perhaps David's best friend and closest guide when he is a child, occupies a liminal space. The Copperfields call their servant Peggotty, because her first name is Clara like David's mother. David has two Claras: two mother figures. Unlike the biological mother Clara, Peggotty has a Pagan name. The Pagan resonance of the name Peggotty positions the servant as an outsider. David's aunt Miss Betsey asks David, "*Do you mean to say child, that any human being has gone into a Christian church and got herself named Peggotty?*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 14). She might serve as a mother figure for David, but her Pagan-sounding name inscribes her as an outsider. This contradiction is persistent with her liminal position as a servant, as both inside and outside the family. She lives with the Copperfields, but as their servant, she is not exactly one of them. As Helena Michie points out, the domestic worker "*hovers on the borders of the family*" (Michie, 1992: p. 10).

While David effaces his mother's corporeal presence, he highlights that of Peggotty:

> *The first objects that assume a distinct presence before me, as far as I look back, into the blank of my infancy, are my mother with her pretty hair and youthful shape and Peggotty with no shape at all. . . and cheeks and arms so hard and red that I wondered the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 18).

David writes upon the "*blank of [his] infancy*," molding it with narrative authority (Dickens, 1987: p. 18). His writing assigns a more intense bodily experience to Peggotty than to his mother. Turning to Clara, David does not describe her as a fleshly being; instead, he mentions her hair and youthful shape, a mere contour. When he moves on to describing Peggotty, he writes explicitly about her full cheeks and arms, as if they were edible. She acquires the fleshliness that Clara lacks. Her shapelessness, too, suggests corporeality, indicating that she has excessive flesh contrasting with the rigid posture of a skinny woman. Contrasting the two women would be like comparing apples and oranges: "*I thought [Peggotty] in a different style from my mother, certainly; but of another school of beauty I considered her a perfect example*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 3). Class identity imposes aesthetic expectations and just as the classes are segregated physically, they have distinct aesthetics. The novel's depictions of Peggotty as fleshy and Clara as ethereal reinforce the Victorian constructions of middle-class and working-class female bodies.

The differences between working- and middle-class bodies are more than just a discursive construct. The body of the female servant is marked by her labor in ways that increase its visibility. Noticing how labor—or the lack thereof—marks one's body, the Victorian servant Hannah Cullwick wrote in her diary that her mistress' hands had

> *been so delicate, as white as a lily and her face too, from been [sic] in bed so many years & I suppose never soil'd her fingers ever, except perhaps with a dirty book or paper & the white coverlet & all standing out against my dirty black hands, & my big red and black arms, & my face red too*" (Cullwick, 1984: p. 66).

For her, this difference is empowering: "*Miss K. thought me very strong, & so I am, 4 times stronger . . . for she couldn't draw a cork, nor lift a saucepan*" (Cullwick, 1984: p. 75). Hannah's diary shows that the two entirely different bodies constructed for middle- and working-class women, however they may perpetuate certain ideologies, also grew out of actual observation and experience.

As for Cullwick, for the fictional narrator David Copperfield, bodily differences between classes are linked to labor. "*I have an impression on my mind which*

I cannot distinguish from actual remembrance," he writes, "*of the touch of Peggotty's forefinger as she used to hold it out to me, of its being roughened by needlework, like a pocket nut-meg grater*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 19). The hardness of her arms, too, is a revelation that intense labor shapes her body.

Tess O' Toole argues that various Victorian narratives assign a negative value to the materiality of servants' bodies. She notes that the fleshly body type assigned to female servants goes hand in hand with the idea that the maid is the "*female whose primary registration of sensation is a somatic one*" (O'Toole, 1996: p. 336). The mistress is allowed to have "*claims to the non-corporal*" while her maid is "*sketched as a woman whose emotions run neither so deep nor so strong as her mistress's do*" (O'Toole, 1996: p. 336). What follows from this assumption is that servants, lacking the feelings so amply displayed by their middle-class counterparts, cannot be good mothers (O'Toole, 1996: p. 348). Anthea Trodd, on the other hand, notes instances where the corporeal representations of maids result from a belief that their emotions were uncontrollable. She notes that various Victorian narratives suggest that servants had "*a natural affinity with the sensational and were very likely to be producing it*" (Trodd, 1987: p. 179). O'Toole and Trodd both show that the corporeality of the servant supposedly expressed the deficiencies of servants.

Unlike the texts that O'Toole and Trodd analyze, *David Copperfield* presents the female servant's corporeality as a positive trait. The young David absorbs gender and class ideologies that he sees around him, but his individual psychic needs position him to challenge these ideologies. While the deficiencies of the servant's body were often highlighted in Victorian culture, David embraces that kind of body for its maternal qualities. As a surrogate mother, Peggotty nurtures him physically and emotionally. He so strongly identifies her as a nourisher that he refers to the kitchen as "*Peggotty's kitchen*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 19). As he remembers, on the trip they take to visit Mr. Peggotty's boathouse, she has "*a bag of refreshments on her knee, which would have lasted [them] handsomely*" even if they were going to London (Dickens, 1987: p. 31). As the older David reconstructs this scene in his narrative, he underlines Peggotty's role as the guardian of nourishments: "*Peggotty always went to sleep with her chin upon the handle of the basket, her hold of which never relaxed*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 31). The product of her labor—food—signifies caring. Emotionally, too, she provides David with tenderness whenever he needs it. She reads to him and talks to him; she takes his side after the Murdstones' cruelty. She makes him feel loved while he lives with the Micawbers.

As Peggotty expresses her love for David somatically, he appreciates her corporeality rather than demeaning it. Her popping buttons evince her bodily expression of affection. When David's inquiries about remarriage result in Peggotty's "*opening her arms wide*," taking his "*curly head within them*," and giving "*a good squeeze*," he comments, "*I knew it was a good squeeze, because, being very plump, whenever she made any little exertion after she was dressed, some of the buttons on*

the back of her gown flew off" (Dickens, 1987: p. 23). Similarly, Peggotty continues to nourish David even after she is no longer a servant in the household. David describes the letters that he receives from Peggotty while he is staying with Mr. Wickfield:

> *Four sides of incoherent and interjectional beginnings of sentences, that had no hand, except blots, were inadequate to afford her any relief. But the blots were more expressive to me than the best composition; for they showed me Peggotty had been crying all over the paper, and what could I have desired more?* (Dickens, 1987: p. 115)

Even in written form, Peggotty manages to develop bodily expression: the blots that indicate her tears make her body more legible even when it is miles away. Michie notes that working-class women's bodies were to be "*stared at, read, and interpreted*" (Michie, 1987: p. 52). Dickens highlights the legibility of the female servant's body through the blots.

Dickens does not deny the servant her own voice, however corporeal she may be. Indeed, he does more than characterize Peggotty as an articulate servant: he allows her to speak subversively. Bruce Robbins, in his analysis of servants' role in literature, shows that the servants' employment of subversive discourse is not uncommon (Robbins, 1986: p. 13). Fictional servants speak back to their masters and sometimes dissent. "*Hegemony*," writes Robbins, "*is not absolute domination but a continually fluctuating, continually renegotiated give-and-take, a dialogue that is unequal but not quite a monologue*" (Robbins, 1986: 19). These observations apply to David and Peggotty's relationship. Criticizing Clara's choice to marry Mr. Murdstone, Peggotty says that David's father would not have approved the choice. Peggotty's power to oppose Mr. Murdstone is limited once Clara marries him, but she still expresses her opinion subtly. She calls Clara Mrs. Copperfield. In response, Mr. Murdstone reminds her that Clara has taken his name, but Peggotty dares not to reply. By the way of calling Clara Mrs. Copperfield and subtly refusing to answer Mr. Murstone's question, Peggotty expresses her disapproval of Clara's marriage. Depicting Peggotty's voice as dissident, David grants the servant a subversive voice and finds an ally who shares his resentment toward his mother's second marriage. Dickens thus explores how one can express agency even when one is not in a position of power. When the ability for self-expression is limited by one's masters, bodily expression surfaces as a way to dissent.

Dickens's esteem for the domestic servant becomes visible when he allows one sense of the word servant—domestic servanthood—coincides with its Christian sense of servanthood to God. At the funeral of David's mother, the two senses of the word come to coincide: "*I hear sobs and, standing apart from the lookers-on, I see the good and faithful servant, whom of all the people upon the earth I love the best, and unto whom my childish heart is certain that the Lord will one day say: 'Well*

done'" (Dickens, 1987: p. 117). This moment superposes three forms of serving: domestic professionalism, Biblical obedience, and catering to another person's ego. The religious intensity of the funeral emphasizes the extent to which Peggotty is a servant in the Biblical sense. The Bible frequently refers to God's servants. Among the numerous such instances are Gen. 44:33 and Num. 12:7, in which Judah and Moses are called servants. David's calling Peggotty a "*faithful servant*" involves a telling ambiguity. Whose faithful servant is she—David's or God's? In David's perspective, there is no difference between these two options. Peggotty is a good servant to God, because she loves David. God must love her, because she loves David. Dickens's elevation of the servant, then, is not entirely innocent in the sense that the servants' ability to please the middle class constitutes the core of their likeability.

David Copperfield as a whole thematizes the ways in which individuals develop a liking for those who care for them. A case in point is Mrs. Mowcher, whose life shows the ways in which personal feelings come into play while judging other people. As a dwarf, she unfortunately thinks the best she can hope for is to be perceived as an amusing spectacle. She knows that although she cannot change her body, she can shape people's reactions to it. "*What is left for me to do but to make a jest of myself . . . and everything?*" she asks (Dickens, 1987: p. 391). She pleases those around her so as to manipulate the way they treat her. Offering people a spectacle they can enjoy, she achieves the ability to make a living. Like Miss Mowcher, Peggotty supplies care and obtains sympathy in return. Miss Mowcher is a version of Peggotty that amplifies her deficiencies and strengths.

III. The Servant's Visibility as the Index of the Master's Status

Perhaps with an internalized sense of the hierarchy between the upper-class and the lower-middle class, Dickens grants the former the ability to control servants. Dickens renders the servant of the upper class (Littimer) invisible, inaudible, and impalpable in contrast to that of the lower-middle class (Peggotty). In doing so, he reaffirms the existing class ideology that the upper-classes distinguish themselves through their superior ability to direct the lives of those below themselves. Littimer, the servant of David's upper class friend Steerforth, is inconspicuous, both in terms of his body and his voice. David attends to his virtual invisibility: "*He was taciturn, soft-footed, very quiet in his manner*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 256). Further, Littimer speaks with a low voice—has a "*soft way of speaking*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 256). David emphasizes his inconspicuousness to the degree that the servant appears ghost-like: "*When I undrew the curtains and looked out of bed, I saw him, in an equable temperature of respectability, unaffected by the east wind of January, not even breathing frostily*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 256). Littimer also moves unobtrusively, as if his bodily presence had no physical impact on the world. As he goes out of David's room, he "*shut[s] the door as delicately as if [David] had just fallen into a sweet*

sleep on which [his] life depended" (Dickens, 1987: p. 257). It may almost seem that Dickens subscribed to the Victorian notion that the upper classes knew how to keep servants who would not interfere with their private lives. However, as Littimer will try to direct their personal lives as the plot unfolds, this is only an illusion.

For as long as Littimer seems an ideal servant and his master Steerforth, an admirable young man, Littimer is more of an absence than a presence. Yet this quality is taken to its extreme point such that Littimer betrays no emotion, and at that point, he becomes suspect. Littimer betrays no human response such as surprise, anger, or happiness. His speech is monotonous and devoid of genuine self-expression. In conversation, he maintains a "*cool calm medium always*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 257). Highlighting his controlled affect, David notes, "*Every morning we held exactly [the same] conversation: never any more, never any less*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 257). As professionalized a servant as anybody can be, Littimer makes David feel inadequate. Does Littimer enact Victorian ideals of domesticity or does he reveal them to be deficient? The answer is both. Littimer must remain invisible in order to efface any sense of the world of business infiltrating the home. Yet, Littimer's invisibility is also eerie and disturbing and as such reveals the ideal of the separate spheres itself to be impossible and disturbing.

Many Victorians famously sought to prevent the world of business, money-making, and commerce from interfering with their private lives at home. As the private spheres model was idealized, it oppressed people by offering an impossible goal. John Ruskin's writing provides an example of this ideal, describing what he calls "*the true nature*" of home:

> *It is the place of peace; the shelter, not only from injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed . . . to cross the threshold, it ceases to be a home.* (Ruskin, 1905: p. 122)

Ruskin thus draws a rigid boundary between home and its outside. In *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, Catherine Gallagher notes that in many Victorian narratives, the family "*designates an enclave in which benevolence, cooperation, and selflessness take refuge and survive*" (Gallagher, 1985: p. 116). The "world of commerce and production," on the other hand, is described as "*antifamily*" (Gallagher, 1985: p. 116).

Servants in the Victorian home threatened to undo the separation of spheres, or rather to reveal that ideal not to have held any sway in the first place. Noting that the mythic Victorian home is based on the separation of spheres, John Jordan points out that the Victorian home's threshold *"defines the home by what it leaves out*" (Jordan, 1998: p. 80). On the threshold are domestic servants who are supposed to

be its "*guardians*"; however, they bring with them "*anxieties*" and "*divisions*" from the outside world (Jordan, 1998: p. 80). The existence of domestic servants problematizes the supposed segregation of public and private spheres. Servants are in the domestic space as professionals. Jordan points out other ways in which the existence of servants is bothersome for the middle class:

> *Differences in class, differences in political and economic power, differences in social horizon and subjective experience—these are among the potentially disruptive qualities that the presence of servants risk introducing into the middle class home. As a result, servants must either be effaced from the scene altogether, along with their traces of labor, or presented as harmoniously one with it.* (Jordan, 1998: p. 80)

Since servants reveal that the domestic space is not really separate from the world of business, they need to be imperceptible, though present. In *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, Pamela Horn notes that "*in certain households the practice of keeping servants out of sight was carried to eccentric excesses*" (Horn, 1975: p. 22). Visible servants reminded the middle class that labor—indeed professional labor—is present inside what is supposed to be a sacred space.

It is not surprising that David, who is in awe of the upper-class Steerforth's inconspicuous servant, is deeply class-conscious. His awareness of class difference surfaces most strongly when the mature David narrates his childhood employment in the warehouse. He is embarrassed by his connection to the two boys in the workhouse, Mick Walker and Mealy Potatoes:

> *No words can express the agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared to these henceforth everyday associates with those of my happier childhood—not to say Steerforth, Traddles, and the rest of these boys; and felt my hopes of growing up to be a leaned and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom*. (Dickens, 1987: p. 137)

David abhors becoming one of the warehouse workers. As Chris Vanden Bosshe puts it, "*the disparaging comparison between Mick Walker and Mealy Potatoes on the one hand and Traddles and Steerforth on the other, betrays a well-developed class consciousness*" (Vanden Bosshe, 1995: p. 35). David is ever attentive to signs of wealth that Steerforth displays, writing of the young man's "*snug private apartment, red-curtained and Turkey-carpeted, where the fire burnt bright, and a fine hot breakfast was set forth on a table covered with clean cloth*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 249). Meeting Steerforth in that apartment, David writes that his friend was "*self-possessed, elegant, and superior to me in all respects*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 249). Impressed by wealth, David internalizes the class hierarchy.

In David's narrative, it is the member of the upper-middle class, Steerforth, who is privileged enough to be granted an inconspicuous servant, thereby erasing signs of servants' existence. David and his mother, who are not upper-middle class like Steerforth, have a servant who is neither quiet nor invisible. Granting the upper-middle class family the ability to maintain an ideal home that sustains the illusion of the separate spheres, David reveals his class bias. In his eyes, the upper-middle class family does not just have more money than the middle-class one. It is closer to actualizing cultural ideals.

Ever haunted by his class-consciousness, David constantly fears that Littimer is there to judge him. He functions like a mirror: not an object to be looked at, but a mere surface which reflects David's gaze. David's insecurity about his own identity—whether he is securely established as a member of the middle class—causes him to see his own shortcoming in this disturbing mirror. Looking at Littimer, David sees himself. "*I felt particularly young in this man's presence,*" he explains, highlighting his sense of ineptness (Dickens, 1987: p. 457). The servant makes the young David feel inadequate: "*I never could bear to show my want of skill before the respectable Littimer. . . [W]henever he was by, . . . I felt myself the greenest and most inexperienced of mortals*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 457). Steerforth is so worthy in David's eyes that even his valet seems sophisticated enough to look down upon a middle-class man—so David believes. The irony is that neither Steerforth nor his valet Littimer will turn out to be worthy. The very inconspicuousness that suggests to David the servant's worth is indeed a sinister façade behind which lurks disturbing designs upon Emily.

Littimer's body becomes almost grotesquely visible once David no longer esteems him. After Steerforth runs away with Emily, David no longer looks up to him. With his dissolving respect for Steerfoth, Littimer's façade of respectability melts away. Curiously, at this stage David begins to see the servant's body. For the first time, when looking at Littimer, he can see the servant rather than seeing himself. As he listens to Littimer's narration of the terrible events that took place abroad, David persistently pays attention to the servant's body. He observes, *"[L]ittimer softly played upon [the back of the seat] with his hands, as if he were striking chords upon a dumb piano*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 563). The attention he pays to every bodily motion registers his disdain for the servant: "*Taking his hands from the seat, and placing one of them within the other, as he settled himself on one leg, Mr. Littimer proceeded, with his eyes cast down, and his respectable head a little advanced*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 563). The respectability is ironic at this point, as the man is anything but respectable, as the ally of a dishonorable, degenerate Steerforth.

Traditionally, according to the mind/body dualism that was salient in Western philosophy and cultures, the mind was elevated above the body. Consistent with this logic, the way David registers his newly-minted contempt at Littimer after the fall of Emily is by reducing him to a body, distancing him from the mind that the

West believed to be the cornerstone of its civilization. David observes Littimer "*clear[. . .] his throat," "chang[e] legs," and "wet[. . .] his lips*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 564). This transformation is a function of David coming to see Littimer as a "*scoundrel*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 566). His newly established dislike for the upper-class Steerforth, which extends to feelings toward Steerforth's servant, is indeed typical for Dickens's plots. As Chris Vanden Bossche notes, "*Dickens's novels depict a rising middle class displacing a moribund self-serving aristocracy*" (Vanden Bossche, 2018: p. 504). No longer guided by Steerforth or disparaged by his servant, David is at a stage where he is going to be his own guide and judge.

IV. The Failure of Servants and the Insecurity of Masters

Dickens persistently uses the bodies and voices of the domestic servants to register anxieties about class identity. The characteristics of the minor servants in *David Copperfield* reveal just how attuned Dickens is to middle-class identity traits and the instability of that identity. David, who betrays his tendency to idolize the upper-middle class through his depiction of Littimer's body and voice, discloses his lack of faith in his own status through the depictions of servants. Unlike Peggotty, these servants play no role in boosting David's ego. David enters a vicious loop as he portrays these servants' bodies as uncontrollable, transgressive, and even criminal. His frustration makes him expose the servants' faults, which in turn reveals his incompetence, only to make him more frustrated.

Fitting with the lower echelons they occupy in the class hierarchy, David and his first wife Dora's servants are reduced to their bodies. They reveal their master's inability to run a household that conforms to the ideal of the separate spheres. One of the few things that David discloses about their first servant Mary Anne is that she is "*subject (particularly in the arms) to a sort of perpetual measles or rash*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 535). Mary Anne's presence in the text is thus made possible by her illness. Her male cousin's body appears grotesque when hers is diseased: he has "*such long legs that the look[s] like the afternoon shadow of somebody else*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 535). His size becomes a means for David to reflect on his own inability to provide a larger home: "*He made the cottage smaller than it need to have been, by being so very much out of proportion to it*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 535). His invasive voice similarly reveals the narrator's own insecurity about his ability to provide an upper-class home: "*The walls were not thick, and whenever he passed the evening at our house, we always knew of it by hearing one conspicuous growl in the kitchen*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 535). At this point, the servant class is so close to the bodily side of the mind / body dualism that they are associated with animals.

Because of the servant's cousin, David and Dora's home cannot provide refuge from the polluted outer world. When the cousin deserts the army and hides in their coal-hole, he is "*brought out . . . by a piquet of his companions in arms, who took him away hand-cuffed in a procession that covered [David and Dora's] front*

garden with ignominy" (Dickens, 1987: p. 539). The situation is ignominious not only for the cousin, but also for David, whose home is invaded by the military presence.

The narrative is full of details about the bodies of servants, some of whose names are absent from the text. One is present only as an uncontrollable body: *"[S]he generally made a point of falling either up or down the kitchen stairs with the tray, and almost always plunged into the parlor*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 539). In contrast, the upper-middle class Mrs. Steerforth's servants make themselves invisible. David's writing contrasts his own servants with those of the upper-middle class family and suggests that the upper-class is more capable of keeping non-threatening servants.

The servants are dangerous insofar as they dissolve borders, such as the boundary separating home from its outside. Another boundary they threaten in David's narrative is that between the mistress and the servant. The servants endeavor to assume their mistress's identity, transgressing rigid class boundaries. That very transgression reveals just how fragile class distinctions are. One servant puts on Dora's bonnet when she goes out. What is at stake here is more than unauthorized borrowing: the servant tries to become like her mistress. This transformation implies that the mistress and the servant are not so different as the servant-keeping class would like to believe. Another servant undermines David's confidence by charging liquor to David and Dora's account, as if the latter were consuming the alcohol. Dora appears "*to have imbibed the whole of these refreshments*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 540). Like the unauthorized borrowing of the hat, this crime is not just about the appropriation of funds or material goods. Claiming that Dora is the one drinking, the servant endangers her status as a respectable middle-class woman. Writing about the servant's alcohol consumption, Dickens reinforces cultural norms that ascribe insatiable and uncontrollable bodies to working-class women.

What first hints at the failure of David and Dora's marriage is their inability to keep servants. Their page, like their other servants, suffers from an uncontrollable body and voice. His body becomes visible at the worst times, when David and Dora have visitors. His body calls attention to itself: *"[H]e would come tumbling out of the kitchen, with iron missiles flying after him*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 582). Since the page threatens David's class identity, he inspires fear in his master: what if the servant never ever leaves the Copperfields? In this comic episode, David predictably pays attention to the way in which the servant's body demands his attention, "*gr[owing] like scarlet beans*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 582). The humorous portrayal of the page blowing his nose and rubbing his eyes similarly stresses the bodily presence of that servant. Like the page's body, his voice draws attention to itself when David and Dora have guests: *"[H]e would shriek for help*" (Dickens, 1987, p. 582). Servants in Victorian culture help masters construct their social status, but in David's case, the

servant threatens the master's social status by disclosing his inability to keep servants. According to Ruskin's formulation, David falls into the class of reproachable masters whose servants fail to observe hygiene.

What, then, happens to David's servants when he becomes securely middle-class and confident in his class identity at the end of the novel? To indicate the transformation in David's class identity and psychic state, Dickens utilizes servants. As years pass on, under the influence of his second wife Agnes, David's sense of inadequacy is replaced with a belief in his worth. He becomes aware of his fame as an author, noting "*the tidings of my growing reputation began to reach me from travelers whom I encountered by chance*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 687). A famous writer, he secures a place in the middle-class as he "*advance[s] in fame and fortune*" (Dickens, 1987, p. 727). Agnes helps him feel that he deserves this improvement in class status. Julia Prewitt Brown calls this kind of narrative "*the novel of empowerment*," wherein "*the main character tries and fails until he or she succeeds in staking his claim to a place in the world*" (Brown, 2013: p. 667). A sense of empowerment replaces David's former insecurities, because he is in charge of his life.

Fitting with the Victorian belief that Ruskin articulates so well—that the more respectable the master, the more inconspicuous the servant—David's ascent implies that his servants no longer stick out like a sore thumb. For example, on the night of Mr. Peggotty's visit, David writes, "*Agnes and I were sitting by the fire, . . . when I was told that a stranger wished to see me*" (Dickens, 1987: p. 727). The use of passive voice in this sentence completely effaces the servant and his or her labor. We infer a servant must have been present, but there is no direct reference to his/ her body or voice. At this stage in his life, David moves to the position of employing servants who are "*always at hand when wanted and never near when not wanted*," just as Steerforth's servant Littimer used to be when David used to hold them in high esteem (Dickens, 1987: p. 257). Deeply aware of the markers of class, Dickens maps David's ascent onto his growing satisfaction with his servants.

V. Conclusion

In his analysis of fictional servants, Bruce Robbins writes, "*the literary servant does not represent actual servants, or does so only tangentially*" (Robbins, 1993: p. 11). Taking this insight as its point of departure, this study has turned to the making of fictional servants as a site that reflects negotiations between ideological dictates and psychic needs. In other words, when we confront the inexperienced David with his unruly servants whose bodies and voices make their presence felt incessantly, the conclusion should not be that the middle-class actually had the misfortune of always having to deal with working-class incompetence. Rather, what we see is

an attempt to mold the account of one's life such as it is aligned with ideological presuppositions. David belongs to a culture in which the middle-class defines their identity in part through their ability to enforce the separation of spheres. To comply with the cultural expectation that the failure of the servant indicates a failing master, he highlights the grotesque mistakes of his servants through his failed marriage. In his narration, the measure of the success of his second marriage is the well-trained set of servants who serve them. Yet, it is important to note that Dickens does not always comply with the demands of Victorian class or gender ideologies. Although mainstream Victorian culture would disparage the visibility of a servant's body, when David's psychic needs require it, he turns it into a source of maternal compassion, as he does with Peggotty's character. At the same time, when his goal is to disparage his first marriage, he must write about the conspicuous bodies of his servants as a sign of the couple's failure. Through his narrator's portrayal of servants, Dickens reveals the ways in which a Victorian subject shapes his image of the world according to both given ideologies and spontaneous psychic needs.

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