



LUND UNIVERSITY
Humanities and Theology

**Mollifying the Masses:
Obscuring Class and Alleviating Inequalities in Charles Dickens's
David Copperfield, *Great Expectations*, and *Little Dorrit***

Lisa-Marie Teubler
LIVR07
Master's thesis in Literature, Culture,
Media: English
Spring Term 2013
Centre for Languages and Literature
Lund University
Supervisor: Birgitta Berglund

Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of a rising class-consciousness in the mid-nineteenth century, which threatened to challenge formerly stable power positions. The focus lies specifically on parts of Charles Dickens's literary production as several early as well as contemporary critics, such as G.K. Chesterton and Andrzej Diniejko, have ascribed his works a rather critical position in the representation of inequalities as related to this newfound class-consciousness. By analysing patterns of social mobility in *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Little Dorrit* (1855-57), and *Great Expectations* (1860-61), this paper argues that all three narratives stabilize rather than disrupt prevailing social hierarchies. They do so specifically by obscuring class, and thus socio-economic inequalities; by rendering narratives of successful or unsuccessful mobility individual rather than collective destinies; by naturalizing positions and presenting them as unchangeable; and by alleviating unsuccessful mobility through domestic happiness and charity. Consequently, an understanding of inequalities as based on socio-economic misdistribution is denied, and alternative structures to that of class are strengthened so that an unjust system—which could essentially be changed—is reproduced and stabilized instead.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
<i>David Copperfield</i>	4
David Copperfield: the Successful Social Climber	6
Uriah Heep: the Unsuccessful Social Climber	11
Little Emily: the Unsuccessful Social Climber	14
The Peggottys and Steerforth	16
Alleviating Inequalities	20
<i>Great Expectations</i>	24
Pip and the Gargerys	25
The Convict Magwitch	32
Estella	36
Magwitch's Narrative	38
Alleviating Inequalities	40
<i>Little Dorrit</i>	43
The Marshalsea and the Dorrits	45
Little Dorrit	47
Villains: Blandois Rigaud and Mr Merdle	50
Alleviating Inequalities	52
Successful and Unsuccessful Female Climbers	55
Conclusion	57
Works Cited	59

Introduction

The nineteenth century, during which Charles Dickens wrote his novels, was characterized by major social changes. Extensive developments in the sciences altered society significantly; moreover, the three Reform Bills/Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884-5 brought about developments within the distribution of power between different groups in society. In *British Civilization*, John Oakland writes, “[t]he Whigs extended voting rights to the expanding middle class in the First Reform Act” (71). According to Glenn Everett, “[o]ne man in five could now vote,” and “[f]or many conservatives, this effect of the bill, which allowed the middle classes to share power with the upper classes, was revolutionary in its import” (*Victorianweb*). However, it was not until 1884 that the change in voting right incorporated the working classes as well, as it was then extended to all male adults irrespective of their property or income (Oakland 71). Consequently, societal structures that seemed set in stone were suddenly altered, which meant that formerly steady power structures, such as the class system, could no longer be considered entirely stable.

According to Raymond Williams, “[t]he changes in society had been long in the making: the Industrial Revolution, the struggle for democracy, the growth of cities and towns. But these also, in the 1840s, reached a point of consciousness which was in its turn decisive” (9). This consciousness marked a threat to the stable power structures that characterized the foregone decades. Francis Bowen, an American scholar in the nineteenth century, spoke about the danger of a rising class-consciousness and highlighted his position on the non-progressive side of the issue:

There is a danger from which no civilized community is entirely free, lest the several classes of its society should nourish mutual jealousy and hatred, which may finally break out into open hostilities, under the mistaken opinion that their interests are opposite, and that one or more of them possess an undue advantage, which they are always ready to exercise by oppressing the others. (qtd. in Schragger Lang 1)

In short, the fear of an uprising due to a sudden awareness of inequalities and a questioning of supposedly natural positions unsettled society and, consequently, concerned scholars and authors alike.

Charles Dickens’s novels are one example of texts that deal with the societal developments, and as he remains one of the most acclaimed authors worldwide, Dickens’s works continue to hold a central power position in the formation of cultural representations. Consequently, it is important to continue to investigate the production of meaning that they contribute to. Many scholars have argued that these works represent revolutionary views of nineteenth-century society. For example, G.K. Chesterton, an early critic, characterized him

as “the spokesman of the poor” (qtd. in Orwell), and G.B. Shaw, a great admirer of Dickens’s later work, claimed that *Little Dorrit* was more subversive than Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* (Page 173). Furthermore, the contemporary scholar Andrzej Diniejko states that Dickens was “one of the most important social commentators who used fiction effectively to criticize economic, social, and moral abuses in the Victorian era” (*Victorianweb*). These authors and critics have one thing in common: they assume that Dickens’s work has subversive tendencies and criticizes prevailing inequalities in his society. To investigate what role his works take in the representation of class-based inequalities, this paper focuses on three novels of the latter half of Charles Dickens’s literary production: *David Copperfield* from 1849-50, *Little Dorrit* from 1855-57, and *Great Expectations* from 1860-61. Importantly, I do not investigate whether Dickens had a political agenda or not; rather, I conduct a close reading of the three texts to see in how far their representations contribute to a stabilization or a disruption of the narratives’ society.

My analysis focuses specifically on one central theme of the novelistic representation of social structures: the possibility of achieving a happy ending by means of a successful rise in society of one particular individual, generally an individual who thereby achieves social, economic, and domestic success. Two important concepts need to be discussed in closer detail to make sense of this analysis: the rise in society and the successful individual.

The ‘rise in society’ alludes to the overall concept of social mobility. Through group-identification, individuals define their identities as they side with specific people or groups and distance themselves from conceptualized ‘others’ (Jenkins 43). Jackson et al. discuss Henri Tajfel and John Turner’s definition of social mobility as one of three strategies for achieving positive in-group social identity, the others being social creativity strategies and social change strategies. Social mobility, accordingly, allows individuals who are dissatisfied with the station that their in-group holds to move beyond this group and into another in-group. According to Jackson et al., this is the only strategy of the three that is pursued by an individual as opposed to a group, its objective being “to enhance the individual’s identity without necessarily changing the status of the in-group as a whole” (241). Consequently, the theme of social mobility obscures class as a collective phenomenon and presents mobility as an individual struggle and achievement.

The ‘successful individual’ marks another important concept in this study as the word ‘successful’ suggests that not everyone accomplishes a rise in society, and the term ‘individual’ suggests that it is not collectivities which can be mobile but rather single characters. Who, then, are those that cannot achieve social mobility, and what alternatives do

the narratives offer them? An analysis of the reasons which render some successful and others unsuccessful climbers highlights the ideological and political grounds of the representations at work in Dickens's novels. Similarly, a closer inspection of the alternatives that are offered to those who are unsuccessful in their mobility can highlight patterns of dealing with and justifying inequalities.

I argue that *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, and *Little Dorrit* reproduce and stabilize the hegemonic structures of a capitalist society by granting social mobility to the deserving few and offering alternative identities for those who are not. The works' stabilizing influence is created through four different mechanisms. Firstly, the narratives obscure class processes by focusing on non-economic inequalities, such as gender. Secondly, unsuccessful or successful processes of mobility are presented as an individual character's destiny rather than as representative destinies of a specifically treated collective. Thirdly, the texts deal with inequalities by relating them to personal characteristics and justifying positions by representing them as natural dispositions. Finally, by alleviating inequalities through concepts such as charity and domestic happiness, the texts offer alternative identities for those who are not granted mobility.

David Copperfield

First published in 1850, *David Copperfield* was Charles Dickens's eighth novel. It describes David Copperfield's downfall from an initially middle-class station into a position as a working boy, and finally, through the support of his aunt and much hard work on his part, his rise back into his initial middle-class position. According to John Peck, *David Copperfield* is a typical *Bildungsroman* as it deals with the "troubled quest for identity" (2) of one young individual. Interestingly, the process of coming into knowledge, growing into a differently aware, wiser, more mature person focuses almost exclusively on David Copperfield's development into a person that is worthy of and can achieve domestic happiness. Although clear processes of moving between classes are presented in the text, social mobility is exhibited as generally destructive to the character's happiness, while domestic happiness is advanced as the way to achieve ultimate contentment.

In the introduction to the Wordsworth Classics edition of *David Copperfield*, Adrienne E. Gavin describes how the text expresses "mid-Victorian, middle-class values: moral earnestness, industriousness, separate spheres for men and women, and in a broad sense 'knowing one's place'" (DC XII). The text contains and judges the developments in society along these values by focusing, in particular, on family relations. Peck offers insightful criticism from which my research benefits: "*Copperfield*, in my view, is a work where social themes and History are not absent but have been repressed" (4). I discuss how the threat of a rising class consciousness has been pushed to the realms of non-existence to make place for a narrative of domestic and personal suffering, one which presents a stable hierarchy within society through the use of the four main mechanisms presented in my thesis: it obscures class processes, it highlights individual destinies, it naturalizes stations, and it alleviates inequalities through domestic happiness and charity.

Firstly, *David Copperfield* describes practices within the narrative's society as devoid of any class implications. In *The Syntax of Class*, Amy Schrager Lang studies representations of class in nineteenth-century American novels and discovers patterns that are also applicable to British novels of that time (4). Schrager Lang states that "the body of representations" which constitutes a literary work is shaped by and shapes the experience of class and "actively participates in articulating, mediating, and displacing class differences and managing class conflict" (5). She focuses mainly on the tendency of "displacing the reality of class" in other "locked-in" categories of individual identity, such as gender and ethnicity, and claims that finding an identity in another social category sets aside the need to establish class-consciousness and understand class differences (6). Specifically, Schrager Lang discusses the

displacement of class when she describes the middle-class home as a location in which the effects of class are so thoroughly mediated by an alternative paradigm of gender that they disappear from view (18). As gender is a category that is based on an unchangeable difference—sex—the displacement of class into the category of gender leads to the belief that class is also based on an unchangeable difference. Consequently, the, in fact, changeable economic base of inequalities within the text is obscured, and the narrative promotes a vision of a stable hierarchy based on unchangeable differences.

Secondly, the negative characteristics that the narrative attributes to those who try to rise beyond their station are always directed toward the individual as opposed to the collective. John O’Jordan notices “the apparent surplus of personal, as opposed to social, anger in David’s narrative” (114). While it is important to take into account that all representations are shaped by David, this aspect will be essential to my analysis of the text as it promotes an understanding of inequalities as individual issues rather than society’s responsibility. Schrager Lang notes how in nineteenth-century American literature “the persistence of social inequality is disguised as the ongoing consequence of individual crime” (40). This is precisely the case in *David Copperfield* as denied social mobility is continuously attributed to individual shortcomings rather than collective inequalities.

Thirdly, the narrative presents the characters’ positions within society as social rank “acquired by birth” (O’Jordan 116). It suggests that these positions are natural and suitable to the characters’ dispositions. As family connections and natural station are presented as legitimizing or disqualifying an advance in society, successful mobility is granted only to David, who has a right to the station that he ascends into through inheritance. One might assume, then, that this would affect any individual within the narrative’s society, but van den Bossche argues, “only within the notion of the aristocratic family does origin matter because this family defines itself in terms of lineage” (88). However, his definition is not wholly applicable to the analysis of *David Copperfield*. While David aims to prove his worthiness in other ways than merely by insisting on his superior background, it is significant that only he is finally able to move upward although there are several other characters who try to prove their worthiness in similar ways as he does.

Finally, differences between the characters’ access to social mobility are alleviated through charity and domestic happiness, which removes the focus of the actual cause of the inequalities and stabilizes the prevailing structure. In *Justice Interruptus*, Nancy Fraser introduces a distinction between inequalities and possible mechanisms of overcoming them. She discusses two distinctions of injustice: socio-economic injustice and cultural-symbolic

injustice (13-14). According to Fraser, these different forms of injustice require specific ways of alleviation: firstly, socio-economic injustices need to be changed through redistribution, that is, a shifting of the economic means so that everyone has the same access to wealth and the privileges that come with it. Secondly, cultural-symbolic injustices need recognition, that is, acknowledging the differences on which the inequalities are based and affirming the positive value of these (16). It can be concluded that the first destructs group identity for the purpose of factual equality, while the second constructs group identity as a way of embracing difference and creating positive identities. Socio-economic injustices, Fraser asserts, require transformative remedies, while cultural-symbolic differences require affirmative remedies (24-25).

In the following, I analyse the patterns of social mobility in *David Copperfield* by focusing specifically on a few of the main characters. In doing so, I demonstrate how my four thesis points repeatedly serve as stabilizing mechanisms, thus rendering the narrative a picture of blissful middle-class domesticity.

David Copperfield: the Successful Social Climber

Although social mobility is not a clear concept for *David Copperfield*, it is the main narrative event and at the basis of all his strivings. He is the only ideal social climber in this narrative, in fact, in all three narratives that are analysed in this paper, so his legitimization as such must be analysed in close detail. I argue that he is presented as the ‘ideal’ social climber because he is the only social climber who achieves the ultimate goal: domestic happiness—all other characters who aim to ascend are outright denied this. The plot development establishes his legitimacy through comparing him to the illegitimate climbers, which highlights their inferior family connections and his natural superiority. Significantly, the deciding factor for whether characters in *David Copperfield* are successful or unsuccessful in their mobility is based on dynamics that are in no way related to their socio-economic background.

To begin with, natural dispositions, physical appearance, and age differences are used to legitimize the stations of the characters. David’s mother, Clara, is described in direct comparison to Peggotty, the domestic servant in David’s home: “my mother with her pretty hair and youthful shape” is contrasted with “Peggotty with no shape at all, and eyes so dark that they seemed to darken their whole neighbourhood in her face, and cheeks and arms so hard and red that I wondered the birds didn’t peck her in preference to apples” (*David Copperfield, DC*, 15). Their physical differences are accompanied by differences in their general dispositions. Peggotty is able to work hard and to organize the entire household, while

David's mother is weak in both mind and body. In addition, Peggotty's sphere is the kitchen which is described as hers (19), and when David later on accompanies her to Yarmouth he claims: "Peggotty at her needlework was as much at home with St Paul's and the bit of wax-candle, as if [she'd] never known any other roof" (25). Her position in the Copperfield's household and her life in Yarmouth are represented as natural and suited to her disposition. By presenting the differences between these two women as related to their physical appearance and to their natural dispositions, the narrative obscures their unequal and changeable socio-economic circumstances. Consequently, the concept of class is concealed, and their distinct positions are based on physical differences. The narrative offers thus an affirmative remedy for the characters and readers alike by presenting Peggotty as an individual that is perfectly suitable and satisfied in her position rather than a domestic servant who represents the oppression of an entire group of people.

David's mother and Peggotty are contrasted as they both take maternal roles in David's life. While they are equally good at heart, the beauty of David's mother is mainly superficial (she remains a very flat character at all times). Conversely, Peggotty is not described as a beautiful woman on the outside but rather as beautiful because of her honesty and goodness. After David has bitten his stepfather and has been locked up in his room, he asks Peggotty through the keyhole to give his love to Emily and the others in Yarmouth. He continues to describe the situation as follows: "The kind soul promised, and we both of us kissed the keyhole with the greatest affection—I pated it with my hand, I recollect, as if it had been her honest face—and parted" (55). Clara's superficial beauty highlights her role in David's life; she is the family connection on which he grounds his claims to a higher station. John O'Jordan describes how David's penchant to reminisce about the past and his earlier childhood "betrays the extent to which he attempts to ground his social identity, his 'station,' in the family estate and in the class expectations that derive from it" (118). As the differences between the two women are naturalized, their positions are seen as suited to their natural dispositions rather than as consequences of their different economic background.

David's mother, however, only holds a middle-class position because she married Mr Copperfield. Hence, Clara herself is a social climber, as she was a nursery maid who married a wealthier man. While her role as a social climber never threatens to deconstruct the hierarchy that is presented in the text, there are two possible ways of interpreting how it is dealt with: Firstly, Clara does not climb because she has particular ambitions to do so; rather, a man from a higher station wishes to be with her, so she rises as a consequence of this but has no active agency in the move. Secondly, she is not content with her life and dies early, so

it could be argued that the narrative punishes her and the other illegitimate climbers for her social mobility.

David's first wife, Dora, is a helpless creature just like his mother, only fit to be the idle wife of a wealthy man. Neither his mother nor Dora is able to survive in a society that strives more towards middle-class values, that is, towards women who can run a household and men who can run a business. Dora and Clara represent for their contemporary society somewhat out-dated subject positions; significantly, both die early. Furthermore, they represent the value of surface as they are both beautiful but rather useless when it comes to the practicalities of life. Their physical appearance, their representation as young, and their natural disposition render them quite unfit for a middle-class household, yet paradoxically stable in their superior position to domestic servants, such as Peggotty, who have to run the household for them.

The focus on physical representations is noteworthy as it often obscures a class discourse. Magnus Nilsson discusses Nancy Fraser's understanding of "cultural recognition" as displacing "socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle" (qtd. in Nilsson 31). Rather than concentrating on the fact that one person is economically better off than another, *David Copperfield* emphasizes issues such as the differences in physical appearances and other stable variances. That is, the alleviation of inequalities becomes a matter of recognition of unchangeable differences rather than a matter of redistribution of economic means.

Another important aspect when speaking about naturalized positions in *David Copperfield* is that of occupation, or the lack of it. Occupations, such as Peggotty's as a domestic servant, and occupation, in general, are specific class markers and important factors in the consideration of social mobility. Mr Micawber raises the question of whether one is born into a certain profession, which is closely related to asking whether one is born into a certain station:

Whether he was born a carpenter, or a coach painter, any more than he had been born a bird? Whether he could go into the next street, and open a chemist's shop? Whether he could rush to the next assizes, and proclaim himself a lawyer? Whether he could come out by force at the opera, and succeed by violence? Whether he could do anything, without being brought up to something? (647-648)

If one is born into a position of manual labour, the narrative shows that it is highly unlikely that one will rise into a position of a white-collar labourer. This distinction only holds for men as, according to Schrager Lang, "labouring women and children upset the moral geography of family life" (16). In *David Copperfield*, however, it is only middle-class women and children

who are presented as upsetting the moral geography when they work; Peggotty, as a working-class woman, is presented as good at her work and content in her positions, while working class children are not present in the narrative at all. After Peggotty has been let go at the Murdstones, she explains: “I’m a-going, Davy, you see, to my brother’s, first, for another fortnight’s visit—just till I have had time to look about me, and get to be something like myself again” (213). Peggotty’s work is presented as that which she bases her identity on.

The distinctions of naturalized positions as based on one’s occupation are particularly important in consideration of David’s experience of manual labour as a child. He is sent to work at Murdstone and Grindby’s, his stepfather’s factory, and he describes the devastating effect that his time as a working boy has on his morals and states that his “hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man [are] crushed in [his] bosom” (*DC* 136). When he is sent to school and meets all the other boys he notes:

I was so conscious of having passed through scenes of which they could have no knowledge, and of having acquired experiences foreign to my age, appearance, and condition as one of them, that I half believed it was an imposture to come there as an ordinary little schoolboy. (197)

The fact that David had to do manual labour as a child is a clear working-class marker, and at a time when “as many were arriving in the middle and upper classes others were being proletarianized” (van den Bossche 91), his fear of being found out shows an understanding of the contemporary societal developments. However, *David Copperfield* guarantees those who have a right to it by birth to remain in or return to their stations and ensures that others who do not have this natural right will remain in their stations.

Notwithstanding, there is a complete lack of representations of other labouring children in David’s workplace. Although David must surely have met some, the focus remains strictly on him, so it could be argued that either David does not or cannot see the lower classes and the inequalities that surround them, possibly that he thinks it natural that these other children should be working. Other than David’s superior origin, there is no particular justification for David’s unsuitability to work as opposed to others’ suitability. The lack of seeing those that worked with him at the blackening factory is noteworthy as it is an example of the narrative’s focus on David’s as an individual destiny rather than an instance of the destiny of a larger group of people that might not have been as fortunate as to rise beyond their stations. Similarly, it highlights the natural position of some in this working place and contrasts David’s unnatural position within the scenario.

As much as working as a child was contrary to his position, the adult David does not shy away from hard work as long as it is suitable to his middle-class station. After his aunt

Betsey Trotwood loses her fortune, David has to support himself entirely on his own by teaching himself shorthand and offering his services in parliament. As shorthand is not manual labour, it does not carry the same negative connotations as working in the blackening factory did. Occupation is highlighted as marking the borders between the classes, and van den Bossche makes a relevant claim in relation to this: “The identity of the middle class depends on [David’s] belief in these other family forms [working class and aristocratic] against which he defines the superiority of his own” (100). By othering himself from the idle upper class through his family connections and his willingness to work, David establishes a truly middle-class position.

David’s love interests are another way of establishing his station within society. O’Jordan argues that as David’s first wife, Dora, comes from a higher social background than him, “David’s courtship of Dora has important class implications,” so “his falling in love with Dora is motivated, initially at least, by a desire to improve his social station” (128). However, I argue that his ambition to move beyond his initial station of middle class by marrying her is punished through their unhappy marriage. According to van den Bossche, Dora lives “within the aristocratic economy and [...] cannot really comprehend this middle class one” (95). Thus, her idleness and incapability prevent her from creating a happy middle-class home, and she dies early, allowing David to marry the ideal middle-class wife, Agnes Wickfield, and to achieve domestic happiness.

The happy middle-class home takes a very important role in all three novels of my analysis as it is closely connected to the definition of ultimate happiness as found in the domestic space, a very specific kind of domestic space. According to Schragar Lang, the “alternative system of classification centered in the home” is used in domestic novels to avoid the necessity of class-consciousness (17). She borrows the definition of “home in the better sense” from Christine Stansell, according to which a home in the better sense has at its centre a nurturing mother and an industrious father who produce modest daughters and promising sons (15). The ultimate happiness as found in the domestic space has an important stabilizing influence, as Annette R. Federico argues that Agnes Wickfield is presented as this ideal woman for David, and she stands for “[h]appiness [as] passivity and surrender” (80). Meanwhile, making a home in the better sense is only possible for those that have the resources and the correct values (Christian, middle-class values) at hand. Consequently, David Copperfield’s main goal of achieving middle-class happiness highlights the mechanisms that reproduce the prevailing social structure.

In sum, David Copperfield is the ideal social climber. He comes from a good family; he is willing to work for his living and, consequently, displays truly middle-class values, such as a Protestant work ethic and resourcefulness with what he has, values which are defined in closer detail by such Victorian scholars as Samuel Smiles in his influential work *Self Help*. While David is granted mobility and can return to his initial position, the two other characters that aim at social mobility, Uriah and Emily, are denied an upward movement or punished for it. I will investigate how this is justified in the following.

Uriah Heep: the Unsuccessful Social Climber

Uriah Heep is the second social climber who will be discussed. He is employed at Mr Wickfield's office and rises within the development of the narrative to the position of partner in the firm. However, this climb is portrayed as based on criminal motives, so Heep falls into disgrace, goes to prison, and finally has to emigrate to Australia. Heep's failed upward mobility is justified as he is presented in an extremely negative manner; however, as much as he is David's nemesis, these two characters are also very much alike. Both are social climbers who want to reach a better station in life by marrying their employer's daughter, for example. Nonetheless, their initial social stations are crucially different, which the narrative presents as justifications for why one may climb and the other may not.

David's legitimacy as the ideal social climber is to a great extent shaped by the narrative's representation of him as the opposite of those who are unsuccessful in their ambitions. A most important mechanism of shaping identities and stabilizing positions is to distance oneself from others; hence, several characters are important in relation to the definition of David's station. According to O'Jordan, the characters James Steerforth and Uriah Heep function as "boundary figures in the class system" (115). He argues further that they form two of the main subplots of David's progress toward domestic happiness and worldly success; Steerforth signifies the class connection that David aims to strengthen and hopes to be associated with, Uriah signifies the class entanglement that David strongly seeks to avoid (115). O'Jordan supposes a class-consciousness here that I would argue the text avoids. Instead of presenting groups of people that David wishes to associate with or to avoid, his interest is focused on two individuals who both disrupt stability in their own ways: Heep, because he feels that it is only fair for him to have the same comfort that most other people have who work for their money, and Steerforth, because he is naturally powerful and brilliant. I argue that Little Emily is another important contrast to David; however, she is in no way a threat or a motivation to David, as Uriah and Steerforth are respectively, as she is contrasted

through a clear and unchangeable difference: her sex. As Steerforth is not a social climber, he will be discussed further on in this chapter.

The representations of Heep are clearly negative; however, as John O’Jordan states, “[i]t is important to keep in mind that everything we know about Uriah is filtered through the consciousness of a narrator steadfastly committed to the values and moral superiority of the middle class” (129). Consequently, the descriptions of Heep cannot claim neutrality and are, instead, descriptions by and reactions of David, who passionately hates Heep from the moment he meets him. What must be asked then is not why Heep is unsuccessful in achieving upward mobility but rather how David presents him as unworthy of doing so.

According to O’Jordan, “David’s abuse of Uriah is a form of class oppression” (129). However, difference and subsequent inequality are not manifested in Heep’s economic inferiority but rather in his nature, his looks, his behaviour, his low morals, his ambitions, and his family connections. Firstly, Heep is presented as naturally beneath the genteel classes and arguably beneath any human class, as he is slimy and sly, an animal or a ghost rather than a human being:

As I came back, I saw Uriah Heep shutting up the office; and feeling friendly towards everybody, went in and spoke to him, and at parting gave him my hand. But oh, what a clammy hand it was! As ghostly to the touch as to the sight! I rubbed mine afterwards, to warm it, *and to rub his off.* (DC 195)

David describes Uriah’s behaviour as equalling his looks in terms of inferiority and potential to disgust:

Profuse in his farewells, he got down again as the coachman got up. For anything I know, he was eating something to keep the raw morning air out; but he made motions with his mouth as if the pear were ripe already, and he were smacking his lips over it. (494)

Although Heep’s economic inferiority is clearly established through his working position and his living in a small place with his mother, David presents Heep’s manners as features of his natural disposition. He describes how Heep finally managed to subvert the ‘natural’ power structures and managed to break Mr Wickfield so that “with the evidence of his native superiority still upon him,” Mr Wickfield had to “submit himself to that crawling impersonation of meanness, Uriah Heep” (438-439). Heep is presented as naturally lower than Mr Wickfield and David Copperfield; however, until Heep is proven to be criminal, this lowliness is not presented as based on anything other than David’s dislike for Heep. Importantly, Heep is finally convicted for fraud and deception, which justifies David’s rather harsh representation of him throughout the narrative.

Furthermore, Heep is ambitious and, most importantly, dishonest about his ambitions. He fervently repeats, “I’m a very umble person” (202), and proceeds to put himself down when describing his relationship with Mr Wickfield: “he is hard to *me* sometimes [...] But I don’t know what he might be to a gifted person” (219). Brian Longhurst et al. describe the different social contexts that are at work in the formation of the mindset of society in the nineteenth-century. According to these scholars, the moral perception of the time was mainly formed by the Christian doctrine, which served to support the existing structure of society and “preache[d] the virtues of humility to the poor” (69). While on the surface Heep claims the virtue of humility, he ‘plots’ to reach greater ends. He is not truly humble and is thus not truly virtuous, in contrast to the Peggottys, who are the perfection of humility but are denied to climb for other reasons that will be discussed below.

David Copperfield sees the cause of Heep’s behaviour in his family. When he is asked to visit them and cannot find a reason to avoid this uncomfortable social call, he describes the house as follows:

We entered a low, old-fashioned room, walked straight into from the street, and found there, Mrs Heep, who was the dead image of Uriah, only short. She received me with the utmost humility, and apologised to me for giving her son a kiss, observing that, lowly as they were, they had their natural affections, which they hoped would give no offence to any one. It was a perfectly decent room, half parlour and half kitchen, but not at all a snug room. (*DC* 220)

While there is nothing really wrong with their housing or their behaviour, David cannot seem to make himself comfortable around them. What makes the Heeps so unlikable is, of course, that they constantly speak about themselves. Mrs Heep says, “we know our station and are thankful in it” (221). Instead of actually showing humility, they repeatedly claim that they are humble, which makes them paradoxically ostentatious about their humbleness. The Heeps are, in fact, a different kind of people. However, the narrative does not present this as related to class but rather to the Heep’s general demeanour and appearance. Uriah Heep, finally, takes criminal steps to achieve his goals, so his ambitions are described as his individual fault and a view of them as a reaction to an inherently unjust system is denied. As Schrager Lang discusses, inequalities are often “disguised as the ongoing consequences of individual crime” (40), and so they are in this case.

As Heep is so clearly presented as the villain, he is also one of very few characters who can speak uncomfortable truths. He gives a strong speech in which he criticizes the social system and highlights its inequalities. However, several mechanisms in the text shut down any subversive potential that this speech might have. Firstly, one could argue that the text sets up Heep as having few, if any, positive characteristics. Secondly, Heep is punished for aiming

to rise into a station that is not his to begin with, for being paradoxically ostentatious about his humility, and for becoming criminal in the process of his mobility. Finally, David's narrative points specifically to the family being the problem and avoids the extended view of society's responsibility. According to David:

It was the first time it had ever occurred to me, that this detestable cant of false humility might have originated out of the Heep family. I had seen the harvest, but had never thought of the seed. (*DC* 489)

David implies here a beginning consciousness of inequalities, but his criticism remains focused on the domestic space. There is no understanding of a group larger than that of the Heep family that might face certain inequalities. However, David states, "I fully comprehended now, for the first time, what a base, unrelenting, and revengeful spirit must have been engendered by this early, and this long suppression" (490). While there is a definite hint at inequalities which are much more than just a personal issue, this topic is left untouched. As Heep is undeserving and punished later on, his voice is silenced.

Uriah Heep is directly contrasted to David Copperfield, as they are similar to each other in several ways. This contrast serves to promote David as the ideal climber, specifically because David is merely returning to his natural position, while Heep is challenging his.

Little Emily: the Unsuccessful Social Climber

Emily is the third obvious social climber in *David Copperfield*. She is the niece of Mr Peggotty and shares the houseboat at Yarmouth with him, Ham, and Mrs Gummidge. At first, she is presented as a loving and selfless creature; however, her ambitions come to the fore and climax in her eloping with Steerforth, which means a breaking out of her station. She is punished but finally saved because she is ultimately honest and good. However, she cannot find personal happiness in England anymore as she has broken with the dominant conventions of its society and, therefore, has to try to make her luck in Australia instead.

To begin with, Emily seems to deserve her fate because she does not have the family connections to justify the upward move that she aspires to. Furthermore, being a woman, she cannot hope to advance into a position by working for it, and her elopement with Steerforth renders her ultimately powerless as it entails throwing away her only means of bargaining: her virtue. Moreover, Emily is ambitious, but she is presented somewhat differently than Uriah Heep as she claims that her ambition has a selfless quality and is grounded in wishing to move upward so that she can take care of Ham and her Uncle (35). Nevertheless, the self-centred quality of her ambition comes to the fore when Steerforth visits, and she is willing to elope with him, not minding the consequences that this will have for the rest of her family.

Her upward mobility, like Heep's, leads to the ruin of her own life and also of large parts of her family, as it causes Ham's death and Mr Peggotty's leaving Yarmouth to find her. Within the plot, she is thus punished with unhappiness and failure for challenging the prevailing structures.

Emily shows that she understands the basic values of a consumer society by claiming that she would like to secure certain possessions to thank her Uncle for his kindness: "If I ever was to be a lady, I'd give him a sky-blue coat with diamond buttons, nankeen trousers, a red velvet waistcoat, a cocked hat, a large gold watch, a silver pipe, and a box of money" (34). David thinks that these possessions would be inappropriate and highlights how out of place the Peggottys would feel dressed so beyond their station:

I said I had no doubt that Mr Peggotty well deserved these treasures. I must acknowledge that I felt it difficult to picture him quite at his ease in the raiment proposed for him by his grateful little niece, and that I was particularly doubtful of the policy of the cocked hat; but I kept these sentiments to myself. (35)

What the text shows is that both Emily and the Peggottys are in the station that is most suitable for them.

When comparing the illegitimate social climbers in *David Copperfield*, two main differences stand out. Firstly, Uriah is not as poor as Emily, he works in a white-collar profession, and, in contrast to the Peggottys who live in a boat, he inhabits an actual house with his mother. However, he is a villain because of his criminal ways of trying to move upward. Secondly, Emily is a woman, which is presented as somewhat less problematic for upward mobility as it is considered less of a threat to prevailing power structures when a woman is raised in society as this usually happens without any active agency on her part. Much like Clara, then, it would have been generally possible for Emily to move upward. However, her active ambition and her desertion of her family in the process of mobility highlight her lack of morality and deny her happiness.

One important similarity that stands out in the narratives of these two illegitimate climbers is that they are both narratives of individual destiny. When David speaks about Heep, it is the ambitious villain who is foregrounded, not a representative of an entire group of people that might be aiming to move upward. It is the same with Emily, as she does not represent the other Peggottys, who all know their station and are content with it. These representations highlight personal struggles and clearly avoid any sense of collectivity; and while they are justifications of these two individual failures of upward mobility, they suggest that others from similar backgrounds might be granted upward mobility. The illusion of social

mobility for all is seemingly upheld, while the denial of it for some is alleviated through several factors that I will address further on.

Presenting David or Steerforth as personally responsible for Emily's disgrace becomes another negation of the collective of class. While Ham is angry with David for bringing Steerforth to Yarmouth, he also develops a feeling of hating one 'gentleman' for what another has done. However, this idea is disavowed when Ham overcomes this feeling toward David and saves Steerforth, thereby becoming a true working-class hero who kills himself in the process. Ham has to die for several reasons, one being that he begins to see inequalities as being collective and thus based on class. Another reason is because there is no possibility for him to achieve domestic happiness anymore, as this would have been to be with Emily, which is now impossible.

The Peggottys and Steerforth

According to O'Jordan, the representations of social mobility in *David Copperfield* have one thing in common: "the assumption of a stable social hierarchy in which persons should not seek to change their position through marriage or any other means of advancement" (117). The idea of remaining in one's station is promoted throughout *David Copperfield*. While there are three clear-cut social climbers, of whom only David is successful in his endeavour, there are also several individuals in the novel who do not aim to climb and are presented as having no interest in doing so. Several different representations stabilize their positions within society and represent them as content in their station.

According to Oscar Lewis, the family is the medium which passes on the lifestyle that enables the poor to deal with their poverty (in Longhurst et al. 78). The culture of the poor is then presented as originating from within the group of the poor themselves, and the Peggottys are a practical example of the workings of this culture of poverty. Admittedly, Lewis's thesis focuses somewhat too strictly on the poverty-related aspects of culture and might thus miss important other factors within culture that could influence the behaviour and cultural identities of the poor, such as gender or ethnicity. However, the perception of the Peggottys' station as self-imposed and reproduced through the medium of family is quite relevant to a domestic novel such as *David Copperfield*.

Several dynamics serve to stabilize stations and thus justify the non-existent mobility for some: Firstly, belonging to a station is naturalized, so to know it and to be content in it is presented as a virtue. This belonging to a station is connected to one's family, which, as Lewis claims, reproduces the specific culture of poverty and, consequently, offers positions

for the poor to assume that enable them to deal with their inferiority (in Longhurst et al. 78). Secondly, a specific positive subject position for the lower classes is presented that incorporates both their beauty and honesty while it presents them as uncultivated and incapable of anything beyond their present station.

David Copperfield's description of the Peggottys naturalizes their belonging to their station, physically and morally. According to the young David, the Peggottys fit perfectly into the boat in Yarmouth. They are comfortable and have made it as much a home as any home could be: "Peggotty said, with greater emphasis than usual, that we must take things as we found them, and that for her part, she was proud to call herself a Yarmouth Bloater" (28). While David interprets this as a voluntary lifestyle, it might as well be read as a description of dealing with necessities. By accepting the role of the oppressed, as Frantz Fanon writes about racially oppressed groups in *Black Skin, White Masks*, one achieves a sense of empowerment that makes this role bearable (63).

Besides being portrayed as naturally hard working and capable, the Peggottys are also portrayed as naturally truthful, with an inherent quality of goodness about them. At several points in the novel, they are appointed as witnesses to support the higher positioned, thus claiming their honesty and purity. For example, when Mr Murdoch accuses Clara, his wife then, of being ungrateful, she turns to Peggotty for support of her case: "I know I am affectionate. I wouldn't say it if I wasn't certain that I am. Ask Peggotty. I'm sure she'll tell you I'm affectionate" (DC 47). Peggotty is described as honest and purely good. She comforts David when he is locked up in his room after biting Mr Murdstone, who had abused him. After David asks Peggotty to give his love to Emily and the others in Yarmouth, he continues to describe the situation as follows: "The kind soul promised, and we both of us kissed the keyhole with the greatest affection—I patted it with my hand, I recollect, as if it had been her honest face—and parted" (55). Goodness, honesty, and an honest commitment to empathy come natural to the Peggottys.

These aspects all serve to create their subject positions of happy, caring, and honest individuals who might not be able to do better than their station but who are perfectly suited for it, and are thus happy within it. According to O'Jordan, "perhaps the saddest thing about the Peggotty household is the extent to which its members internalize their own class oppression and thus conform to the middle-class stereotype" (124). Frantz Fanon discusses the psychological need to submit to the oppression and internalize it: "Alterity for the black man is not the black but the white man" (77). The Peggottys portray these patterns of submission.

The Peggottys' internalization is most clearly portrayed in their frequent assertions of knowing their station. Several features in the text specifically, as well as in the motif as such, suggest that the Peggottys are aware of, content with and suited for the station that they occupy. Mr Peggotty, for example, says to David, “[g]lad to see you, sir, [...] You’ll find us rough, sir, but you’ll find us ready” (*DC* 32). Another example is the following situation in which Peggotty describes Mr Peggotty: “He was but a poor man himself, said Peggotty, but as good as gold and as true as steel—those were her similes” (33). This description highlights the working class as genuinely virtuous and honest. Moreover, in this particular instance, goodness is paired with the term gold, which suggests that although they are impecunious, they are morally superior to others with economic means. Schrager Lang claims that in order to function and to be content with their life, any human being needs to occupy a specific position. According to her, “self-consciousness [...] is to occupy the psychic space that might otherwise have been occupied by class consciousness” (22). The Peggottys’ internalization of their station and their seemingly positive attitudes toward it might then be described as a specific self-consciousness that replaces the need of seeing oneself as the economically inferior lower class.

One important reason as to why the lower positioned individuals cannot rise successfully is that they are just not quite capable. Throughout the text, they are portrayed as being unwittingly entertaining but lacking the potential to be successful. The Peggottys, while perfectly good people, often appear socially clumsy. They mean a lot to David, and he is very happy whenever he visits them in Yarmouth. However, as David grows older, he becomes more and more aware of their natural inferiority to him. Often this condition is expressed in their unconventional or uncomfortable behaviour. For example, when Mr Peggotty and Ham come to visit David at school, they make for a comical picture. David meets them on the grounds of his school where they stand close together “squeezing one another against the wall” (*DC* 91). Their comical characteristics are highlighted though David points out that he mostly laughs because he is happy to see them, admitting that he laughs a bit because of their out-of-place appearance (91).

Another example is Mr Barkis’s wooing of Peggotty, which is of a quite peculiar kind and also comical, a display of not knowing better but of meaning well:

These offerings of affection were of a most various and eccentric description. Among them I remember a double set of pigs’ trotters, a huge pin-cushion, half a bushel or so of apples, a pair of jet earrings, some Spanish onions, a box of dominoes, a canary bird and cage, and a leg of pickled pork. (126)

Barkis is described as dressed in a comical manner, but trying hard to dress properly. David sums it up by stating that he “thought Mr Barkis a phenomenon of respectability” (126).

While he is a very respectable man who has high moral standards, Mr Barkis does not quite know how to behave in an appropriate manner. Instead of relating this to a lack of education in the correct standards or even a questioning of these, it is seen as part of his natural disposition.

Finally, members of the working class are often portrayed as incapable of controlling their emotions and, consequently, as less calculated and less successful. However, these qualities are also what make them so loveable. They are honest and true to their emotions, and uncorrupted by anything else. Peggotty is a good example as she breaks out of composed behaviour and reacts according to her immediate emotions on several occasions. This is pointed out as appreciated but rather comical: “Greatly to the astonishment of the passengers in the street, as well as of her relations going on before, the good soul was obliged to stop and embrace me on the spot, with many protestations of her unalterable love” (121). Due to this uncontrolled behaviour, which highlights another shape of their honesty and truthfulness, the lower classes cannot be trusted fully.

Another group of people who are born into a certain station is the upper class, represented in the text through Steerforth, who David describes as follows:

He was a person of great power in my eyes; that was of course the reason of my mind running on him. No veiled future dimly glanced upon him in the moonbeams. There was no shadowy picture of his footsteps in the garden that I dreamed of walking in all night. (79)

The passage highlights that Steerforth’s course of life is clear. Being born into the upper class means that one holds a high station and will keep it throughout one’s life merely by asserting it.

Steerforth is only one example of the rather negative portrayal of the upper classes that runs throughout the entire text. Although David is completely fascinated by Steerforth, he is also aware of his immorality. Steerforth insults the teacher Mr Mell, thus exhibiting his arrogance and sense of superiority:

I tell you what, Mr Mell, once for all. When you take the liberty of calling me mean or base, or anything of that sort, you are an impudent beggar. You are always a beggar, you know; but when you do that, you are an impudent beggar. (86)

David describes the entire incident as very uncomfortable. However, while he feels sorry for Mr Mell, Steerforth’s power and attitude fascinate him. As uncomfortable and disruptive as this situation might be, it also highlights Steerforth’s natural social superiority. His arrogance

is presented as having a real basis in his superior knowledge, so although he behaves immorally, he is to a certain extent justified in doing so.

Mr Waterbrook at Salem house is another example of born-into-a-station arrogance.

David describes him:

[A] man who had been born, not to say with a silver spoon, but with a scaling-ladder, and had gone on mounting all the heights of life one another, until now he looked, from the top of the fortifications, with the eye of a philosopher and a patron, on the people down in the trenches. (319)

While this depiction is a very critical description of arrogance and immorality, and a lack of empathy with the poor, it is only critical of the distinction between upper and middle class, while the equally oppressive relationship between the middle class and the working class is left unmentioned. The position of superiority and arrogance that David holds over the Peggottys is presented as slightly patronizing at worst, and their distinctions are naturalized.

Alleviating Inequalities

The narrative in *David Copperfield* presents successful mobility for some and unsuccessful mobility for others. The stable lower positions are naturalized, which denies an understanding of them as problematic. Furthermore, by suggesting that the different positions which people hold in society are their natural positions, the text subscribes to presenting them, in Fraser's terms, as symbolic-cultural inequalities. Consequently, they must be alleviated through recognition and affirmative remedies (16). Within the narrative, domestic happiness as ultimate goal and charity are presented as affirmative remedies; these seem to alleviate the denial of social mobility for some.

Firstly, domestic happiness is presented as the ultimate goal. Hence, being denied upward mobility becomes unimportant as long as there is domestic happiness to make up for it. This can be argued to be an affirmative remedy as it relocates the formation of a positive identity into the domestic sphere and can thus alleviate the need to change one's overall position. Problematic in this scenario is that the ultimate goal of a domestic identity, in combination with the above-examined mechanisms of naturalization, obscures the need for transformative remedies. The stations become internalized and recognized by other members of society; consequently, the underlying socio-economic inequality is disguised and rendered inconsequential.

A second alleviating factor which functions as an affirmative remedy is charity. Charity is a mechanism of recognition as it acknowledges the worthiness of the receiver. Furthermore, it is an alleviating factor for both the givers, who remain morally worthy of their

position, and the receivers, who are shown appreciation and become affirmed in their superior qualities opposing those who are not worthy of charity.

To begin with, domestic happiness is presented as the ultimate goal in life, unaffected by one's economic background. According to van den Bossche, Rosa Dartle, who lives in the household of the Steerforth's, "insists that only a real family, one that lays claim to that title through its legitimate lineage, can have a home" (92). However, David's narrative seems to defy this presumption as it offers domestic happiness, specifically to the Peggottys. Whenever the young David is upset or feels in need of comfort, he wishes he were in Yarmouth with the good Peggottys:

The idea of being again surrounded by those honest faces, shining welcome on me; of renewing the peacefulness of the sweet Sunday morning, when the bells were ringing, the stones dropping in the water, and the shadowy ships breaking through the mist; of roaming up and down with little Em'ly, telling her my troubles, and finding charms against them in the shells and pebbles on the beach, made a calm in my heart. (119)

The almost magical bliss of Yarmouth is David's romantic idea of the perfect home. It has replaced his initial memories of his childhood home, the Rookery, before the Murdstones came into that household.

A closer reading of the Peggottys' situation might show how their domestic happiness is a mere childhood illusion on David's part. However, on the surface, the possibility for domestic happiness in combination with the naturalization of the Peggottys' station alleviates or makes obsolete the need to climb out of it. Instead of basing their identity on their economic inferiority, the Peggottys can base it on their domestic happiness, thus obscuring class-consciousness as discussed by Schragger Lang (17). David believes that all Peggottys, except for Mrs Gummidge, are happy people; but according to O'Jordan, "this myth of happiness is as much a misperception on David's part as his belief that the Peggottys are a nuclear family" (123).

The tasks that to the Peggottys are blatant necessities are beautiful to David:

Mrs Gummidge, with the white apron, was knitting on the opposite side of the fire. Peggotty at her needle-work was as much at home with Saint Paul's and the bit of wax candle, as if they had never known any other roof. (32)

While the upper class and middle class might have been knitting and sewing as leisure activities, the working class had to do so to have clothing. The romantic bliss of the Peggottys' home that David portrays is thus likely to be an illusion. This illusion, however, is much more than mere hypocrisy on David's part. It is an expression of the prevailing hegemony, presenting bliss where it is self-made and denying bliss where it is too much concerned with economic comfort.

Ultimately, the domestic happiness of the Peggottys does not remain stable as a consequence of the act of an individual villain, Steerforth, who elopes with Emily, and thereby destroys the Peggottys' home. While in the general presentation of their station, the Peggottys are a homogenous group; the narrative bases the denial of Emily's advancement on her individual unworthiness. Consequently, the illusion of a possible climb for others from the same background remains.

In *Hard Times*, Catherine Gallagher speaks about "Dickens's special use of the family-society metaphor, a use that [...] gives family reform priority over social reform and tries to substitute family solidarity for social cohesion" (174). The focus on family is particularly noteworthy in the case of the Peggottys, of the Heeps, and in the case of Little Dorrit's family in the Marshalsea. The focus of all narratives remains on domestic success as the ultimate goal rather than on economic success. Thus, David Copperfield's happiness in life is not highlighted as linked to his profession, which would imply a direct link to his economic situation. Instead, it is David's marriages and the domestic space that these create which make or break it.

Charity is presented as a second alleviating factor in a system that grants mobility for some and denies it for others. Good individuals in the narrative take care of each other, and if these individuals are wealthy, they take care of those who have less. However, the concept of charity in *David Copperfield* strongly implies a move away from monetary alleviation and toward an understanding of a charitable disposition as being selfless and good irrespective of one's economic background.

Agnes Wickfield, David's second wife and daughter of his employer Mr Wickfield, is presented as the perfect wife because she has these precise qualities. Elizabeth Langland terms her "the goal of David's long journey to stabilize his identity as a respectable and genteel middle-class hero" (87). Agnes is the ideal Victorian woman, the Angel of the House. While her perfection is based on her ability to run a household, her ability to make David happy is also strongly connected to her selfless, charitable disposition.

Importantly, Agnes does not have to try hard to be empathic and caring; it comes natural to her. According to Elizabeth Langland, "the happiness that Agnes instils is written as an aspect of her nature" (87). Her qualities of love and sympathy are so pure and her general disposition so charitable that she can move beyond social restraint. For example, David thinks that he saw her saying goodbye to Emily before the latter boards the ship to Australia, and he suspects Agnes of having been charitable to Emily, although a respectable woman should generally not associate with a fallen woman (*DC* 690). However, Agnes's truly charitable

disposition seems to go beyond the need to perform superiority. Schrager Lang claims that the ideal woman in the domestic novel “eludes classification and takes possession of an ideal self outside class” (18). This begins with Agnes, but it is not until *Little Dorrit* that this representation of the ideal woman is established thoroughly. A woman such as Emily cannot be the Angel of the House as her station implies that she is a worker, which, according to Langland, is the ideological other of the Angel of the House (83).

In direct contrast to Agnes’s natural benevolence stands Steerforth’s calculated financial compensation for Mr Mell. Having been insulted and disgraced by Steerforth, Mr Mell, loses his position as teacher in the school. However, Steerforth informs Traddles, who is upset by the situation, that he will take care of Mr Mell: “”As to his situation—which was a precious one, wasn’t it?—do you suppose I am not going to write home, and take care that he gets some money?” (DC 90). The narrative then continues into what seems a somewhat naive description of the situation by David:

We thought this intention very noble in Steerforth, whose mother was a widow, and rich, and would do almost anything, it was said, that he asked her. We were all extremely glad to see Traddles so put down, and exalted Steerforth to the skies; especially when he told us, as he condescended to do, that what he had done had been done expressly for us, and for our cause; and that he had conferred a great boon upon us by unselfishly doing it. (90)

As Steerforth’s charity does not come from a position of humility and empathy, it is not of the truthful kind. Consequently, it does not give him a moral high ground as it does in Agnes’s case. Charity as a concept is quite interesting as it is disguised as a transformative remedy. That is, the rich giving to the poor suggests that there is an actual redistribution of wealth or other commodities at work. At the same time, however, this process is affirmative as it reinforces the positions of superior and inferior within society. Furthermore, by alleviating the blatant needs of the poor, the initial inequality and the need for redistribution are obscured, and the charitable disposition of the givers renders them worthy of their high position thus enforcing them further.

To conclude, by naturalizing positions and granting mobility only to David, who comes from a worthy position to begin with, *David Copperfield* denies mobility to most. However, the focus on domestic happiness as main goal and on charity as a seemingly transformative remedy alleviates inequalities to such an extent that their understanding as inequalities is denied altogether, which stabilizes the narrative and, consequently, the representations of an egalitarian and well-functioning society.

Great Expectations

Although chronologically *Little Dorrit* was written between *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, the latter will be the object of the second part of my analysis. This is to highlight the strong similarities between concepts of social mobility in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, which are best discussed in direct contrast. Charles Dickens published *Great Expectations*, his thirteenth novel, between 1860 and 1861. Much like *David Copperfield*, it takes the form of a Bildungsroman as it describes Philip Pirrip's development from a young boy to an adult.

Pip lives, with his sister and her husband, Joe Gargery, in a household that cannot be described as happy because his sister has a penchant for using physical violence toward both him and her husband. However, Pip's brother in law and substitute father, somewhat rectifies the condition of Pip's home as he is very caring, and he creates a feeling of security and family despite his wife's violent temper. Although Pip is initially supposed to become a blacksmith just like Joe, he begins to aspire to more when he starts to visit Miss Havisham, a rich woman in town who pays him to keep her and her adopted daughter, Estella, company. Pip later comes into money through the act of a secret benefactor, whom he finds to be a convict he, at a very young age, had helped to survive. The text sketches Pip's life, his aim to advance in society, his doing so, and the consequences of his ambitions for him and for those that surround him.

Charles Dickens wrote *Great Expectations* after *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, which, according to John Bowen, were particularly 'dark novels' and were not as well received by the audience as *David Copperfield* had been. In contrast, *Great Expectations*, claims John Bowen in the Introduction to the Wordsworth Classic edition of the text, "was welcomed as a return to Dickens's earlier comic form" (VI). This is particularly interesting when analysing the impact of its representations and their possible challenging of the readers' perception, as the text deals with the characters' rather universal ambitions: "to be rich, to be loved, to be admired, to be happy" (Bowen IX). According to Fumie Tamai, *Great Expectations* "indicates an ideological shift" as it allows the working-class protagonist to rise to the category of gentleman and thereby fulfil a typically Victorian "cultural goal" (55). However, I can only partially agree with this statement. While it is true that Pip rises in station, he never clearly achieves his declared goal of domestic happiness. Furthermore, the recurring pattern by which hardly any of the characters are truly granted happiness is noteworthy. The positive reception of *Great Expectations*, as opposed to *Little Dorrit*, is thus rather surprising as the text paints a devastating picture of denied happy endings for almost all of the main characters.

In his discussion of *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, Elihu Pearlman points to the inversion of the pattern of social mobility first exposed in *David Copperfield*. While David is born a member of the middle class who through “mischance undergoes a period of purgatory,” Pip is born into the working class and by “accident [...] is transformed into a gentleman” (550). In his analysis of *Great Expectations*’s inversion of *David Copperfield*, Pearlman points to several instances in which the underlying ideologies in Dickens’s writing surface. While the texts might seem to subvert initial stability and challenge specific structures, all characters return to their initial stations or are punished for not doing so. “Dickens masquerades as the enemy of class bias and social snobbery, but the novel itself speaks counter to that profession,” concludes Pearlman (559).

Pip and the Gargerys

The novel primarily discusses one singular social climber: Pip. My reading of the text takes its starting point in Humphrey House’s description of Dickens as a writer: “His mood and idiom were those of the class from which he came, and his morality throve upon class distinctions even when it claimed to supersede them” (*Victorianweb*). As opposed to *David Copperfield*, Pip is not a middle-class narrator; however, while his narrative is more nuanced and mature than *David Copperfield*’s, it still portrays clearly stabilizing structures either by denying social mobility on the whole or by granting it only in exchange for the sacrifice of happiness. *Great Expectations* portrays again my four thesis points as it works to stabilize positions and, consequently, social hierarchies.

To begin with, Pip and David have a few things in common: they both take the narrative role in their story, they are both orphans, they are both in love with somebody of a higher station, and they both want to climb in society. However, there are also some crucial points that distinguish one from the other: Pip’s family is clearly working class, while David’s is middle class. Pip does not work for his money; rather, he receives it as an act of gratitude from a convict he once helped, while David first lives off his aunt but later on has to work both to achieve and to keep his position. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether Pip achieves domestic happiness, while the text’s structure definitely renders David successful in attaining his blissful middle-class home. The most important question is: what are the crucial differences between these two characters in that one is granted domestic and economic success, while the other is granted only economic success? This question will underlie my following investigation.

The first stage of the text presents Pip as a child that has not yet acquired his ambitions, a stage which Robert Stange terms Pip's "natural condition" (517). Pip describes himself as particularly obedient to those socially above him, and has no hesitation in following precisely what they ask him to, often without any further reflection. An instance of this obedience is the scene in which he meets Herbert for the first time:

'Come and fight,' said the pale young gentleman. What could I do but follow him? I have often asked myself the question since; but, what else could I do? His manner was so final and I was so astonished, that I followed where he led, as if I had been under a spell. (*Great Expectations*, *GE*, 77)

Pip is very much under a spell here—that of the dominant hierarchy in the society that he inhabits. Without explicitly referring to it, he assumes his lower position in the encounter and submits to Herbert's assumed power. Through meeting his other, he begins to reflect on his identity.

The process of finding an identity is closely connected to that of knowing one's station. Pip's process of acquiring an identity along the lines of others is thus a useful point of analysis in understanding patterns of movement and underlying power structures that control these. He begins his narrative by stating his full name and his nickname but immediately proceeds to speak of his parents' tombstone and the authority of their names on it: "As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from their tombstones" (3). Thus, the reader learns two things very quickly: Firstly, Pip is an orphan, and, secondly, his destiny is from the very beginning determined by his lack of knowing where exactly he comes from. According to Robert Stange, "he is an orphan who must search for a father and define his own condition" (519). His orphanhood is important in the development of the plot as it highlights an important aspect in connection to social mobility, that of origin and inheritance.

As Pip cannot, in contrast to David Copperfield, base his claim to upward mobility in his origin, he must find other ways of justifying it. He begins doing so by highlighting his interest in getting an education and his susceptibility to being a scholar. Furthermore, his search for a father and a legitimate background for his gentility includes denouncing Joe and, finally, his benefactor, Magwitch. In short, Pip has to cut any family entanglement to rise, leaving him without domestic comfort in the end.

Instead of presenting Pip's ambitions as a longing for financial success, they are presented as a longing for education and refinement. However, education at the time was a definite class marker, so this might be seen as a connection to class and upward mobility

anyway. Furthermore, Tamai claims, “[e]ducation is the only means for the oppressed to subvert the power structure” (60). Pip’s endeavour to learn can thus be understood as a direct threat to the prevailing hierarchy. Joe comments that he would have liked to get an education as well but was prevented from doing so by his wife. Tamai discusses Joe’s illiteracy and explains how it “does not result from the limitation of his intellectual capacity but just from his obedience to his tyrannical wife” (63). According to Joe, his first wife did not want him to learn, as she was afraid he might want to climb in station “like a sort of rebel” (*GE* 61). After Mrs Joe’s death, he remarries Biddy, who teaches him how to read; however, his education is no longer threatening as Biddy also offers him domestic happiness and, therefore, an incentive to remain within his station.

In Joe’s denied wish to learn lies a potential criticism as he can be understood as a representative of a whole group of people who are denied an education. While his awareness of his being oppressed through this denied education is extraordinary, it does not go beyond a pattern of domestic submission. Mrs Joe is at fault, and Joe is the one who suffers. All four of my thesis points are at work here: Joe’s destiny is presented as individual; class oppression is obscured and replaced by domestic oppression; Joe’s station is presented as suited to his natural disposition; and, finally, his denied advancement is alleviated by his marriage to Biddy and their domestic happiness.

Despite a general interest in education, the longing for change, which later leads to Pip’s second stage of consciousness, begins when he starts to visit Miss Havisham. According to Elihu Pearlman, Miss Havisham’s daughter Estella, who becomes Pip’s love interest, is “the inspirer of [Pip’s] desire to rise” (559). She is his opposite in all aspects and offers him a position against which he can define himself. This pattern of coming into knowledge through meeting an opposite stretches throughout the entire text. Peter Capuano quotes Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, who exposed the “contradictory psychological effects that rapid economic transition had on the middle-class subject” (197). According to Stallybrass and White, the bourgeois subject “defined and re-defined itself through the exclusion of what is marked as ‘low’,” so that the identity of the bourgeois subject is defined through this mechanism of exclusion (qtd. in Capuano 197). Hence, knowing one’s station might be presented as knowing where one does not belong. Pip presents this very pattern of coming into knowledge. The vital aspects in his consciousness and understanding do not become clear to him until he encounters their opposite, with Estella being the first example of this. As much as she humiliates Pip, she is also the outset of his rising understanding of his lower position

and the beginning of his wanting to advance out of it. As he walks back home after his first visit at Miss Havisham's, he begins to think about his station:

I set off on the four-mile walk to our forge; pondering, as I went along, on all I had seen, and deeply revolving that I was a common labouring-boy; that my hands were coarse, that my boots were thick; that I had fallen into a despicable habit of calling knaves Jacks; that I was much more ignorant than I had considered myself last night, and generally that I was in a low-lived, bad way. (*GE* 55)

These thoughts signify an important shift in Pip's consciousness as they highlight how he now defines himself along his opposite. According to Frantz Fanon, the black man only becomes black in his position opposing the white man, so the oppressed is dependent on the other because this other stresses the oppressed's idea of having to enhance their status (187). Pip himself feels that he can only be with Estella if he becomes a gentleman, so he forms the ambition of climbing out of his lowly position, of leaving his "low-lived, bad way" (*GE* 55). His belief that he can advance seemingly breaks with the earlier predominant idea of ultimately natural positions.

Although his encounter with Estella is the main point of forming his consciousness within the narrative of social mobility, Pip openly admits to making up his mind by discarding an opposite several times. For instance, when he finally comes to understand Joe's worth, it is not because he has gone through a long process of coming to terms with his position and his consequent disappointment but rather because he compares Joe to Mr Pumblechook: "I had never been struck at so keenly, for my thanklessness to Joe, as through the brazen impostor Pumblechook. The falser he, the truer Joe; the meaner he, the nobler Joe" (356). Pip's identity, first as a working-class boy and later as a gentleman, is constantly formed along its opposite. Bruce Robbins speaks about Gayatri Spivak's discussion of upward mobility and claims, "Bertha Mason, in Spivak's analysis, has the same function as Joe Gargery and the forge do in *Great Expectations*: they suggest that upward mobility can happen only as betrayal of those left behind" (17). Pip can thus only fulfil his expectations by abandoning his family connection with Joe. Most importantly, Pip never aligns himself opposing a collective; instead, it is always two individuals who oppose each other. Consequently, any sense of collective inequality is denied and the focus remains on individual destinies and natural stations.

Tamai discusses how processes of inclusion and exclusion mark both the history of the gentleman and the liberal history of democracy. Groups as well as individuals need to define themselves by excluding an 'other':

In *Great Expectations*, while an inclusionary impulse can be found in Pip's incorporation into the category of gentleman, this exclusionary impulse is most clearly

manifested in the characterisation of Magwitch, who is destined to die and be expelled from the text at the end of the story. (56)

Pip only comes into his expectations through seeing that which he does not have in Estella. Differences are at the base of the inclusion and exclusion processes, and these “have the potential for mobilisation in a variety of forms such as gender, race, and class,” asserts Tamai (56). In *Great Expectations*, as well as in *David Copperfield*, the differences of class are often concealed or obscured by a focus on gender.

Pip does not understand what it is to be a gentleman until he meets his other in Miss Havisham and Estella. Consequently, he does not want to be a gentleman until he falls in love with Estella, or so he claims. When Pip is already apprenticed to Joe to become a blacksmith, he confesses his real dreams to Biddy: “‘Biddy,’ I said, after binding her to secrecy. ‘I want to be a gentleman’ (GE 107). Biddy, who is much more pragmatic and knows her station inquires whether Pip does not think that he would be happier as he is (107), but he goes as far as to claim, “I am disgusted with my calling and with my life” (108). Importantly, he bases his entire wish of upward mobility on the wish to be able to marry Estella. What Pip, like David Copperfield, does not understand is that his interest in Estella has a clear basis in his interest in rising in society; he sees it as a romantic endeavour to fulfil his destiny of being with Estella. Pip acquires his ambitions, which will grant him a rise in station but will also cause his denied happiness as he defies two important Victorian morals: modesty and empathy.

To advance, Pip denounces his earlier family connections and also his connection to manual labour. As mentioned before, a man that was once a manual labourer is very unlikely to rise into a white-collar profession. In David Copperfield’s narrative, the reader encountered a narrator that was extremely self-conscious of having to work and worked hard to hide this dark spot in his biography. The same can be found in Pip’s narrative: “What I dreaded was, that in some unlucky hour I, being at my grimest and commonest, should lift up my eyes and see Estella looking in at one of the wooden windows of the forge” (92). Though it is Estella in particular that Pip does not want to be found out by, it is what she represents that is significant here: the genteel class and thus upward mobility. The major difference between Pip and David is that David works as a child but does not come from a lower class family, while Pip is supposed to be a workingman for life because he comes from a family which earns its livelihood through manual labour. Pip carries the same preconceptions as David and bases his superiority to the others of his class on the belief that he is destined to do better in life as he personally has the potential to do so. Again, the reader never quite learns why Pip believes

himself superior, but the reader knows that Pip has no clearly defined origin, which explains his initial confusion about his station.

After acquiring his ambitions, Pip loses his modesty and his empathy. He begins to feel superior to Joe and the other members in his immediate surroundings. Particularly in his behaviour to Joe, who has been nothing but kind to him throughout his entire life, Pip shows an arrogance that goes to the extreme. He expresses this arrogance in the following: “I wanted to make Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society and less open to Estella’s reproach” (93). Although he regrets this behaviour when he is older and reflects on his own ambitions critically, it might be argued that he is never quite able to compensate for the damage that he has caused with it, as he is now successful but without a family and a happy home.

Throughout the development of the text, Joe remains Pip’s other in being thoroughly selfless and virtuous. Eventually, it is Pip’s emotional return to Joe that marks his repentance. Stange argues, “the moral of this return to Joe sharply contradicts the accepted picture of Dickens as a radical critic of society: Joe is a humble countryman who is content with the place in the social order he has been appointed to fulfil. He fills it ‘well and with respect’; Pip learns that he can do no better than to emulate him” (523). Significantly, only Joe and Bidley finally achieve a happy ending as they marry, have a son, and find domestic happiness. As they are the two characters who most clearly do not challenge their station, it can be argued that they are rewarded for this within the narrative. Their lack of ambition is naturalized, and they are presented as content individuals.

Joe’s position is naturalized through several factors, his appearance being a first hint. Whenever he dresses in something other than his working clothes, they do not quite fit him: “In his working clothes, Joe was a well-knit, characteristic-looking blacksmith; in his holiday clothes, he was more like a scarecrow in good circumstances, than anything else” (*GE* 20). Rather than merely pointing to Joe’s much more natural and well-composed appearance when wearing work clothes, the text also stresses the direct connection between Joe’s identity and his occupation. Furthermore, that these are holiday clothes points to another concept which is unnatural to Joe: leisure time. Whenever he dresses in his suit, he is away from the hearth, and the narrative strongly implies that the hearth is the only place where he is comfortable. Importantly, this is presented in such a manner that makes it seem as though Joe is perfectly happy with his situation. He is the only one of the main characters in the text that is rewarded throughout its development. After Mrs Joe’s death, he finally receives domestic bliss by marrying Bidley and having a son with her, whom they name after Pip.

Much like the Peggottys in *David Copperfield*, Joe is steadfast. He cares for others, as shown when he marries Pip's sister and accepts to raise Pip as his own. Although he is treated with contempt by Pip for a number of years, he remains loyal and finally nurses Pip back to health when the latter falls sick. The reader learns why Joe is uneducated and a blacksmith when he explains to his nephew that his father was an alcoholic who used to beat him and his mother and that after they had left the father, this father "were that good at hart that he couldn't abear to be without us" (39). Joe's position in life is therefore related to his family background and rendered an individual fate rather than the doom of an entire group. However, this narrative might also highlight a connection to the general penchant for violence in the working classes, which might then be understood as an allusion to some sort of collective identity. Significantly, these hints at possible collectives are only brought up when they serve to justify denied mobility, such as when highlighting the entire lower classes as funny, honest, beautiful, dim-witted, dense, comical, and generally happy in their stations.

Mrs Joe behaves exactly as a working-class individual would be expected to: she uses physical violence, she is aroused by this precise kind of violence, she works hard to keep the household, and she does not allow herself time for the aesthetic or for idleness. The last of these character traits she expresses quite clearly when she points out that she will not go and listen to the carols as Joe and Pip want to: "I'm rather partial to Carols, myself, and that's the best of reasons for my never hearing any" (19). She takes the role of a martyr in this scene, which this passage somewhat mockingly points out. Her sacrificing herself for the greater good of the family is central: she will not allow herself idle enjoyments such as this one as she is too busy keeping the house. However, by highlighting her hard work, she disqualifies herself as the truly selfless Angel of the House.

Pip describes his sister much like David describes Peggotty:

My sister Mrs Joe, with black hair and eyes had such a prevailing redness of skin that I sometimes used to wonder whether it was possible she washed herself with a nutmeg-grater instead of soap. She was tall and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron, fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square, impregnable bib in front that was stuck full of pins and needles. (8)

While Peggotty has an inherent quality of goodness about her and behaves motherly to David, Mrs Joe does no such thing. Her denial or, possibly, incapability of creating a domestic haven and her constant vocal affirmations of her unhappiness in her station are finally what justify her early death.

In his relationship with Mrs Joe Gargery, Joe takes the inferior position—childlike as Tamai argues (58)—in which he becomes subject to her violence and her scrutiny. It is

because of her that he does not get to study, and it is because of her that he does not try to improve his position. Tamai claims, “although Joe is physically an adult, mentally he is also a powerless child, ‘a larger species of child,’ and ‘no more than [Pip’s] equal’, as Pip puts it” (58). Joe is not permitted to climb based on his inferior position and youthful immaturity; however, Joe is also the only character that finally receives a happy ending. That is, when Mrs Joe Gargery’s death finally relieves him of his duty to her, he can be with Bidley, who does not hold him back but who offers him a happy home and, consequently, an incentive to remain in his station. She is the ultimate stabilizing instance as she offers domestic bliss at the level that Joe naturally occupies. The narrative seems to suggest that social mobility and the unfortunate consequences that it has for most is not necessary as long as one can find domestic happiness within one’s station.

Bidley is the woman in *Great Expectations* who comes closest to being the Angel of the House. However, she is also clearly submissive: “[...] there was an air of humble propitiation in all she did, such as I have seen pervade the bearing of a child towards a hard master” (105). The pattern of rewarding female characters that display these character traits with happy endings implies that submission, if possibly even desirable, is at least what functions best in the societal structures they inhabit. The same pattern can be found in Little Dorrit’s selflessness and in Agnes Wickfield’s class-surpassing charity.

The Convict Magwitch

Throughout the narrative, Pip is haunted by his association with the convict Magwitch, whom he helped survive on the marshes. He feels that it is a “guiltily coarse and common thing [...] to be on secret terms of conspiracy with convicts” (67). The problematic aspect of his entanglement with the convict reaches its climax, which is also the narrative’s climax, when Pip discovers that his secret benefactor is Magwitch, who had been deported to Australia where he made his fortune, which he is now giving to Pip so that he can live a gentleman’s life.

Magwitch and Joe are similar in several aspects: they both know their station, they are empathic and they both assume a father role in Pip’s life. Magwitch expresses himself with never-ending gratitude when he states, “I lived rough, that you should live smooth; I worked hard, that you should be above work” (273). This does not fulfil the requirements for an appropriate gentleman according to Victorian standards as the narrative suggests that a gentleman must be either born into his station or work hard to achieve it. Pip has done neither, so his position is challenged. Furthermore, Magwitch wants to assume a father’s role in Pip’s

life; in fact, according to him, he has already assumed this role: “Look’ee here, Pip. I’m your second father. You’re my son—more to me nor any son” (273). Pip arguably freed himself of a lowly family entanglement by leaving Joe and the forge, but through Magwitch’s claim of a father’s role, Pip is now dragged back into this lowly position.

Money as such does not make a gentleman, and it most certainly does not increase happiness. Even when Pip first acquires his fortune and thus seems to fulfil his dream to be a gentleman, he is not truly happy: “Dissatisfied with my fortune, of course I could not be; but it is possible that I may have been, without knowing it, dissatisfied with myself” (122). John Bowen comments, “[...] it is striking how little happiness Pip’s good fortune and gentility brings, how little pleasure comes with money and status” (XIII). After his fall back down from the genteel class, Pip returns home hoping to be forgiven and to reconcile with his past. While it is still not what he wants to do, Pip supposes that he will have to marry Biddy as it now seems the most sensible alternative to him; however, Pip is too late because Joe has already married her.

In *Great Expectations*, money, generally, does not make anybody happy. Miss Havisham is supposedly the character of highest status, but she is unhappy because the man she loved only wanted her money and tricked her. Estella marries a rich man, Bentley Drummle, who Pip describes as “idle, proud, niggardly, reserved, and suspicious” (173). By doing so, Estella rises in station even further; however, her climb is also the outset for her domestic misfortune, as Drummle is described as a very manly man with strong arms, which, the reader learns, he uses on his wife (183). Charity of the monetary kind, unless it is inspired by selfless motives, is presented as destructive rather than constructive. Joe has nothing to offer Pip economically, yet he is described as the only person that can save Pip in the end. Joe comes to nurse Pip, and Pearlman quotes an important passage: “Joe wrapped me up, took me in his arms, carried me down to [the coach], and put me in, as if I were still the small helpless creature to whom he had so abundantly given of the wealth of his great nature” (555). As money is presented as an evil excrescence of society, the responsibility of making things better lies in the value of humanity. The focus of changing inequalities by redistributing wealth is obscured and the solution is found in a Christian ideal of caring for one’s neighbour. This solution, while it might have potential, still serves to deny a clear view of the actual inequalities by demonizing money and glorifying empathy and honesty.

However, empathy and honesty, qualities which both Joe and Herbert Pocket portray, are presented as leading to an incapability of being economically successful. Pip discusses this explicitly in his description of Herbert:

Herbert Pocket had a frank and easy way with him that was very taking. I had never seen anyone then, and I have never seen anyone since, who more strongly expressed to me, in every look and tone, a natural incapacity to do anything secret and mean. (*GE* 152)

Although he comes from a relatively affluent family, Herbert is described as naturally good, and Pip connects this natural goodness with the inability to be economically successful as he moves on to say directly in his next sentence, “There was something wonderfully hopeful about his general air, and something that at the same time whispered to me he would never be successful or rich” (152). Dickens here breaks with the stereotypes that are still readily portrayed in *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit*. Evil is no longer in specific individuals; instead, it is money that makes these specific individuals act in certain ways and is thus the cause of unfortunate happenings in *Great Expectations*. The problem, however, is not seen in the uneven distribution and manner of achieving wealth.

A second reason as to why Pip cannot be rendered a gentleman by acquiring his fortune through Magwitch is because it is not earned through his own hard work. Instead, he comes into it through a charitable act of another, which is a most crucial aspect. He both actively inspires to move upward as well as he is passively raised by someone who should be naturally below him. Both these aspects upset the social hierarchy, so his climb is initially rendered unsuccessful. He does finally live life legitimately somewhat above his initial station, as the cathartical meeting with Magwitch has taught him proper morals and has reconciled him with his past. However, it can be argued that Pip is never quite granted a truly happy ending as he does not definitely acquire domestic bliss in the form of marriage and a family.

Magwitch, like Joe, is described as naturally lowly and, consequently, unfit for dressing in gentlemen’s clothes or any other clothes than working clothes. To disguise him when he comes to London, Pip tries to put different attire on him; however, this act of hiding his ‘true’ character does not function well. Pip states, “Whatever he put on, became him less (it dismally seemed to me) than what he had worn before. To my thinking, there was something in him that made it hopeless to attempt to disguise him” (286). The natural lowness of Magwitch’s being stands out no matter what he wears, which establishes a connection between his class background and his genetic background. Pierre Bourdieu argues in *Distinction* that taste is culturally appropriated (67). However, in *Great Expectations* it is presented as something in Magwitch’s nature that makes him fit only for the position which he holds. His typical behaviour is described as follows:

[H]e had a barrack way with him of hanging about one spot, in one unsettled manner, and going through one round of observances with his pipe and his negro-head and his jack-knife and his pack of cards, and what not, as if it were all put down for him on a slate. (*GE* 289)

Much like Joe, he is not cultivated and can, therefore, not be part of the genteel classes. However, much like Joe, he has no interest in rising beyond his station; rather, he wants Pip to do so.

The charity which Magwitch offers to Pip works against the constructed pattern of downward charity, which means that a congenial ending to their relationship would upset the entire social structure. Consequently, Magwitch has to die, Pip has to recover his humble self, and he has to make his fortune on his own. Pip shows an awareness of this inappropriate charity as he only takes his seat beside Magwitch when the latter is about to die, claiming it as his for the rest of Magwitch's life:

[W]hen I took my place by Magwitch's side, I felt that that was my place henceforth while he lived. For now my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted, wounded, shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously towards me with great constancy throughout a series of years. (379)

The patronage is reversed now as Pip can execute his pity and empathy on Magwitch rather than the other way around. According to Stange, Pip has by this point accepted Magwitch "and come to love him as a true father" (519). While Stange makes many interesting points in his essay, I strongly disagree with this particular one. Pip has not come to love Magwitch as a father, which would imply accepting him as an equal; he is quite aware that he would not be able to remain a gentleman with Magwitch as a father figure, so he claims that he "could not be sorry at heart for his being badly hurt, since it was unquestionably best that he should die" (*GE* 380). Instead of having come to love Magwitch, Pip has rediscovered his empathic heart. "In sympathizing with Magwitch," argues Robert G. Stange, "Pip assumes the criminal's guilt; in suffering with and finally loving the despised and rejected man he finds his own real self" (519-520). He rediscovers a set of strong Christian values that he can execute and that will make him a gentleman in the moral sense even if he cannot be so in the economic sense at this particular moment.

According to Stange, in Pip's final narrative stage, "he returns to his birthplace, abandons his false expectations, accepts the limitations of his condition, and achieves a partial synthesis of the virtue of his innocent youth and the melancholy insight of his later experience" (518). Pip wants to repent by marrying Biddy, but he is too late as Biddy has already married Joe. As he cannot repent in this way, he might arguably not be able to repent

at all. It is, however, also possible to see his continued longing for Estella, who is found out to be the daughter of Magwitch and a servant of gypsy origin, as a kind of marrying down to the lowest possible level, so his pursuing of her might be the final device of repentance. As the narrative has an open ending, the reader cannot be sure whether Pip might be denied to marry Estella, in which case he would be denied domestic happiness altogether, and his climb could be said to be thoroughly punished.

Estella

Estella is a very different kind of woman to Biddy as she has been raised to fulfil a different purpose. As an orphan, Estella had the chance to escape her destiny of a miserable, lowly life through Miss Havisham's adoption of her. Should her parentage become known, however, she would be judged by it as all others are and would have to be demoted into a lower class again. Consequently, Mr Jaggers claims it is best not to tell her about the rediscovered father. Mr Jaggers states, "I think it would hardly serve her, to establish her parentage for the information of her husband, and to drag her back to disgrace, after an escape of twenty years, pretty secure to last for life" (*GE* 351). Her natural heritage as the daughter of a gypsy murderess and the convict Magwitch can be denied by focusing on her nurtured heritage.

Although Pip does not consciously observe this, his interest in Estella can be claimed to be as much informed by the wish to climb the social ladder as is David Copperfield's interest in Dora. She represents what Pip aspires to and is described much like upper-class individuals in *David Copperfield*. Estella is "beautiful and self-possessed" (48), which are two important points that distinguish her from Pip's sister, for example. However, as opposed to Dora, Estella is described as seeming much older, which might be a hint at her actual origin:

Though she called me a 'boy' so often, and with a carelessness that was far from complimentary, she was of about my own age. She seemed much older than I, of course, being a girl, and beautiful and self-possessed; and she was as scornful of me as if she had been one-and-twenty, and a queen. (48)

Her superior behaviour is mainly related to her gender, although it can be argued that the self-possession is an acquired skill that highlights her nurtured, superior class background.

According to Pearlman, there is an important parallel to be found in David Copperfield's and Pip's love interests: "In each novel the hero must choose between sex and home, that is between a woman whom he loves with overpowering passion, and another woman, a surrogate sister, who represents good sense, duty, obligation, motherhood, religion" (558). I argue that beyond this, in each novel, the hero must choose between the thrill of rising beyond one's station and the comfort of a home. Significantly, only those that choose the latter are

presented as truly happy because the creation of a domestic space which can be home in the better sense is understood as the ultimate goal.

Estella presents all the class snobbery to be expected, though she can, in fact, not be sure of her superior background. When asked by Miss Havisham to play cards with Pip, she refuses at first: “With this boy! Why, he is a common labouring-boy!” (50). She makes Pip feel inferior and shows no sympathy towards him at all. Pip assumes that Estella is naturally superior to him, but Capuano explains his misjudgement: “Estella appears to ‘inherit’ a capacity for similar behaviour as she uses her ‘white,’ ‘taunting hand’ to reinforce her inaccessibility” (200). In Capuano’s argument, these descriptions incorporate a Ruskinian “notion of gentility as an organic sensibility where the ‘finesse of nature’ is figured as a category of ‘breeding’” (200). Until the very end of *Great Expectations*, Pip is completely incapable of seeing Estella as anything less than of aristocratic background, which shows that he is incapable of seeing the Victorian ideology that “tended to convert differences in the acquisition of culture into differences of nature” (200). In this aspect *Great Expectations* is different than *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit* because it questions, if very carefully, the notion of gentility as being acquired by birth.

Capuano borrows his formulation from Bourdieu, who introduces a valuable theory of the connection between culture and nature:

The ideology of natural taste owes its plausibility and its efficacy to the fact that, like all the ideological strategies generated in the everyday class struggle, it *naturalizes* real differences, converting differences in the mode of acquisition of culture into differences of nature; it only recognizes as legitimate the relation to culture (or language) which least bears the visible marks of its genesis, which has nothing ‘academic’, ‘scholastic’, ‘bookish’, ‘affected’ or ‘studied’ about it, but manifests by its ease and naturalness that true culture is nature—a new mystery of immaculate conception. (68)

Through her manner of behaving as superior and treating Pip as inferior, Estella establishes a class position that she does not naturally hold. Capuano concludes, “Estella’s beauty and inaccessibility lead Pip to assume that there is something ‘natural’ about her class position, an assumption which exemplifies Bourdieu’s notion that social values become visible as acts of culture” (201). The lower-individuals reinforce their positions to the same extent by constantly reinforcing their lowness and exerting their identities in the stations they hold in void of the possibility to rise beyond them and to find new identities.

Estella’s class identity, however, is by nature even lower than Pip’s initial status, as she is the daughter of a convict and a gypsy murderess. She is not aware of this, but Pip learns these circumstances through Mr Jaggers. The question of Estella’s background and its

importance is of course important in analysing the end of the novel and also the possibility of Pip's being with her while being a gentleman. According to Pearlman, Dickens evaded giving his narrative a clear ending precisely because of this complicated question: "Would Pip really be free of the class he has forsaken if he married Estella?" (560). Estella's fate in the narrative is as unclear as is her class belonging: "If Estella were one class or the other, she could be either shunned, or embraced. But she is neither, and the ending of the novel is consequently left unresolved" (560). Her unclear class background and their possible family connections cannot be contained within the stabilizing pattern of the novel, so it is left untouched in an open-ended dénouement.

Magwitch's Narrative

Chapter forty-two marks a significant change in narrative perspective as Magwitch, someone who has been "'in jail and out of jail' all his life" (Bowen XIII), assumes the role of the narrator. He describes how he comes from a very poor household and how he needed to and wanted to work but was not able to find a steady job. Instead, he describes how he did "a bit of most things that don't pay and lead to trouble" and how he "got to be a man" (*GE* 294). Devoid of an occupation to identify with, Magwitch claims his gender as his subject position. However, this position is quickly replaced by the identity of the criminal, which then replaces the necessity of the gender identity as it consumes it so thoroughly.

Magwitch describes how he met Compeyson, who became his patron. Unfortunately, the patronage of this man leads him to worse and worse deeds. He describes the man as having "no more heart than an iron file, he was as cold as death, and he had the head of the Devil afore mentioned," and the most highly valued qualities, compassion and pity, are foreign to Compeyson who "was a-having pity on nothing and nobody" (295). An allusion to race is mingled into the description of subjecting power here: "I'll simply say to you, dear boy, and Pip's comrade, that that man got me into such nets as made me his black slave" (296). The pattern of submission is presented through a concept of oppressor and oppressed that is related to race rather than class, so inequalities are not seen as of an economic basis; instead, they are understood as based on natural differences.

Another instance that takes a quick detour into a race and thus colonial discourse is that social mobility in *Great Expectations* is not only concerned with mobility within England. In fact, the event that sets the mobility in motion comes from abroad in the form of Magwitch's money. This pattern diverts the basis of the narrative's troubling events away from class and into a discourse of nationality, into the threat of what might be abroad and what

might come to challenge the social order within English society. John Bowen discusses this in relation to both *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*:

At the end of *David Copperfield*, Dickens shipped off many of the characters to Australia to begin a new life, simply as a convenient way of disposing of surplus or awkward individuals. In *Great Expectations*, the reverse movement occurs, not out from the imperial core to the colonized periphery but back from Australia to London and the life of the genteel middle-classes. (XIII)

This backward movement was already somewhat hinted at by Mrs Micawber in *David Copperfield*, who moves to Australia with her family to make their fortune, but who states that she wishes to come back one day. Now that the return is set in motion, the supposed danger of it is presented in a narrative that presents the returned as virtuous or dangerous and, most importantly, still incapable of surviving in the old world.

Ultimately, all narrative strings of deception, unfair treatment, and inequality run together in one evil individual: Compeyson. None of the decisive events of the novel would have happened, so the narrative suggests, if Compeyson had not existed. Miss Havisham would not have been deceived, she might not have adopted Estella, Pip would not have acquired his ambitions by meeting Estella, Magwitch would not have been a criminal, Pip would not have gotten into money, and everyone would have remained where they originally were. Consequently, the supposed chaos in the narrative and the unhappiness of all these individuals is not caused by an unjust system; rather, it is caused by an individual being that does not have the correct moral standards to be part of a functioning Victorian society: “That evil genius, Compeyson, the worst of scoundrels among many scoundrels,” as Magwitch calls him (*GE* 344).

The motif of an evil individual that is at fault for anything that goes wrong within the narrative world of *Great Expectations* is precisely as it is in *David Copperfield*. Individual fault is put into focus rather than a failure of society as a whole. Orlick, who works for Joe at first, also leaves the forge and he, in contrast to Pip, is rendered a villain in his attempt and ambition to rise beyond his position. A bit like Uriah Heep, he is an unhappy individual who tries to bring about change. However, the manner in which he does this is illegitimate as he questions societal structures at the same time as he commits actual illegal offences. Orlick blames Pip for having given him a bad name (*GE* 359). Pip, however, denies this fervently, claiming that Orlick “gained it for himself” (359). Although Orlick admits to having been the actual committer of the crime on Pip’s sister, he still claims that it is Pip’s fault: “... it warn’t Old Orlick as did it; it was you. You were favoured, and he was bullied and beat” (361). This speech is very similar to that of Uriah Heep. It highlights the differences that Pip and Orlick

faced from very early on; but instead of allowing these to be based on class, they are diverted into differences of individual character.

Tamai speaks about the “persistent fear of the working classes who were often regarded as savage, and marginalised as such” (56). This fear is what both Orlick and Heep react to. They question the grounds of it and highlight how they have been made to be as they are. These two break out of the pattern of accepting one’s position, which directly leads to the acceptance of the overall societal structures. However, the narrative renders their outbursts harmless to a certain extent, as they are merely criminal individuals that do not have the correct morals to speak or to be taken serious to begin with.

Alleviating Inequalities

The alleviation of inequalities in *David Copperfield* was mainly based on the concept of charity and of domestic bliss as ultimate happy ending. While the achievement of domestic bliss takes a very similar position of rewarding or punishing the characters in *Great Expectations* as it does in *David Copperfield*, the concept of charity is presented in a somewhat more complex manner. Questions of empathy and pity are closely related to the overall question of charity that stretches throughout the text.

Great Expectations marks a change in the alleviating factors that were to be encountered in *David Copperfield* as it does not offer a truly happy ending for any of the characters except Biddy and Joe. Significantly, Biddy and Joe are the only ones who have never challenged their station or even hinted at ambitions beyond it. They both know where they belong and are contented with their station, which is plot-wise rewarded. Bowen states, “In many of his other novels Dickens wants to believe that romantic relationships, particularly marriage, can provide a haven from the conflicts and violence that exist outside the home” (XIV). This is seldom achieved in *Great Expectations*, in which domestic violence and unfulfilled romantic longing are central events. The ending of the text is particularly noteworthy as it is rather open but was originally intended to deny domestic happiness to Pip.

Domestic bliss in Pip’s initial family home is denied because of his physically assaultive sister. The text repeatedly refers to her bringing Pip up ‘by hand’ (8). Furthermore, she beats not only Pip but also her husband, Joe. The implication of this is two-fold: Firstly, it highlights the uncontrolled nature of lower class individuals, their lack of cultivated behaviour, and their inability to solve conflict without physical violence. Another supporting argument for this claim is to be found in the situation in which Joe has to strike Orlick because he has been disrespectful to Mrs Joe. Although the sister dramatically faints at the

end of the fight, she is presented as quite happy to watch it first. Secondly, it helps to develop the narrative of Pip as a searching individual. He is not happy at the outset of the novel, although he does not know any better, but once he meets Estella, he realizes that there could be other options and begins to form his ambitions.

Pip does not begin to question his home and family connections until he meets Miss Havisham and Estella. Their home is not home in the better sense either; however, Pip accepts their superior position merely because they claim it so confidently. Understanding that their standing in life is superior to his, he begins to feel ashamed of his home and speaks about this shame as the most miserable thing:

I had believed in the best parlour as a most elegant saloon; I had believed in the front door, as a mysterious portal of the Temple of State whose solemn opening was attended with a sacrifice of roast fowls; I had believed in the kitchen as a chaste though not magnificent apartment; I had believed in the forge as the glowing road to manhood and independence. (91)

As though going through an awakening, he finds his alterity in Miss Havisham and Estella and now feels that their position is what he needs to aspire to. His comparisons seem those of a more mature narrator as it is very unlikely that a child should draw such specific conclusions and be able to reflect on his situation so thoroughly. Importantly, it is not Pip's concept of class positions that awakens here; rather, it is his concept of manhood which he so far saw as connected to the forge but now sees in the development into a gentleman.

The concept of home in *Great Expectations* is complicated, yet it is clearly the key to ultimate happiness. Much like it was in *David Copperfield*, it is one of the major goals for all main characters to create a home that can be considered 'home in the better sense' as Schragger Lang discusses it (15). Crucially, this concept applies only to the middle-class home; consequently, a working-class home that portrays these precise characteristics would challenge the ideal as it would upset class relations. In all three texts, *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* and *Little Dorrit*, there is no such thing as a working-class home in the better sense, despite of what the narrators might have their readers believe. Pip's home is rendered not a home in the better sense because it lacks the nurturing mother, in fact, it lacks parents altogether as Pip is, in essence, an orphan.

Charity is another important alleviating factor for inequalities, especially in *David Copperfield*, but the concept is much more complex in *Great Expectations*. At the beginning of the novel, Pip is presented as a compassionate and caring individual. He is genuinely happy when he sees that the convict enjoys the food that he brings to him and narrates it as follows: "Pitying his desolation, and watching him as he gradually settled down upon the pie, I made

bold to say, 'I am glad you enjoy it'" (17). Charity here comes from Pip and is directed toward an individual who is even lower than him; consequently, it is presented as valuable and appropriate.

Joe is just as inclined as Pip to feel friendly toward the convicts on the marshes, and they discuss how they hope that the sergeants will not be able to find them. Joe states, "I'd give a shilling if they had cut and run, Pip" (29), and he forgives the convict for stealing the pie: "We don't know what you have done, but we wouldn't have you starved to death for it, poor miserable fellow-creatur" (34). However, once Pip is corrupted by his ambition towards upward mobility, his charity is no longer presented as honest and caring:

I promised myself that I would do something for them one of these days, and formed a plan in outline for bestowing a dinner of roast and plum pudding, a pint of ale, and a gallon of condescension, upon everybody in the village. (124)

The mature narrator Pip seems to reflect on his feeling of superiority here. Stange claims that Pip's charity in his second stage of consciousness is no longer of the true and honourable kind: "he acts through calculation rather than through instinctive charity, his moral values deteriorate as his social graces improve" (517). While this behaviour then points to a corrupted mind, unhappy although rich as well as highly condescending, it merely serves to render Pip's individual conduct of charity insincere and does not go as far as criticizing the concept of charity altogether.

Pip very clearly separates between affection and money, and between morals and economics. The kiss that he is allowed to give to Estella after having fought with Herbert feels much too unaffectionate for him. Here, he makes a striking point about his preference for affection over money: "I kissed her cheek as she turned it to me. I think I would have gone through a great deal to kiss her cheek. But, I felt that the kiss was given to the coarse common boy as a piece of money might have been, and that it was worth nothing" (*GE* 78). This is an important point as it might highlight the slightest of understanding of the concept of charity. The young lady granted the kiss charitably, but it is not what Pip really longs for as it still contains all the disregard and superiority that Estella stands for. What Pip wants is to kiss her like an equal, but he is denied this as Estella points out that he is not.

Overall, the narrative in *Great Expectations* renders Pip an undeserving climber and thus unhappy. Precisely as in the narrative in *David Copperfield* and, as we will see, also in the narrative of *Little Dorrit*, this novel obscures the basis for inequalities and renders them natural. Particularly the concept of charity takes an important role in highlighting that which is proper and that which is improper.

Little Dorrit

Although *Little Dorrit* was published before *Great Expectations*, between 1855 and 1857, I present it last in my analysis. This is for the simple reason that Little Dorrit is a quite different social climber than Pip and David are. Most obviously, she is different because of her gender. Another aspect that prompted me to include *Little Dorrit* as a comparison in this analysis is that many critics have claimed that specifically this text highlighted Charles Dickens's progressive understanding of the class system and its inequalities.

To begin with, Lionel Trilling claims that although all of Dickens's novels might be said to be about society, *Little Dorrit* "is more about society than any other of the novels, that it is about society in its very essence" (357). The audience's perception of the text was rather negative as opposed to Dickens's other novels, which Peter Preston, in the introduction to the Wordsworth Classics edition attributes to the darker nature of the text and its subject matter (VI). According to him, "*Little Dorrit* is a dark novel, in which Dickens can barely control his anger or find relief for his despair in the good nature and high spirits that had attracted readers to his early books" (VI). Consequently, this perception of the text as a rather dark work is often attributed to the politically and socially critical implications that it seems to have. However, by comparing *Little Dorrit* to *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, it becomes strikingly obvious that even this work presents a stabilizing narrative which makes use of my four thesis points.

In the text, a plenitude of characters move upward or downward within society although they still face class entanglements by family or occupation. While some, such as Arthur Clennam, challenge institutions and point to obvious grievances in the social system, the overall narrative renders these disruptions unheard. Instead, it draws together all strings in domestic happiness by offering the truly deserving joyful homes and by placing the undeserving in prisons or by deporting them. I strongly disagree with Preston who argues, "Dickens began to see that the blame for the condition of England lay not with any individual but with the system" (VII). While the text clearly criticizes institutions by introducing the Circumlocution Office and by laying bare the shortcomings of the banking system, it does not make the problem out as one of society as such. Instead, it presents either certain individuals or specific families as the base of the issues.

In his Marxist reading of *Little Dorrit*, Julian Markels praises the text for its view of the working classes: "Marxism's master narrative, when it does become a novel's point of entry, can produce through its form a knowledge and power unavailable to forms defined by ways of seeing apart from what is ultimately seen" (114). *Little Dorrit*, as well as *David*

Copperfield and *Great Expectations*, represents working class individuals; they become part of the narrative, and their struggles are highlighted to a certain extent. However, through aestheticizing their lives, through rendering them beautiful, good, and happy individuals, the vision of their situation is extenuated. Furthermore, the middle class is presented as overall empathic and charitable. These patterns can be established by focusing on one of the main themes and the supposed goal for most of the characters in the text—social mobility.

Although social mobility functions somewhat differently in *Little Dorrit* than it did in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, the pattern of social mobility remains as stabilizing as it is in the other two novels. Some characters are granted to climb, while others are not; no one, however, is entirely successful in his or her endeavour to advance. Those who are denied to rise in station are rendered undeserving either because of individual failure or because of their family connections; consequently, their lack of mobility is naturalized and their position presented as most comfortable to them. Moreover, the alleviating factors of domestic happiness and charity are particularly dominant within this text. Charity, in fact, takes a central role within the development of the plot and is an important mechanism in the structuring of power within *Little Dorrit's* society. Overall, the characters' moral conduct and their natural disposition to be empathic and charitable renders them either worthy or unworthy of certain positions. The focus of the challenging of class borders lies on that between the middle class and the upper class, while the working class remain in their 'natural' stations and are content with them.

Although a plenitude of characters holds vital positions in the narrative of *Little Dorrit*, it is the Dorrit family that claims the central role within it; consequently, they are the main focus of my analysis. Little (Amy) Dorrit is the youngest daughter of Mr William Dorrit, who is imprisoned for debt in the Marshalsea. Her sister Fanny together with her brother Edward 'Tip' and her uncle Frederick complete the core of the Dorrit family. All members of the family represent specific characteristics that qualify or disqualify them for specific positions within society; these will be discussed in the following. According to Langland, in presenting a naturally middle-class heroine, the text "consistently underwrites the validity of class distinctions" (104). Langland's reading of the text is related to my reading of it, but I go a step further and argue that the stable pattern of movement and the disqualification of happy endings for those who move without being worthy of it strongly stabilizes existing class distinctions while highlighting alleviating factors for the seemingly inevitable inequalities.

The Marshalsea and the Dorrits

The debtors' prison Marshalsea plays a very important role in *Little Dorrit*; in fact, prisons on the whole have been discussed as one of the text's major themes. According to Langland, the Marshalsea is "middle class at core," as it is "populated by individuals who embody the tenuousness of middle-class status, formerly 'haves' who, through reversals, have become 'have nots,' yet who might, once again, reclaim their stations or win one higher" (97). In contrast to the workhouses of the time, the Marshalsea has its inmates rest in idle expectation of change, a change that for those who are in the workhouses would be impossible to achieve. The original middle-class positions of the inmates are upheld rather than negotiated into new positions.

The Marshalsea, as Little Dorrit herself points out, is in essence a smaller scale society (*Little Dorrit, LD, 565*). It functions along the same lines of inclusion and exclusion, and its inmates exhibit the same sense of social superiority within as they would outside of prison. Mr Dorrit takes the role of the benevolent patriarch, the Father of the Marshalsea; however, his power position is based on self-delusion, which stretches throughout the entire text. All members of his family, in particular Little Dorrit, perform roles to ensure that their family status remains as it used to be: genteel. These descriptions of the family's behaviour highlight status and power as displayed on the surface, yet they also return to an understanding of them as natural. While class is a somewhat more conscious process in this narrative than it has been in *David Copperfield*, the basis of it as grounded in socio-economic injustice remains obscured throughout.

Mr Dorrit holds his station by acting in the expected manner of a man within it; so by following the cultural codes that are ascribed to the position he wishes to present as his natural, he upholds it to a certain extent. He is described as having, "a wonderful air of benignity and patronage in his manner" (*LD 80*). A useful description of class processes and identification is formulated by Amariglio, Resnick, and Wolff, who claim that "class identity is the 'understanding' agents have of themselves that enables them to participate in class processes and to occupy class positions" (491). By exhibiting a certain kind of behaviour and claiming a certain station, Mr Dorrit seems to be able to enter this class position. However, in all three novels of my analysis, this acquisition of a middle-class identity is not possible to the same extent for all characters, which highlights that Mr Dorrit is only able to claim his position because he was initially born into it. Those who actively try to rise are punished for their ambitions, while others who passively come into a higher position are usually represented as happy within it. Little Dorrit, however, marks a change here as she is not at all

happy in the position that she has been raised into and can only revert it after the death of her father and her return to the Marshalsea through marrying Arthur Clennam, who is by that time imprisoned in it.

Fanny Dorrit, Little Dorrit's older sister, is ambitious when it comes to rising beyond her station. She sees her family position even beyond the middle class, as she points out by distinguishing herself from the others in the Marshalsea. She expresses this superiority in a speech to Little Dorrit:

I am sure you'll consider what a thing it is to occupy my position, and feel a consciousness of being superior to it. I shouldn't care [...] if the others were not so common. None of them have come down in the world as we have. They are all on their own level. Common. (*LD* 226)

Fanny executes her power by threatening Mrs Merdle to marry the latter's son, Edmund Sparkler, who is hopelessly in love with her. Finally, she does marry him, although she has no romantic interest in him. For a while, this marriage raises her into the position she wishes to acquire, but this mobility is short lived, as they lose all their money when Mr Merdle, Edmund's stepfather and the God-like banker of the city, is found to have embezzled everyone's money and subsequently kills himself. The rise that Fanny aspired to is thus not accomplished, and the punishment for her ambition is to live with a dim-witted husband as a member of her initial class.

The class position that the Dorrits claim is exerted through processes of exclusion and inclusion. On the one hand, Mr Dorrit gladly receives gentlemen visitors who leave tokens of their devotion for him (charity, one might argue). On the other hand, he is careful to exert his superiority over those who surround him by offering them either charitable advice or arrogant disrespect. Specifically, when Little Dorrit brings Mrs Plornish's father, an old working-class man, to visit Mr Dorrit, the latter is rude and condescending to him to such an extreme that it is very uncomfortable for the good-hearted Little Dorrit:

The most striking of these was perhaps the relishing manner in which he remarked on the pensioner's infirmities and failings. As if he were a gracious Keeper, making a running commentary on the decline of the harmless animal he exhibited. (354)

Mr Dorrit very ostentatiously presents himself to the old man as the benevolent gentleman he once was, and still pretends to be, to re-establish the appropriate power structure and ensure that Mr Plornish's visit cannot appear as an act of charity in itself.

Fredrick Dorrit, Little Dorrit's uncle, stands more or less opposite to his brother William, her father, as he is not at all capable of upholding the status of the family. He is often referred to as the "fallen brother" (213). While Frederick claims that he is generally

different than his brother and thus incapable of living up to his expectations, William is of the opinion that he has the potential to be like him as they are of the same family, the same origin: “You might be like me, my dear Frederick; you might be, if you chose” (213). This point highlights a slight shift away from the understanding that positions are completely determined by a person’s family and origin; however, in the overall narrative, this is still a prevailing concept.

Little Dorrit

The youngest of William Dorrit’s children, Little Dorrit, is the core of the family and of the narrative. In Little Dorrit’s disposition, the influences of nature and nurture come to play and compete for her identity as the narrative stresses several times that she is the only one of the family who was born after the family’s imprisonment and has thus never experienced life outside of it.

To begin with, she holds the family together during their time in the Marshalsea as she combines two female subject positions: the worker and the Angel of the House, which are opposites, according to Langland (83). She works to allow her family a few luxuries, and she also takes care of the household, making the small and desolate space as comfortable as possible. According to Langland, “she manages the family’s scarce resources to protect their ‘status’ and also secures whatever dignity and reputation they possess by importing to their affairs her bourgeois discipline” (98). The family’s way of dealing with her double role, which is not entirely congenial to their fiction of gentility, is to see only Little Dorrit’s domestic identity and to block out her role as a worker: “It was the family custom to lay it down as family law that she was a plain domestic little creature, without the great and sage experiences of the rest” (*LD* 224).

Anderson claims, “according to Langland, the detailed rules governing household management and social interactions were expressly intended to negotiate the delicate rift between the upper and lower middle classes, as well as to set the terms for the proper management of servants” (253). Little Dorrit negotiates a new subject position for a woman but does so allegedly devoid of any class implications. She is presented as not driven by surface and class pretensions; instead, she is driven by her natural quality of selflessness and empathy. This renders her ultimately good and explains why she is devastated after the family’s move into a higher position. She undergoes a rather substantial change from taking care of the entire family to being expected to live as an idle gentlewoman. Once the family

leaves the Marshalsea, she is incapable of adapting to her new identity, which emphasises her initial position as both industrious and domestic as her natural station.

Perhaps the most important difference between Little Dorrit, Pip and David is that she is a woman. According to Schrager Lang, working women and children upset the “moral geography of family life” (16). However, family life here is only that of the middle-class family. From early childhood on, Little Dorrit knows her place and knows to fill it well:

What her pitiful look saw, at that early time, in her father, in her sister, in her brother, in the gaol; how much or how little of the wretched truth it pleased God to make visible to her; lies hidden with many mysteries. It is enough that she was inspired to be something which was not what the rest were, and to be that something, different and laborious, for the sake of the rest. Inspired? Yes. Shall we speak of the inspiration of a poet or a priest, and not of the heart impelled by love and self-devotion to the lowliest work in the lowliest way of life? (*LD* 71)

This passage speaks of a vital difference between duty and inspiration. To Little Dorrit the tasks of working and of taking care of her family have nothing to do with duty; rather, they are an expression of her self and her identity. According to Schrager Lang, “the ideal woman in the domestic novel eludes classification and takes possession of an ideal self outside class” (18). Little Dorrit does just that; instead of forming a class-based identity, she forms one that is entirely dependent on her relationship with and her caring for others. However, in the process, she reinforces middle-class ideals and sets standards that are untenable for working-class women who have to work all day to offer the bare necessities to their families.

Once the family has come into their fortune, Little Dorrit cannot adapt to her new position, although, Mrs General, the governess, and her sister try to teach her how to. This highlights the natural condition of her earlier position further. She cares for others because she has a truly empathic heart, not because she is expected to do so: “To have no work to do was strange as having glided into a corner where she had no one to think for, nothing to plan and contrive, no cares of others to load herself with” (*LD* 439). Langland claims, “the novel’s sustained critique of the Dorrits’ new leisured life depends upon a contrast between Little Dorrit’s ‘natural’ gentility and the ‘artificial’ veneer valued by High Society” (99). As she is incapable of adapting to it, she fails to be happy in this new position. However, she also remains untouched by the conceit and dishonour of higher positions, which eventually renders her one of very few characters who achieves domestic happiness with Mr Clennam, which she expresses as her only wish when she confesses her love to for to him in the Marshalsea (*LD* 771).

When the Dorrits meet Mr and Mrs Gowan in Switzerland, Little Dorrit falls directly into the position of caring for Mrs Gowan, who is not feeling well. Fanny criticizes this strongly:

Is it not enough that we have gone through what is only known to ourselves, but are we to have it thrown in our faces, perseveringly and systematically, by the very person who should spare our feelings most? Are we to be exposed to this unnatural conduct every moment of our lives? (*LD* 430)

Fanny's speech highlights the perceived interconnection of what is culturally acquired knowledge and behaviour and what comes natural. Behaving in a certain way to match the role of the station that one holds is presented as natural. Consequently, someone who has not been born into a specific station and does not have access to education and an upbringing that is shaped accordingly will be unable to leave this station. While the question of nature or nurture is never quite resolved in the book, the characters who live out their positive natural qualities are rewarded in the narrative, and those who do not are punished for their insincerity.

The first man who falls in love with and proposes to Little Dorrit is the son of the Marshalsea's turnkey, John Chivery. He has been a friend of Little Dorrit since their childhood; but when he finally informs her of his feelings for her, she cannot reciprocate. Like Uriah Heep, John Chivery as "the alternate suitor for the hand of the housekeeping angel serves to define more carefully the class to which she 'inherently' or 'naturally' belongs" (Langland 104). For John, his love for Little Dorrit is a way of finding an identity in domestic happiness. Defining himself through his love for her, he does not believe that he can be "anything worth mentioning" (*LD* 209) after her refusal. He is honest, good and hard working: "there really was a genuineness in the poor fellow, and a contrast between the hardness of his hat and the softness of his heart (albeit, perhaps, of his head too); that was moving" (207). Hinted at here is that he might also be somewhat gullible and simple. These are the precise terms in which most other working-class individuals are described in all three novels, so their lowly positions are continuously highlighted as natural. John Chivery's proposal to Little Dorrit, however, would mean upward mobility for him; consequently, its denial is another stabilizing move.

Immediately upon refusing John, Little Dorrit claims that it has nothing to do with their social stations: "Little Dorrit entreated him to disparage neither himself nor his station, and, above all things, to divest himself of any idea that she supposed hers to be superior" (207). Although she insists that this is not the reason, within the repeated stabilization of stations that the narratives represent, it is only logical that his lower station is precisely why she cannot marry him. Her belief of having to marry someone who she really loves does not

change the fact that she conveniently falls in love with someone, just like David and Pip, who is of a station to which these characters wish to return. An important difference here is though that Little Dorrit only admits her love to Arthur once he is imprisoned and impecunious. She is thus rendered the absolute ideal as she was granted mobility and chose actively to deny it as a means of remaining in her original position, in terms of station as well as physical space—the Marshalsea.

Villains: Blandois Rigaud and Mr Merdle

Similar to *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, *Little Dorrit* presents several definite villains. These scoundrels disrupt the narrative and serve as ‘other’ to those who take the centre of the narrative stage. Particularly in *David Copperfield*, the villains are also clear markers of class boundaries, which can be said to be similar in *Little Dorrit*. However, in the latter they mark a more diffuse concept of superiority and inferiority than in *David Copperfield*, where Uriah clearly stands for the lower class and Steerforth for the upper class. In *Little Dorrit*, they serve either as other to what is sacred and important within the society of the novel, or they serve as deterrents from wrongful doings.

Mr Merdle is the first of these villains, who much like Mr Dorrit, keeps up an appearance. Although he has the perfect exterior of a successful man, what lies beneath it is false and criminal. Preston describes him as an “illustrious man, and great national ornament” (XII). He is the true capitalist of the city, the banker who holds everyone’s fortune; consequently, his family enjoys a very high status in society:

All people knew (or thought they knew) that he had made himself immensely rich; and, for that reason alone, prostrated themselves before him, more degradedly and less excusably than the darkest savage creeps out of his hole in the ground to propitiate, in some log or reptile, the Deity of his benighted soul. (*LD* 525)

Having created this position for himself, he does not fail to keep it, as he is able to blind everyone with his wealth: “He regarded this power of attraction in wealth to draw wealth to it as something remarkably interesting and curious—something indefinably allied to the loadstone and gravitation” (534). His position becomes a natural law, and it reinforces itself by the sheer power of assertion. Noting this power exposes parts of the dilemma within society that *Little Dorrit* points to—that of blind faith in capital. It also exposes the blind faith in surface and thus rank, but it does not question rank as such.

After his deceitful behaviour has been exposed, Mr Merdle undergoes a change from God-like figure to factual villain; however, this new position is of little consequence to him as

he has taken his life by then. Mr Merdle is a villain and sinful because he has taken it upon himself to rise to a position that should only be held by God himself:

The clerks and servants cut him off by back-passages, and were found accidentally hovering in doorways and angles, that they might look upon him. Merdle! Oh, ye sun, moon, and stars, the great man! The rich man, who had in a manner revised the New Testament, and already entered into the kingdom of Heaven. (580)

His position, which is almost God-like, becomes an affront, which is finally punished with the worst possible death—suicide—granting him eternity in hell, according to the Christian doctrine that informs the novel's society.

Monsieur Rigaud, or Blandois as he shall be referred to here, is the second and most obvious villain of the text; in fact, he is called so several times. His name is the first hint at his delinquency, as he changes it frequently to avoid punishment and to plan his intrigues. Lionel Trilling claims, "Blandois is wholly wicked, the embodiment of evil; he is, indeed, a devil" (361). He is no doubt a criminal, but his threat to society lies much deeper than merely in his outright criminal acts. As Trilling argues further, "[...] the devilish nature of Blandois is confirmed by his maniac insistence upon his gentility, his mad reiteration that it is the right and necessity of his existence to be served by others" (361). He claims a position that no one can be sure whether it is deserved or not; consequently, he threatens the understanding of the natural inheritance of a specific station.

Dianne F. Sadoff argues, "Rigaud's criminality [...] originates in his confused lineage, the mysterious circumstances of his birth" (379-380). It is not only his nationality which is diffuse but also his original station. According to Sadoff, "having no origin himself, he spitefully reveals hidden origin by selling the secrets of genealogy" (380). Blandois threatens the social order doubly: he reveals its secrets, and he deceives it by living the life of a gentleman without having a confirmable right to do so.

In his speech to John Baptist Cavalletto, a man who he, much like Compeyson does with Magwitch, pulls into criminal acts, he blatantly claims his position as a gentleman and affirms precisely what it is in his character that frightens the others in his surroundings:

I have lived here, and lived there, and lived like a gentleman everywhere. I have been treated and respected as a gentleman universally. If you try to prejudice me by making out that I have lived by my wits—how do your lawyers live—your politicians—your intriguers—your men of the Exchange? (*LD* 14)

Blandois upsets those around him because he cannot be clearly defined and eludes the law as well as a clear classification of nationality. He represents both the fear of what might have a toll on the stability of England from the outside as well as he represents the fear that anyone

might undeservedly rise into a position of gentility and assert this position without having an inherited claim to it.

He is first introduced when he is still in France, and a woman and man in a tavern in which he stays discuss his character and their fear of him: “‘it may have been his unfortunate destiny. He may have been the child of circumstances. It is always possible that he had, and has, good in him, if one did but know how to find it out’” (121). While this guest represents the belief in natural goodness and nurtured ill will, the woman who works in the hotel replies to this:

‘I tell you this, my friend, that there are people (men and women both, unfortunately) who have no good in them—none. That there are people who must be dealt with as enemies of the human race. That there are people who have no human heart and who must be crushed like savage beasts, and cleared out of the way.’ (122)

Although one cannot be too sure where exactly Blandois comes from and what exactly his station should be, his character as evil and deceiving is presented as part of his nature.

Blandois’ upsetting of the social system goes hand in hand with his exceptionally clear understanding of it. He claims that he holds the natural position as a gentleman, yet he only corresponds to the surface values of a gentleman while he is truly a criminal. Blandois’ potential to play with the system and to live as an impostor exposes loopholes and offers a critique of society and its prevailing hierarchy, much like Uriah Heep’s play with the structures did. However, as much as both of them might speak uncomfortable truths, they are rendered unheard as they are criminals and thus not worthy to be taken seriously.

Alleviating Inequalities

In *Little Dorrit*, only very few characters are allowed to climb, whereas others either do not aim to climb or are punished for trying to do so. As opposed to *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, no one is granted a happy ending by means of a climb in society in this text. However, the concept of charity alleviates any sense of inequality as it soothes those who have nothing and renders those who have plenty to spare worthy of their riches. Similarly to *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, domestic happiness is presented as the ultimate achievement in life and is that which makes a character’s narrative ultimately congenial.

Charity works as an alleviating mechanism while it simultaneously stabilizes inferior and superior positions in society. Mr Dorrit in the Marshalsea is dependent on small financial contributions from his visitors, but admitting this would compromise the surface of his well-constructed identity as a gentleman. Consequently, he takes very good care that these tokens do not appear as acts of charity. Similarly, Little Dorrit has to work to support her family, but

she keeps up the pretence of not having to do so in order to grant her father the belief that he is a true gentleman and that she lives the life of a gentleman's daughter. Langland claims, "Dorrit's actual labors as seamstress outside the prison walls—labors to procure luxuries for her father—must be disguised from Mr Dorrit to salvage his illusions of familial grandeur" (98). Charity is thus a complicated concept here as it highlights superior and inferior positions. Mr Dorrit's denial of his need of charity is a sign of his understanding of this organizing mechanism of charity. Consequently, an awareness of charity as a mechanism that stabilizes rather than improves unequal situations begins, but this awareness merely focuses on the middle class; the working class remain in their 'natural' positions of inferiority.

The Meagleses, as opposed to Little Dorrit's honourable charity, exhibit a rather questionable form of it. Much like Steerforth's, it seems rehearsed and a means to an end. Preston reads the Meagleses as descriptions of what is wrong with this society:

Meagles, with his determination and compassion, has some of the secondary characteristics of the early philanthropists, but his conservatism, his snobbery and his failure to understand the potential consequences of his own well-meaning gestures make him a much more problematic figure: the trim villa at Twickenham is less orderly and peaceful than it appears. (XVIII)

Tattycoram is an important aspect of this complex situation, as she is the object of constant charity that the Meagleses use to present their superiority. Mr Meagles is not charitable in the selfless sense of the concept because he keeps pointing out his benevolence, so Miss Wade points to his position as an oppressor rather than a selfless helper of the poor: "You can be, again, a foil to his pretty daughter, a slave to her pleasant wilfulness, and a toy in the house showing the goodness of the family" (Langland 103). The honest kind of charity should not have to be such an ostentatious act; instead, it should come naturally as it does in Little Dorrit's and Agnes Wickfield's case. Their utter selflessness is idealized, while charity that stems from a merely calculated initiative is not recognized as a proper alleviation.

The second alleviating factor, domestic bliss as ultimate happiness, is rarely achieved in *Little Dorrit*, yet it remains the underlying concept of happiness that most individuals seem to aspire to. Families, which make up an important part of the concept of a good home, are not functional in the novel; yet, precisely as in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, the narrative in *Little Dorrit* promotes the idea that a caring and happy home will alleviate the need to change one's position in society. Except for the one real working-class family in *Little Dorrit*, the Plornishes in Bleeding Heart Yard, the novel only presents dysfunctional families. According to Preston, "the Dorrits are only the most extreme example of the novel's lack of

stable family units” (XXI). The Clennams and the Merdles are equally dysfunctional, and so are most of the families in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*.

The concept of home is somewhat more complex in *Little Dorrit* than it is in the other novels. While to the rest of her family this can never be so, to Little Dorrit the Marshalsea is home because she has never known anything else. She confesses this to Arthur Clennam, who is upset by it: “Don’t call it home, my child!’ he entreated. ‘It is always painful to me to hear you call it home.’ ‘But it is home! What else can I call home?’” (249). Little Dorrit is the perfect middle-class woman who can make a home out of any place, so she cannot find herself happy later on in her higher social position as her basis of identity is taken away from her. Home in this text is not based on the economic ability to make it comfortable but entirely on a female ability of making a home out of just about anything.

While Little Dorrit is able to make a home even out of a cell in a debtor’s prison, the Merdles, despite all their riches and their beautiful house in a wealthy neighbourhood, are incapable of doing so: “Let Mrs Merdle announce, with all her might, that she was at home every so many nights in a season, she could not announce more widely and unmistakably than Mr Merdle did that he was never at home” (377). Mr Merdle is the personification of the object of obsession: money. He is married to Mrs Merdle because she comes from an important family and is perfectly formed inside and out for a high position in society. This is expressed through a quip which describes her bosom as merely serving as a “show-window” for the jewels that Mr Merdle displays on it for all of society to see (370). She is not a nurturing mother as Mrs Plornish in *Bleeding Heart Yard*, who always has an infant sucking on her bosom; instead, Mrs Merdle merely nurtures the surface.

The Plornishes in *Bleeding Heart Yard* are the direct opposite to the Merdles, a prototype of a working-class family. They have a vast amount of children, the father is in and out of work, yet they are happy, good, honest, and caring. Their home offers domestic happiness and is named the “Happy Cottage” (544). It is described as follows: “[n]o Poetry and no Art ever charmed the imagination more than the union of the two in this counterfeit cottage charmed Mrs Plornish” (544). Much like the Peggottys, this family, although made up of all kinds of different individuals, is very happy. However, their cottage as well as their life is very much a fiction as the cottage, for example, is merely painted on the outside of their building and the house as such can only be assumed to contain the bare necessities. Consequently, to affirm their identities and to recognize them as beautiful individuals serves as a means to avoid seeing their desperation. In fact, they are not presented as being in any

sort of need at all as they all take care of each other. The narrative stabilizes their socio-economic inequality by obscuring it and naturalizing their position.

Successful and Unsuccessful Female Climbers

Little Dorrit's social mobility is an important aspect to consider as it draws together the different narratives of the female character's mobility in all three texts and highlights all four thesis points. The female perspective of social mobility is closely connected to the concept of domestic happiness as the ultimate goal of all characters. As the female character plays the central role in creating this domestic happiness, she must present a very specific set of morals to be deserving of this happiness.

Domestic happiness is defined not only by the ability of the woman to make a happy home but also by her ability to truly love and be loved. Preston makes a valuable observation, which partially supports my claim in this chapter:

In this novel, however, riches can be measured neither by money nor by the accumulation of supposed virtue, and the forms of worship implied by either practice offer no guarantee of happiness. As Arthur and Little Dorrit lose their money, and as both free themselves from the harsh or demanding duties exacted by their parents, they discover each other and the infinite riches of love. (X)

Little Dorrit, for example, cannot understand how Fanny could consider marrying for any other reason: "If you loved anyone, you would no more be yourself, but you would quite lose and forget yourself in your devotion to him" (558). This notion of love, of losing oneself and finding an identity in another person recalls the prevailing themes of the Romantic writers and poets. It is repeated in David's love for Dora and also in Pip, who gives a similar speech about Estella as Little Dorrit does about Arthur. While this romantic love is meant to surpass any differences, it does not surpass class in any of the works. Rather, it becomes the motivation to remain in a certain station or to reach another.

Exactly like the male characters, none of the women characters are granted social mobility in its purest form. While Little Dorrit and her family rise in station, they only return to their natural station. Little Dorrit and Agnes Wickfield are arguably the only two female characters who are truly granted domestic happiness. These two have a few things in common: they come from a middle-class family, they are not afraid to work for their living, they are completely selfless, they are truthfully charitable, and they are completely submissive. Little Dorrit expresses her submission, which has previously been shown in her role as carer of her father, very clearly when she finally confesses her love to Arthur Clennam:

I am rich in being taken by you, I am proud in having been resigned by you, I am happy in being with you in this prison, as I should be happy in coming back to it with

you, if it should be the will of God, and comforting and serving you with all my love and truth. I am yours anywhere, everywhere! (*LD* 771)

Little Dorrit has a remarkable need to devote herself to someone entirely. Instead of enjoying and striving for freedom as such characters as Pip and David do, she is only happy when she can care for someone and make this person the centre of her being. As Arthur and Little Dorrit are the only ones who are truly happy, the idea of submission is promoted.

The female characters who aim to climb beyond their stations, such as Little Emily, Estella, and Fanny Dorrit, are all punished within the narratives as none of them manages to achieve domestic happiness. These women all try to actively climb beyond their station by marrying upward. Although it can, of course, be argued that rising by marrying upward does not necessarily signal agency on the woman's part, it must be remembered that at this particular time in history, there were not many other possible ways for a woman to seemly advance their station.

Little Dorrit and Agnes completely internalize their inferior positions, yet their positions are presented as their natural dispositions so that they are presumably very happy within them. Importantly, these two characters do not rise in station. Little Dorrit, precisely like David Copperfield, returns to her station, and Agnes does not move at all. Consequently, the patterns of social mobility as lived out by the female characters of the text portray the same pattern as all other representations before: those who climb are punished for it, and those who remain in their station are rewarded for it. Overall, the narrative in *Little Dorrit* follows a similar scheme of stabilizing social hierarchies as *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* as it continues to obscure class, to highlight individual rather than collective destinies, to naturalize positions, and to offer alleviation for denied mobility. The alleviating concept of charity is not as straightforward and unproblematic in *Little Dorrit* as it has been in *David Copperfield* and, to a certain extent, *Great Expectations*; however, any possible rupture is presented as reparable by an honest commitment to Victorian middle-class virtues.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that a close reading of the patterns of social mobility in *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, and *Little Dorrit* shows that very few characters are granted mobility and that most characters are presented as naturally and happily remaining in their initial positions. The main climbers differ substantially in their initial stations and in the final outcome of their social mobility. Firstly, David Copperfield is granted upward mobility, primarily because his mobility is not upward mobility at all as he merely returns into a position that was his by birth. Uriah Heep and Little Emily, the other two climbers in the narrative, are denied mobility altogether and are rendered criminal and destructive respectively in their attempt to achieve better positions.

Secondly, Pip's pattern of social mobility has been shown to be somewhat more complex than David's as he is, in fact, initially working class. As his family background does not guarantee him a natural middle-class position, his initial ambition to rise beyond his station is rendered reprehensible. However, he does manage to achieve a higher position by working hard, by re-evaluating his moral conceptions, and, paradoxically, by finally reconciling with his lowly position. Yet, he never quite achieves a happy ending as he never marries and thus does not attain domestic happiness. Both David and Pip have to work hard and experience periods in which they are humbled by misfortunes before they can become more or less deserving, in Pip's case, and actually happy in David's.

Finally, Little Dorrit differs somewhat from the other two climbers as she takes a completely passive role in her mobility and only rises because her family has been wronged and their earlier fortune is restored. However, Little Dorrit is very unhappy in her higher position and finally returns to a more modest one in which she finds perfect happiness in domesticity. Much like David and Pip, she also goes through a period of hardship; however, her hardship is the period in which her family is rich and has risen in station. The main point here is that not a single member of the Dorrit family is truly content after their climb into wealth; William and Frederick Dorrit die, arguably as a consequence of their incapability of coping with the altered situation.

The fact that social mobility as such is nearly always unsuccessful or creates unhappy endings for those who aim for it is a first mechanism that stabilizes the hierarchal constructions in the narratives. However, the novels portray an additional four mechanisms which stabilize the patterns of social mobility and, as a consequence, society within the novel. Firstly, inequalities are presented as not related to economic differences, thus obscuring class as a process. Secondly, mobility, be it denied or granted, is presented as connected to

individuals and not to collectivities; characters are either individually deserving or individually undeserving of upward mobility, thus obscuring class as an identity. Thirdly, stations are presented as acquired by birth and thus natural to the individuals. Even though a plenitude of characters seems to expose culturally acquired senses of inferiority or superiority, their positions as such are presented as biological rather than cultural. Finally, the alleviating factors of domestic happiness and charity offer alternative structures for all and seemingly solve the problem of inequality altogether.

The effect of these four mechanisms is that they obscure the basis of inequalities and offer solutions that merely serve to smoothen the surface. If inequalities are understood as based on natural dispositions, then they will also be understood as unchangeable. The underlying socio-economic inequalities in all of these narratives are very much unnatural and, most certainly, changeable. By obscuring the basis of these inequalities and by offering alleviation via charity and alternative positions in the domestic space, these narratives stabilize an unequal system. The narratives stabilize a hierarchy in which some are better off than others by reinforcing positions of natural inferiority and superiority, promoting the fallacy that socio-economic inequalities are a non-issue based on unchangeable differences.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

- Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. (DC). Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2000. Orig. publ. 1849-1850. Print.
- . *Little Dorrit*. (LD). Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2002. Orig. publ. 1855-1857. Print.
- . *Great Expectations*. (GE). Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2007. Orig. publ. 1860-1861. Print.

Secondary Sources

- Amariglio, Jack L.; Resnick, Stephen A.; Wolff, Richard D. "Class, Power, and Culture." *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. 487-501. Print.
- Anderson, Amanda. "Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture by Elizabeth Langland." *Victorian Studies* Volume 39, 2 (1996): 251-255. Print.
- Bossche, Chris van den. "Cookery, not Rookery: Family and Class in *David Copperfield*." *David Copperfield and Hard Times: Contemporary Critical Essays*. Ed. John Peck. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995. Print.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Transl. Richard Nice. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1984. Print.
- Bowen, John. "Introduction." Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2007. Orig. publ. 1860-1861. V-XVII. Print.
- Capuano, Peter J. "Handling the Perceptual Politics of Identity in *Great Expectations*." *Dickens Quarterly* Volume 27, 3 (2010): 185-208. Print.
- Chesterton, G.K. "What was Dickens's attitude toward the poor?" USC. *Dickens.usc.edu*. University of Southern California, Santa Cruz. Web. 12 May 2013.
- Diniejko, Andrzej. "Charles Dickens as Social Commentator and Critic." *Victorianweb.org*. Web. 8 May 2013.
- Everett, Glenn. "The Reform Acts." *Victorianweb.org*. Web. 10 April 2013.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Transl. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 1998. Print.

- Federico, Annette R. "‘David Copperfield’ and the Pursuit of Happiness." *Victorian Studies* Volume 46, 1 (2003): 69-95. Print.
- Fraser, Nancy. *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the ‘Postsocialist’ Condition*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Gallagher, Catherine. "Family and Society in *Hard Times*." *David Copperfield and Hard Times: Contemporary Critical Essays*. Ed. John Peck. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995. Print.
- Gavin, Adrienne E. "Introduction." *David Copperfield*. (DC). Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2000. Orig. publ. 1849-1850. Print.
- Hollington, Michael, ed. *Charles Dickens: Critical Assessments*. Volume 3. Mountfield near Robertsbridge: Helm Information Ltd., 1995. Print.
- House, Humphrey. *The Dickens World* (1941), Second edition. London: Oxford University Press, 1960. Print.
- Jackson, Linda A., Linda A. Sullivan, Richard Harnish and Carole N. Hodge. "Achieving Positive Social Identity: Social Mobility, Social Creativity, and Permeability of Group Boundaries." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Volume 70, 2 (1996): 241-254. Print.
- Jenkins, Richard. *Social Identity*. Third edition. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Langland, Elizabeth. *Nobody’s Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian England*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1995. Print.
- Longhurst, Brian, Greg Smith, Gaynor Bagnall, Garry Crawford, Miles Ogborn, Elaine Baldwin, Scott McCracken. *Introducing Cultural Studies*. Second Edition. Harlow: Prentice Hall Europe, 2008. Print.
- Markels, Julian. *The Marxian Imagination: Representing Class in Literature*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003. Print.
- Nilsson, Magnus. "Rethinking Redistribution and Recognition: Class, Identity, and the Conditions for Radical Politics in the ‘Postsocialist’ Age." *New Proposals: Journals of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry* Volume 2, 1 (2008): 31-44. Print.
- O. Jordan, John. "The Social Sub-text of *David Copperfield*." *Charles Dickens: Critical Assessments*. Volume 3. Ed. Michael Hollington. Mountfield near Robertsbridge: Helm Information Ltd., 1995. 113-141. Print.
- Oakland, John. *British Civilization: An Introduction*. Third edition. London: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- Orwell, George. "Charles Dickens." *50 Orwell Essays*. Project Gutenberg. Web. 13 June 2013.

- Page, H.M. "A More Seditious Book Than 'Das Kapital'": Shaw on "Little Dorrit"." *The Shaw Review* Volume 20, 3 (1977): 171-177. Print.
- Pearlman, Elihu. "Inversion in *Great Expectations*." *Charles Dickens: Critical Assessments*. Volume 3. Ed. Michael Hollington. Mountfield near Robertsbridge: Helm Information Ltd., 1995. 549-561. Print.
- Peck, John. *David Copperfield and Hard Times: Contemporary Critical Essays*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995. Print.
- Peck, John, and Martin Coyle. *Literary Terms and Criticism*. Third edition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. Print.
- Preston, Peter. "Introduction." Dickens, Charles. *Little Dorrit*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2002. Orig. publ. 1855-1857. Print.
- Robbins, Bruce. "Soul making: Gayatri Spivak on upward mobility." *Cultural Studies* Volume 17, 1 (2010): 16-26. Print.
- Sadoff, Dianne E. "Storytelling and the Figure of the Father in *Little Dorrit*." *Charles Dickens: Critical Assessments*. Volume 3. Ed. Michael Hollington. Mountfield near Robertsbridge: Helm Information Ltd., 1995. 374-391. Print.
- Schrager Lang, Amy. *The Syntax of Class: Writing Inequality in Nineteenth-Century America*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006. Print.
- Smiles, Samuel. "Self Help: With Illustrations of Character and Conduct." *Gutenberg.org*. Updated May 20, 2003. Edition 10. Web. 12 May 2013.
- Stange, G. Robert. "Expectations Well Lost: Dickens's Fable for His Time." *Charles Dickens: Critical Assessments*. Volume 3. Ed. Michael Hollington. Mountfield near Robertsbridge: Helm Information Ltd., 1995. 517-526. Print.
- Tamai, Fumie. "*Great Expectations*: Democracy and the Problem of Social Inclusion." *The Japan Branch Bulletin of the Dickens Fellowship*. Volume 25 (2002): 55-67. Print.
- Trilling, Lionel. "*Little Dorrit*." *Charles Dickens: Critical Assessments*. Volume 3. Ed. Michael Hollington. Mountfield near Robertsbridge: Helm Information Ltd., 1995. 357-366. Print.
- Williams, Raymond. *The English Novel: From Dickens to Lawrence*. St Albans: Granada Publishing Limited, 1974. Print.