



**A Stylistic Analysis Study of  
Morality and Ethics in Relation  
to Class Conflict in Dickens's  
David Copperfield**

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## Abstract

This paper closely examines the stylistic impact of social division in Charles Dickens's novel *David Copperfield*. Due to the social division in Britain during the Victorian Era, there appeared a class of writers who called for putting the society into a better form and condition, improving the social conditions by alteration of the mindset, correction of many errors, and removal of social defects. One figure of those writers was Charles Dickens who expressed the crisis of the social division in the British society and the issue of morality and ethics pertaining to it. The focus of this research is to explore the social conflict and how each class takes and follows the moral values via the use of language. This is made accurately by Dickens throughout the representation of different styles of characters in the novel, especially by providing a full portrait and description that determine the moral value of human conduct. Christine Mallinson (2007) confirmed the linguistic classifications among the social classes throughout the work of "Social Class, Social Status and Stratification" which was the basic foundation of this work. Throughout the novel, Dickens divides the classes as upper, middle and lower. By observing the role of each character, the lower-class characters are given much more sympathy and admiration by the author. In contrast, most of the upper-class characters are represented as characters that lack integrity and are debased morally. Littimer, Steerforth's personal attendant who does most of his services and Heep, the secretary and Wickfield's close companion, are an exception of the lower-class characters that are purposefully shown as immoral characters in order to frame Dickens's concept of morality— where it is not defined as not being based on the class and background but on the ways, a person acts, especially from the standpoint of morality and ethics, and how could the linguistic style serve in this issue.

**Keywords: stylistic impact, social conditions, values, low and upper classes, characters.**

## Introduction

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, social division started to appear in English society. The dawn of the Industrial Revolution nourished social typology and solidified the gaps between classes. The invention of steam power and machine tools and the construction of factories required a lot of working hands. As a result, there was a huge migration from the countryside to the industrial cities for getting opportunities for working. Britain, with the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, heatedly debated the relation between the upper class, which dominated the political life and the economical field, and the lower and the middle classes in terms of the wages of those workers because the latter represented the largest segment of the society. According to Cody (2014), the society encountered a wave of protest and resentment expressed by the middle and working class because of the policies of the upper class and the aristocratic people. The upper class people held the reigns of the state so that the middle class “undertook organized agitation to remedy this situation” (p. 2). Hence, the social corruption was the result of the social division in the society, and that was reflected mainly by the intellectual writers, who mirrored the real people in fictionalized characters in the literary works to work on reforming the moral social system of the society. They emphasized social justice and equality without priorities based on wealth and family.

The priority of the upper class was reflected on the idea that they are higher than the other two classes and they use a different style that could recognize them even. This idea was stemmed from the view that “the Upper Class was by inheritance a Royal Class which was completely different from the Middle class or the Working Class” (“Victorian Era Org”, 2014, p.5). This view served to expand the gap and rift in the social classes at that time and led the other classes, especially the working class, to be looked down and used to carry a social stigma.

The social group of the higher status, especially the aristocracy, was divided according to hierarchal systems and was regarded as

people who held the reigns of authority. They were: “the King and the Queen, Aristocrats, Nobles, Dukes, Viscounts and other wealthy families working in the Victorian courts” (“Victorian Era Org”, 2014 p. 3). Those people had the right of being distinguished from the other classes because of the wealth they had, which was inherited from their ancestors. Accordingly, they were able to gain privileges, profits, and welfare because of the powerful status and position of which the other classes were deprived (p.3). The status gained from wealth and power passed on from parents to their own offspring and descendants enabled the upper class people to dominate “commerce, industry, and the professions” (Cody, 2014, p. 2).

### Characterization and Division

The class division is reflected throughout Dickens’s characterization to *David Copperfield*. Dickens creates characters that are closely based on stereotypes of Victorian social classes. Mostly, his characters are put in the realm of good and evil characters. He depicts the blameworthy characters from the upper class, who are wealthy, boastful and hypocritical; however, he also depicts lower class people who are bad because they try to climb the social ladder. Therefore, one of the major questions asked in *David Copperfield* is, how is morality related to the social classes? I argue that Dickens shows that the lower class characters are represented as good people, such as Clara Peggotty, Mr. Micawber, Mrs. Micawber, Ham, and Mr. Peggotty. Dickens might have admired the real servant Thomas Wright during his time to depict Peggotty as a model servant in his novel. As for the middle class, David, his mother, Betsey, and Agnes are represented as good characters as well. Conversely, many of the upper class characters in the novel are socially corrupted and immoral, such as Steerforth, but the exception of these classes is that the lower class characters that Dickens depicts as corrupted and immoral are Littimer and Heep. The middle class characters Mr. Edward Murdstone and Miss Jane Murdstone, are immoral, yet the upper middle class character Dr. Strong is moral, considerate and warm-hearted.

## Methodology

By adopting a linguistic theory, the research goes on to deepen the ideal conceptualization of morality which can be applied through the theory of social class. The sociologist Christine Mallinson proposed a theory entitled as "Social Class, Social Status and Stratification" (2007). This work is inspired by variationalist approach depiction of social identities and classification. This shows how insecurities are planted into the three social classes (upper / middle / lower) taking into account the factors of wealth, authority and power throughout that era.

## The Lower Class

The real person that might have impressed Dickens during his time and motivated him to represent the character of Peggotty is Thomas Wright, who is mentioned in the article "An Unpaid Servant in the State" (1852). This article was written by Morley Henry and published in the weekly journal *Household Words*, which was edited and conducted by Charles Dickens in the 1850s. Morley's article focuses mainly on Wright and his self-sacrifice as a model of a typical servant. Throughout the article, Morley describes Wright as a man who helps and supports those who are in need. Wright was well meaning and kindhearted and his assistance was not intended for profits (Henry, 1852, iv).

The fathers of the city admired the character of Wright and wished their children to be like him and his "doings" (Henry, 1852, p. 553). Wright looked exhausted, but he did not show himself to be "weary man" and that indicated his perseverance and hard work (p. 553). In other words, he did not show any complaint or dissatisfaction with his duty towards the poor people and the prisoners whom he visited and showed assistance. His income was not high; he earned less than two hundred pounds a year through his charitable work and "this is a life of toil" and charity (p. 553). The writer also shows his admiration and respect to Wright who "did work with a great zeal and great efficiency, obtaining very high respect and confidence from his employers" (p. 553). Wright regular-

ly visited the unhappy prisoners in New Baily Prison, giving his help and preaching to them. His prisoners listened carefully to his warm words and “back with a deep and a contagious sense in the hearer of high-minded virtue” (Henry, 1852, p. 554). He was also a reformative man and involved himself in making changes in people in order to improve their lives. Wright was also engaged in the issues of the family: “He has sent husbands repentant to their wives; he has restored fathers to the fatherless. Without incurring debt, supporting a large family on little gains, he has contrived to spare out of his little” (p. 554). Wright’s reformative attempts and moral instilment helped to gain the trust and appreciation of other people. Although Wright died in 1875, his memory and his achievements were alive in the minds of his people and: “He was eulogized as a humble laborer in that part of God’s vineyard” (2) where his philanthropic intention revived the hope in the poor.

At the early beginning of the novel, the focus is centered on the goodness of the lower class characters where Clara Peggotty is the typical example of this class. Peggotty, to some extent, can be compared to the real person Thomas Wright, who might have impressed Dickens at that time. Dickens gives a lot of attention to the servants in *David Copperfield*. He divides them into two kinds: the servant who is loyal to the family she serves, and the servant who is wicked and disloyal. Peggotty, the nurse who serves David and his mother, proves herself to be a sincere, obedient, and dutiful to the family. Throughout the novel, she seems to be fully occupied and actively engaged in the works of the house, serving Mrs. Copperfield and David. The most distinctive characteristic that Peggotty has is her loyalty and sincerity.

Peggotty is a kindhearted and faithful woman. David feels comfortable with her. He often tells her stories before he sleeps and Peggotty listens attentively to him: “I had been reading to Peggotty about crocodiles” (Dickens, 2004, p. 28). In the first chapters, David describes spending his time with Peggotty where Peggotty plays a role of mother figure to David. David urgently needs somebody to talk to him tenderly and share with him his childhood imagination.

He tells her stories about crocodiles and she is always ready to sit and listen to him with an open heart and an open mind. David also describes the hard work that Peggotty does, "being so wrinkled in all directions!" (Dickens, 2004, p. 28). Here, David, describes Peggotty's wrinkled face as a sign of her tiredness and exhaustion, but she never complains.

During the time of argument between Mrs. Copperfield and Peggotty about Mrs. Copperfield's second marriage, David, Mrs. Copperfield, and Peggotty cry. The scene of crying together reflects the aspects of purity and goodness that Peggotty, David, and Mrs. Copperfield share:

At this, we all fell a-crying together. I think I was the loudest of the party, but I am sure we were all sincere about it. I was quite heart-broken myself, and am afraid that in the first transports of wounded tenderness I called Peggotty a 'Beast'. That honest creature was in deep affliction, I remember, and must have become quite buttonless on the occasion; for a little volley of those explosives went off, when, after having made it up with my mother, she kneeled down by the elbow-chair, and made it up with me. (Dickens, 2004, p. 32-33)

This scene can be seen as catharsis, the process of releasing pent-up and repressed emotions. The three show truthful feelings and emotions though they are angry with each other. Although Mrs. Copperfield is upset with Peggotty's disagreement on her second marriage, she forgives Peggotty and asks her to forgive her about what she has said to her angrily. At the same time, though Mrs. Copperfield insults Peggotty with harsh words and 'negative adjectives' like "poor girl so ill-used" and "cruel thing" (p. 31-32), Peggotty never shows resentment or complaint. David also calls Peggotty a "beast," but then he had a deep regret for what he said to Peggotty (p. 32). David is quite sure of Peggotty's love and loyalty to him and he knows her as an "honest creature" (Dickens, 2004, p. 32). Although Peggotty made Mrs. Copperfield "uncomfortable" when she blamed her for her second marriage, her disagreement with Mrs. Copperfield was for her interest and David's as well.



After Mrs. Copperfield dies, David is overwhelmed with sorrow and grief. He is orphaned and heartbroken, and that makes the reader sympathize with him. If Peggotty were not in his life, he would be undoubtedly lost. He would have fallen under the hand of *murderers*. But Peggotty is the savior who vows not to let David down. He told her, ““Don’t leave me, Peggotty. Stay with me. It will not be for long, perhaps. What should I ever do without you!”” (p. 123). David’s plea to Peggotty reflects humane touches from Dickens in depicting the hard situation that David undergoes as an orphan.

Peggotty plays the role of a mother for David, especially after his mother died. In most of Dickens’ novels, he focuses on the theme of orphanhood and shows the cruel world in which they live. But at the same time he shows the safe world of the good characters who help the pitiful orphans. Peggotty here is represented as a shelter and a place of security to David to protect him from the savageness of The Murdstones. Peggotty with a full kindness and devotion gives David a promise not to leave him: ““Me leave you ‘Me leave you? I think I see myself. Peggotty go away from you? I should like to catch her at it! No, no, no,’ my precious!’ cried Peggotty” (pp. 123-124). Peggotty is determined to take care of David and stay close to him, and she repeats her unwillingness in abandoning him in saying “no” three times as an assertion, showing her sincerity, loyalty, and faithfulness to the family in spite of Mrs. Copperfield’s death. Consequently, Peggotty deserves to be a typical example of the loyal and faithful servant. She is the model of the servants in this novel. She is a great foil to other characters in the novel like Littimer, Steerforth’s servant, who was involved in robbery and put in prison at the end of the novel. Hence, Dickens exhibits Peggotty as an altruistic character, who can be a typical example for other servants to follow. Peggotty, the selfless and self-sacrificial character, is deservedly the model of servants in *David Copperfield*. This is a social moral lesson to follow by using positive and warm linguistic components that help build good social relations among individuals.

Emily, another lower class character, has a strong feeling to be a “lady”. Little Emily seems to seek for a high status in the soci-

ety when she fled with Steerforth. But her ambition does not reach the promising goals. After eloping with Steerforth, she is exposed to the danger of being socially immoral. After Mr. Peggotty, her adopted father, finds her, he decides to make her travel to Australia to escape the social views towards her. She damages her reputation when she elopes with Steerforth without marriage. Seemingly, Mr. Peggotty is aware of the social views towards the lower class and the inferiority they have. He is extremely aware of Emily's reputation in the society. It can be noted that Little Emily is seduced by the false views of the aristocracy to climb the social ladder and to be a "lady", but later her dream was shattered.

According to Emily's visions, the measurement of a person's worth is understood throughout the unchangeability of the financial state and also spending money extravagantly since wealth is linked to these two characteristics. Goldbort explains that Emily "associates the idea of gentility with having nice attire and abundant wealth" (Dickens, 2004, p. 35). She tells David that if she were a lady she would give Mr. Peggotty "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" (p. 42). Emily here relates the concept of well-mannered quality and high social standing with wealth and the fashionable clothes (p. 36). Emily's question of gentility and ladyhood are answered by the aspects of physical appearance and unchangeable financial state.

Traddles is another character who is considered lower-middle class. He is a kind and good-hearted friend for David. He always has troubles in school. He is beaten by the teacher because he sympathizes with Mell. He is also taken out of the church because there is a misunderstanding that he laughed in the church, but, in fact, Steerforth is the one who laughed (Dickens, 2004, p. 101). Here, this scene reflects how the lower class people are generally the only victims in the middle of the aristocratic society and they had to be responsible for the upper classes' ill-conceived actions. Dickens might have made this scene intentionally. He shows that Traddles is wrongly accused of laughing and that might have made to keep

away suspicion from Steerforth, as (falsely) a respectable upper-class character. The one who saw Steerforth's laughter could have concealed the truth of seeing Steerforth's laughter because of the powerful status that Steerforth enjoys, enabling him to seem perfect and void of any foolishness and flaws.

Mr. Mell, the poor teacher at Salem House, is another victim of the lower class characters by the upper one. David is sent to this school by Mr. Murdstone and it is managed by the dictatorial and harsh school teacher Mr. Creakle, Murdstone's friend. In one of the school scenes, Mr. Mell is angry and replies to Steerforth because he calls him poor and beggar. Steerforth once heard from David about Mr. Mell's poverty so that Steerforth starts not to respect him; instead, he shouts at him and uses abusive words. Steerforth tells Mr. Creakle that he is quite sure that Mr. Mell is poor and he should not be here in the school because the poor should not have a space among the upper class and middle class people. Mr. Creakle supports Steerforth's suggestion and thanks him for confirming Mr. Mell's poverty. Steerforth's immorality and his despising behavior towards the poor leads to the dismissal of Mr. Mell from the school, depriving him from his work. This scene can show a part of Steerforth's reality to David and how that will play a crucial role in changing David's views towards him gradually. This scene also shows the inferiority of the lower class people in the society where they should not shout at the people who are higher than them in rank and position.

Seemingly, Steerforth's view of Mell reflects the view of the society where the lower class people should not be mixed socially with the upper class people. Mr. Creakle confirms this view in saying to Mell that he is in a "wrong position" (p. 111). The criterion of respectability and independence of the school seems to keep the poor people away from the school where the upper class people are.

The discrimination that Steerforth shows is based on the idea that the upper class people are genetically and biologically differ-

ent from the lower class ones (Goldbort, 2012, p. 5). Therefore, Steerforth tells Traddles that Mell's "feelings" are not like those in them: "His feelings are not like yours, Miss Traddles" (Dickens, 2004, p. 112). Traddles is beaten by a cane only because he shows pitiful feelings towards Mr. Mell. This scene proves Steerforth a bully, who intimidates deliberately those who are weak and poor. Steerforth regards "the characteristics associated with this version of masculinity are inherent, when in reality they are more often socially constructed or naturalized" (Goldbort, 2012, p. 5). Dickens shows the "idealization of class is damaging as it can lead gentlemen to condemn the poor instead of exercising sympathy and compassion" (p. 4) but some characters like Steerforth give priority to wealth over morality.

Dickens uses a poetic and beautiful image in describing David's feelings towards the plight of weak people like Mell and this shows one aspect of Dickens's sympathy with the poor people. David sympathizes with Mell's dismissal and compares his state with a sad and tuneful flute in his ears: "old flute seemed more than once to sound mournfully in my ears;" (Dickens, 2004, p. 112). The image of the musical instruments as the flute and the lute is familiar in *The Arabian Nights*. In one of its tales, King Shahriyar meets King Shah Zaman where the city is luxuriously decorated and the most tuneful sounds coming out of flutes are played for the majestic meeting: "what while the drums beat and the flutes and pipes sounded and mimes and mountebanks played and plied their arts and the King lavished on them gifts and largesse; and in very deed it was a notable day" (Burton, 1885-1888, p. 251). The reference of the flute in *David Copperfield* shows the influence of Eastern literature on the English writers during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Additionally, Dickens introduces the lower class characters represented by Ham and Emily as orphans and gives more sympathy that only the lower class people are orphans and adopted by other people. It is one of the humanitarian touch from Dickens towards the lower class people. Mr. Micawber and his wife also are put in the set of the lower class with emphasis on their hard situation of being loaded with debts. Throughout the relationship between Da-

vid and Micawber's family, Dickens shows the idea of solidarity of the lower and middle class characters and the love and familiarity they share in sympathizing with each other's situation.

David says, "In my forlorn state I became quite attached to the family, and used to walk about, busy with. Mrs. Micawber's calculations of ways and means, and heavy with the weight of Mr. Micawber's debts" (Dickens, 2004, p. 173). David here shows Micawbers' difficult situation and how they got penniless because of the debts and the lack of food in their house. Despite Micawbers' poverty, Mrs. Micawber responds to Mr. Micawber: "I never will desert Mr. Micawber" (p. 182). Mrs. Micawber here proves herself a sincere wife to Mr. Micawber for her love, sympathy, endurance, and sacrifice to her family.

The allegiance that Dickens shows in his novel is conveyed throughout the intense emotional situation where the pain and tears cover their atmosphere in the novel. And Dicken emphasizes the concepts of "devotion" and "passionate manner" which reflect the sincerity and purity of intentions and the real friendship.

Accordingly, the perspectives of superiority and inferiority reflect the social division which was common in the Victorian period in which social disparity was common between the social classes. In reality, the social distinction resulted from the point of view of the society in the Victorian period was understood in the idea that the poor people are poor by inheritance. Consequently, this view led to stigmatize the poor, and they were seen as being subordinate, secondary, and inferior. By his characterization, Dickens makes it clear that he defends the poor and satires the aristocratic upper class.

### **Physical Appearance**

Dickens often focuses on physical appearance as a measurement of the intentions and personality of the character. Most of the good characters of this novel are depicted with such soft adjectives and expressions as "gentle creature like my mother" and "handsome" as a description for David's aunt. However, not all the class characters are not put in the framework of the good characters. Uriah Heep,

a degenerative boy, is a character that represents the lower class person who tries to climb the social ladder in evil ways. Heep's ugly physical appearance has a connection with his behavior and intentions. David describes him as a cadaverous, pale, thin, and bony with a state of gumminess. Uriah Heep is fifteen years old, but he looks older because of his paleness accompanied with a feeling of disgust and repulsion and with "no eyelashes, and eyes of a red-brown, so unsheltered and unshaded" (Dickens, 2004, p. 228). Uriah Heep's name is metaphoric and has a connection with his shocking appearance and repugnance. His name could refer to a kind of reek and foul smell that smells like urine because David rubs his hand when he shakes Heep's hand and calls it an "uncomfortable hand" and it is "clammy" (p. 235). David also focuses on the ugly appearance and the attitude in exhibiting Heep as having a sinuous form. David says that Heep has the quality of wriggling and "writhing": "the snaky twistings of his throat and body (p. 245), which implies cunningness and craftiness.

### **The Middle Class**

Throughout the novel, David is seen as a middle-class character. He might have tried to climb the social ladder, but he could not do that for the lack of opportunities and for his morality that prevented him from using evil ways for making that endeavor. As the novel develops, David seems to try to direct his hopes and ambitions towards achieving gentleness and "becom[ing] part of a gendered imagined community" (Goldbort, 2012, p. 3). The scene that shows David's desire of being a gentleman is when he sits in the front seat of the cart or what he calls the "Box Seat" (Dickens, 2004, p. 292). The phrase "Box Seat" seems to be reserved for higher classes and David shows here his strong desire to sit in this seat. Here, David feels that he deserves to sit in this seat. It makes him feel the great respect and esteem of being a distinguished person. Generally speaking, the idea of gentleness was "associated with good manners, strength of mind, respectability, financial stability, and education (Goldbort, 2012, p 3) and was related to the middle and upper classes in the Victorian period.

David's aunt Betsey is another character who can be put in the sphere of the middle class moral characters. Although she has austere features and behavior, she proves herself to be a good savior, defender, and protector to David. She feels terrible towards The Murdstones for their ill-treatment to David and his mother. Betsey's treatment to David makes the reader feel satisfied about David's future. Betsey addresses Mr. Dick, "You'll consider yourself guardian, jointly with me, of this child, Mr. Dick," said my aunt (Dickens, 2004, p. 225). Despite Betsey's austerity and ironic humor, David is still satisfied with her treatment to him as a woman with "dignity," and she can be "honored" and "trusted" as well (p. 216).

Moreover, she sharply criticizes Mr. Murdstone for treating David's mother as a baby, who lacks knowledge and well behavior. She says, accusing Mr. Murdstone of breaking David's mother's heart: "you were a tyrant to the simple baby, and you broke her heart" (Dickens, 2004, p. 224). Apparently, the blood kinship is clear in Betsey's behavior towards David in her defending and adopting him. She is his aunt and that what might make her protect him. After befriending Mr. Dick, the reader feels that David now is with trustworthy people after the plight he has with his mother's death and the ill-treatment of The Murdstones when they have seen it at the beginnings of the novel.

From a shocking description to a pleasant one, David skips to Agnes, as a middle class character, who can be a foil to the "ghastly" character of Heep. Dickens introduces Agnes with a smooth and soft description as having a "placid and sweet expression", which differs from the introduction of the "convulsive" and fishy features of Heep. Agnes is a pleasant character and David absorbs the concept of morality from her when she warns him about Steerforth. Agnes tells David that Steerforth is "a bad angel" (p. 374).

In addition to Agnes, David acquires the concept of morality from his aunt Betsey. Betsey gives him a great deal of advice, emphasizing morality and telling him that the strength does not come from the strong physical appearance but by the good and beneficial



qualities of the character: “I don’t mean physically, but morally; you are very well physically... with strength of character” (p. 283). David’s aunt proves to have the good qualities and actions of the good character, especially throughout the emphasis on principles when she gives David genuine guidance and recommendations: “‘Never . . . be mean in anything; never be false, never be cruel. Avoid those three vices, Trot, and I can always be hopeful of you’” (p. 234). Miss Betsey represents the side of morality and decency in the novel. She prioritizes morality over physical appearance. Miss Betsey might reflect a part of the novelist’s logic and philosophy in this novel by emphasizing morality and demonizing the greed, affectation, and craftiness of other characters.

### The Upper Class

In the subsequent chapters, the meaning of morality in the clash of the classes gets clearer when Dickens introduces Steerforth and his mother as upper class characters. David often describes Steerforth as a superior and powerful person. As the plot progresses, David thinks obsessively about Steerforth and how he is attracted by him. Steerforth’s attractive appearance strikes David. David’s description of Steerforth indicates impliedly the dominance of the upper class. Throughout the character of Steerforth, it can be inferred that the upper class people had the influence and power in the society for the genetic power they have as being wealthy and influential by inheritance when Steerforth describes the “Peggottys” as “Savages” (Dickens, 2004, p. 182). Tamal (2000) argues that “it [was] common in the Victorian writings that the working-class people are represented as “savages”” (Dickens, 2004, p. 183). Hence, Steerforth talks with Rosa Dartle and describes the lower class people as “they [do not have] very fine natures” (p. 352) and that emphasizes his view about the “ideological other” of such kind of people when he refers to them as “they” in stark contrast to “us” (p. 183): “why there, there’s pretty wide separation between them and us” (p. 352). Seemingly, the view about the upper class people is that they inherently exhibit goodness and correctness of character and behavior as it was believed at that period.



The idea of Steerforth's superiority and highness shows allegorically the image of aristocracy. Mrs. Steerforth's exaggerated depiction to her son's character shows the focus on nobility and heredity of specific characteristics and their priority compared to other characters (Tamal, 2000, 183). Mrs. Steerforth says, "My son's high spirit made it desirable that he should be placed with some man who felt its superiority, and would be content to bow himself before it; and we found such a man there." (Dickens, 2004, p. 305). The scene when Steerforth accompanies Mrs. Creakle, the headmaster's wife, elucidates the important status that Steerforth has with Mr. Creakle's family. Steerforth walks together with Mr. Creakle's daughter as well. David also describes Steerforth as a sun: "Mr Sharp and Mr Mell were both notable personages in my eyes; but Steerforth was to them what the sun was two stars" (Dickens, 2004, p. 102). David here shows an extended and metaphoric description to Steerforth to show the highest status that he enjoys. He also compares him to the sun because of its highness and brightness.

David makes an allusion to *The Arabian Nights* at the beginning of the novel. Mentioning the works that influenced him, David says that many works he read and "the Arabian Nights, and the Tales of the Genii,- did me [him] no harm" (Dickens, 2004, p. 66). David refers to *The Arabian Nights* again when he tells stories to Steerforth and as the latter says, "we will make some regular Arabian Nights of it" (p. 103). Narrating *The Arabian Nights* to Steerforth, David likens himself to Scheherazade under the mercy of the merciless and ferocious King Shahryar: "it was a tiresome to be roused, like the Sultana Scheherazade, and forced into a long story before the getting-up bell rang" (Dickens, 2004, p. 103-104). Dickens gives a hint about the real nature of Steerforth of having evil intentions towards people, which are different from how he acts. David also feels that he is forced to love Steerforth as his power and impact make David charmed. It could be interpreted that Steerforth is compared to king Shahryar because of the important status and the powerful position. It is a beautiful image that Dickens likens David to the situation of Queen Scheherazade because at this moment David is narrating stories to Steerforth just

like her. Dickens shows the reader that David is victimized by Steerforth and is unable to believe that because he is possessed by the spell of fascination and power of Steerforth.

In the novel, not only is David attracted by the character of Steerforth, but also does Peggotty admire Steerforth's powerful personality: "'Handsome!' cried Mr. Peggotty. 'He stands up to you like - like a - why I don't know what he don't stand up to you like. He's so bold!'" (Dickens, 2004, p. 152). The extended description and hyperbole is repeated by Mr. Peggotty's voice about the fascination and attraction that Steerforth leaves in him.... 'He's as brave as a lion, and you can't think how frank he is, Mr. Peggotty.'" (p. 152) David replies to Mr. Peggotty and tells him that Steerforth is bold and strong and then David completes the word that Peggotty wants to tell, which is a "lion," focusing on Steerforth's physical appearance.

Consequently, the character of Steerforth can be seen as an entity that represents the upper class whereas David can be seen as a middle-class character. David works hard in order to get rid of the shame of being poor. David says explicitly that he feels ashamed of the situation that he reaches when he is in an urgent need of money: "of the shame I felt in my position;" (Dickens, 2004, p. 153). David, nevertheless, succeeds in maintaining his class stable by hard work.

David then discovers how Steerforth is a "bad angel" when he runs away with Little Emily. Steerforth essentially deceives Little Emily when he neglects her and leaves her vulnerable to the evil intentions of his servant Littimer. Steerforth's bad action with Little Emily represents a crucial point in David's relationship with him.

After Emily's elopement with Steerforth, David decides to end his friendship with Steerforth. Steerforth's bright picture is scattered in David's mind. His speech is close to the monologue in a play where it has a feeling of anger and resentment towards Steerforth's bad action. He is now unworthy and David will treat his existence as a "dead" person: "Though he fascinated me no longer... an end between us... who was dead" (p. 461). The character of Steerforth, which is the representative of the upper class, is later deformed by his immorality.

At the end of the novel, Steerforth drowns in the sea because of the strong storm. David describes Steerforth's death as a dream which is closer to reality. David's ambivalent feelings of Steerforth's tragic event creates two possible interpretations of the scene of Steerforth's death. Steerforth might have not died and the scene of his death by the flood might be visual pictures of David's dream. Hence, David makes Steerforth's death closer to reality as being "distinct and vivid" (800). By and large, when somebody is quite sure that something will happen, he sees it as if it exists in front of him. The dream which overlaps with reality in David's mind about Steerforth's death indicates a philosophical perspective where life is considered as a dream to human beings when they die and go to the afterlife.

### **The Language of Symbolism and the Figurative Style**

David may try to say that the inevitable consequence of Steerforth's actions is death either by flood or by any woe of Time. In the aftermath, the flood is a cosmic force that caused Steerforth's doom. Steerforth should have to pay for his arrogance and bigotry to the lower class people. Sea imagery is also related to death. According to Sparknotes (2014), "The sea represents an unknown and powerful force in the lives of the characters in David Copperfield, and it is almost always connected with death" (p.10). Thus, throughout history, it can be seen that sea is a representative of death, typically to the arrogant people like the Pharaoh (Ramesses II) who died as a result of his tyranny and intransigence. In The Holy Bible, there is a reference to Pharaoh's drowning in the sea: "Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea" (*The Holy Bible*, Exodus. 15.4). Here, the sea is seen as a just and fair punishment to the arrogant. David might show the idea of intransigence with Steerforth's death. Perhaps the way of Steerforth's head put on his arms might remind David of Steerforth's arrogance in the school: "I saw him lying with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school." (Dickens, 2004, p. 801) Even in his death, the aspect of bigotry might be notable on Steerforth's face.

The scene of the sea shows also the foil between Ham as a real hero and Steerforth as a false hero. Ham proves himself to be a hero who tries to save Steerforth. Conversely, Steerforth proves himself to be a false hero different to what was seen at the beginning of the novel. Wiant (2008) points out that "Dickens's David Copperfield is a refreshing revision of the medieval allegory" (p. 3). So, the idea of death in the novel could be interpreted allegorically.

As an exception to the upper class characters, Dr. Strong to some extent represents the model of the upper class as being helpful and kind who promotes the welfare of other characters. David admires and describes Dr. Strong as the only higher class character who proves himself to be good and selfless. Dr. Strong's treatment of the students is admirable and he is "an excellent school" (Dickens, 2004, p. 246). Dr. Strong can be a foil to Mr. Creakle as David describes him as "good is from evil" (p. 246). All the boys in the school love Dr. Strong as an "idol" who is greatly admired and revered. He tries to make everybody in his family happy and he is seen to support the poor people as his wife's mother. Dickens here wants to prove that the quality of being in the higher class is not likened to the immorality neither does the quality of the lower class indicate morality. It is rather the nature of human beings that cannot be changed by time.

## Conclusion

Throughout this study, the following points could be concluded:

1- The pursuit of wealth and material led to broaden the social rift in the British society.

2- There appeared a phenomenon where people acted hypocritically and cunningly in order to climb the social ladder and to come out of the circle of the lower class. Thus, the standard to measure one's morality was based on one's background and status.

3- Dickens's found it necessary to respond to the illnesses of his time. Thus, he tried to reshape the understanding of people concerning the meaning of morality— as a feature that cannot be associated with one's appearance and status. In conclusion, the concept of morality in *David Copperfield* is not a criterion based on the social class.

4- Dickens also shows many lower characters with good features, and some of them like Littimer and Heep as immoral and fraudulent. As a result, Dickens tries to uncover the hypocrisy, materiality, and emptiness of the upper-class and the immoral lower class characters throughout his portrayal of the social classes within his huge novel. I refer the reader back to the concept of morality in the class struggle.

5- To sum up, Dickens's philosophy can be summarized in the thought that morality can be achieved not by huge wealth or attractive appearance but by the purity of intention and respect of other people as equal human beings.

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