

"I am a servant," I said, guessing that he merely wished to know my status in the house – intruder, friend, etc.

"A *servant*?" said he. He sounded younger than I had at first thought. "What sort of servant? We don't have *servants*!"

"Perhaps servant was the wrong word," I conceded. I remembered a word Pamela had used, when I had overheard her in the cottage garden. "I suppose I am a sort of au pair."

"Oh, you're *Martin's* girl," said the man. "You must be new. What happened to Colette?"

"I have no idea," I said.

--*The Country Life*, Rachel Cusk

"Nobody knows my name, nobody knows what I've done"

-- Bessie Smith

maid | meɪd |

noun

1 a female domestic servant: Mary eventually managed to find a job as a maid.

2 archaic an unmarried girl or young woman.  
. a virgin.

ORIGIN

Middle English: abbreviation of maiden.

THIS WORLD HAS SEEN MANY REVOLUTIONS  
WHOSE PRIMARY GOAL WAS TO CREATE  
MORE EQUALITY AMONG HUMANS, YET  
SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES  
REMAIN HUGE.

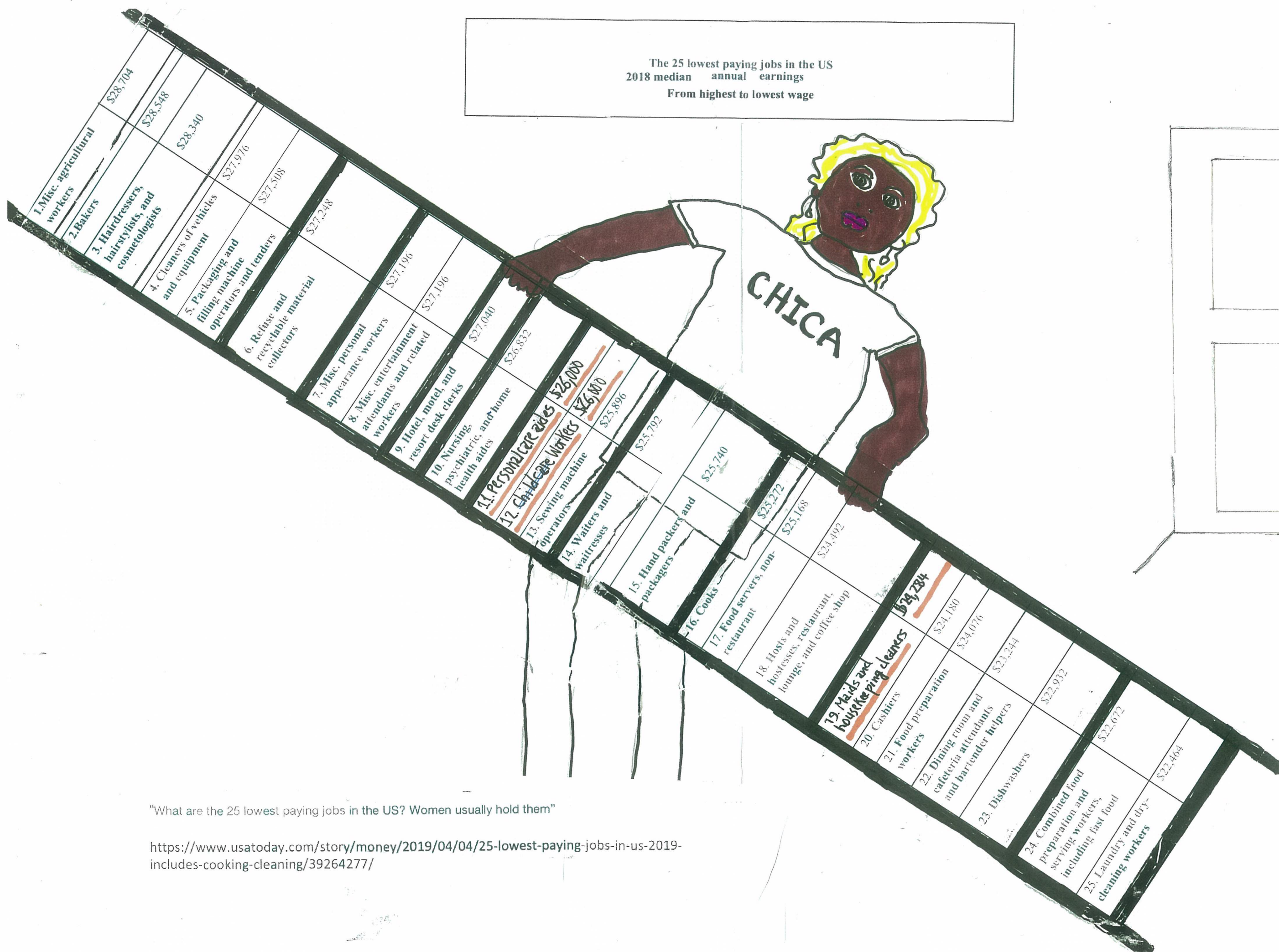
DESPITE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS THAT  
CALLED FOR EQUAL RIGHTS  
ACROSS GENDER, SOCIAL CLASSES  
AND RACE, NOT MUCH HAS CHANGED  
FOR WOMEN EMPLOYED TO CLEAN  
OFFICES, HOTELS, HOSPITALS, SCHOOLS,  
AIRPORTS, TRAIN AND BUS STATIONS,  
FERRY TERMINALS AND HOMES ALL  
OVER THE WORLD.

THESE WOMEN CONTINUE TO BE  
ON THE LOWEST END OF THE  
SERVICE INDUSTRY WAGE SCALE.





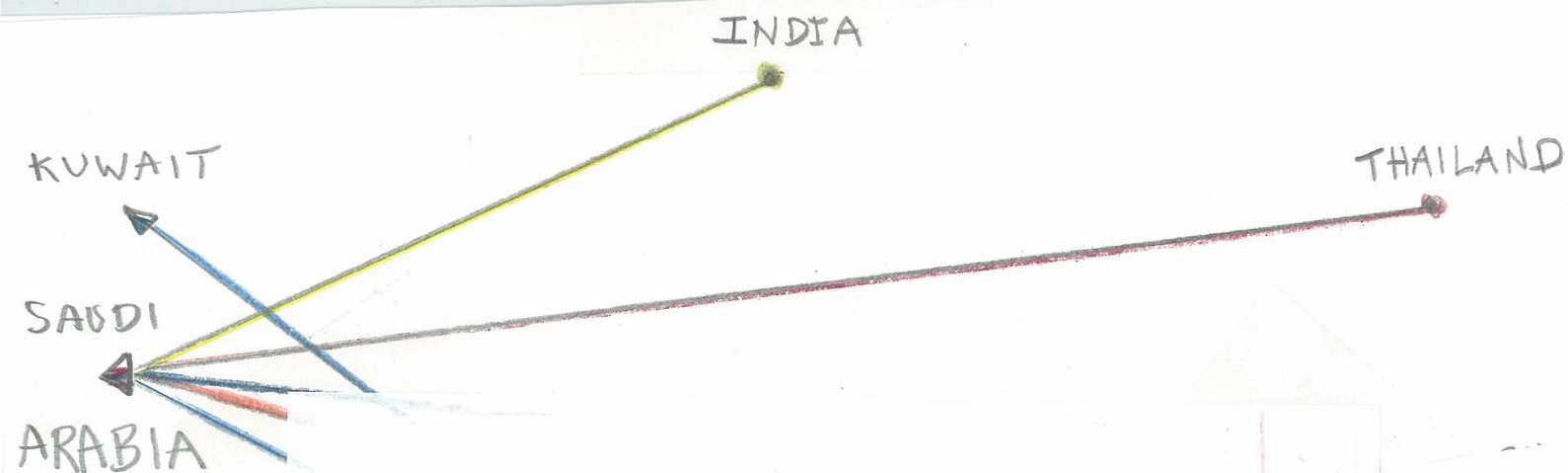
The 25 lowest paying jobs in the US  
2018 median annual earnings  
From highest to lowest wage



"What are the 25 lowest paying jobs in the US? Women usually hold them"

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2019/04/04/25-lowest-paying-jobs-in-us-2019-includes-cooking-cleaning/39264277/>





EUROPE

OTHER CATEGORIES OF WORKERS WHOSE LABOR CONTINUES TO BE UNDERVALUED INCLUDE NANNIES, AND CAREGIVERS FOR THE SICK, THE DISABLED AND THE ELDERLY.

SR LANKA

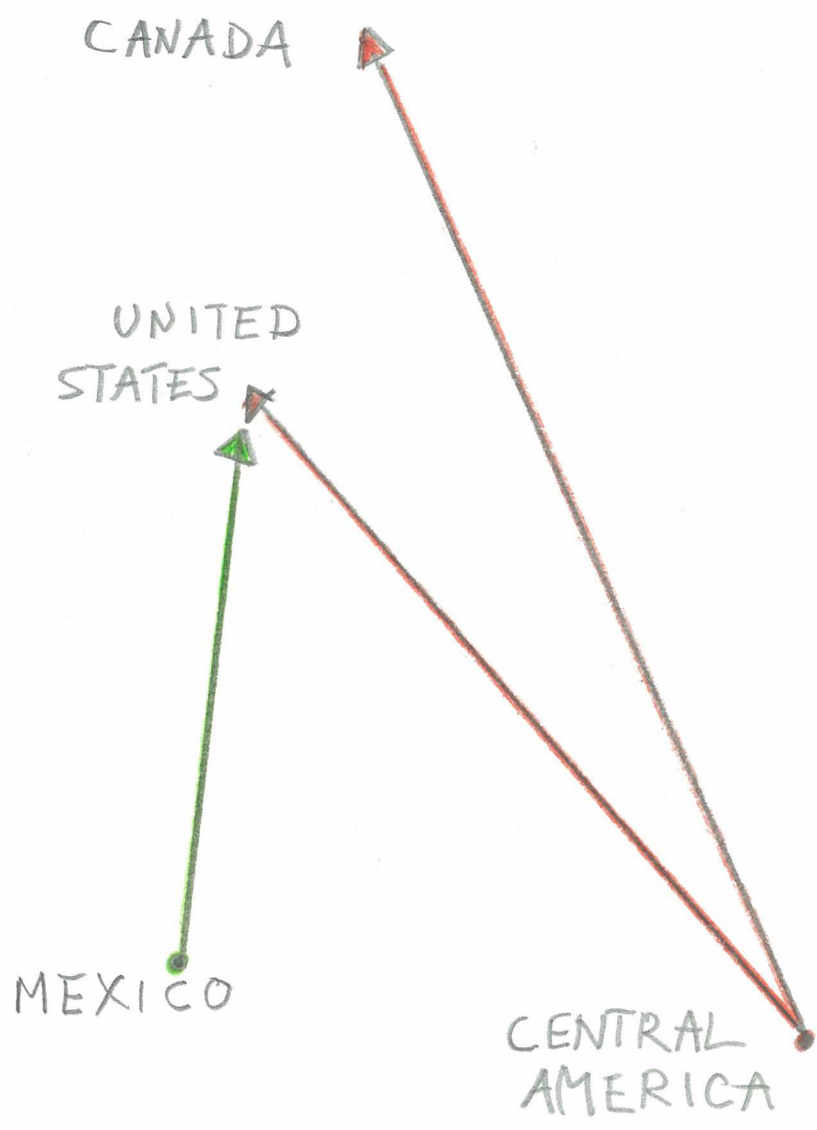
SPAIN  
MOROCCO

WOMEN FROM POORER COUNTRIES SEEKING A LIVELIHOOD IN RICHER COUNTRIES (OR POOR REGIONS >> RICHER REGIONS, COUNTRY >> CITY) MUST OFTEN SETTLE FOR DOMESTIC EMPLOYMENT NO MATTER THEIR SKILL SET. CLEANING AND CARE-TAKING ARE JOBS THAT OFFER LITTLE OR NO LEGAL PROTECTION, AS MANY ARE HIRED WITH LITTLE OR NO DOCUMENTATION.

NIGERIA

ETHIOPIA

SOMALIA





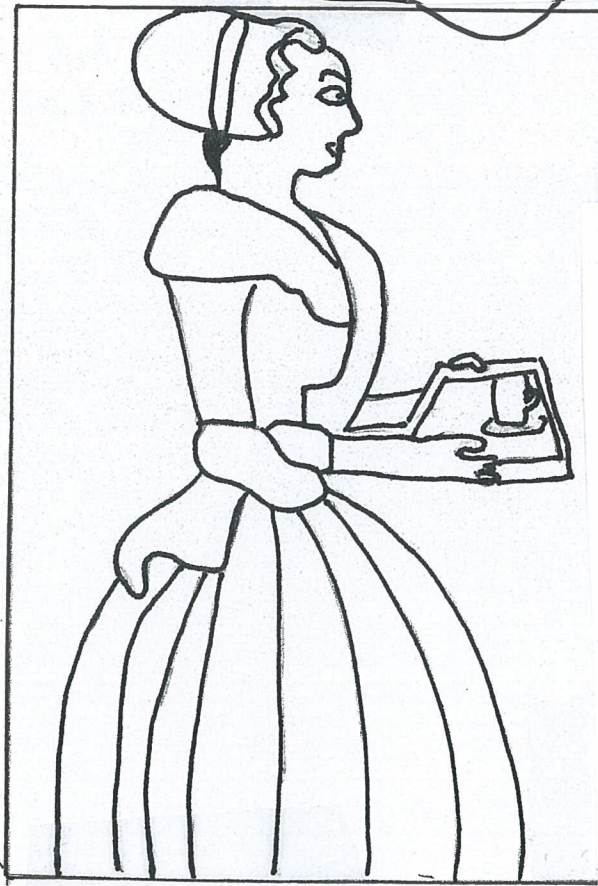
"DOMESTIC" IS A WORD ROOTED IN  
"DOMUS," THE LATIN WORD FOR "HOUSE."  
IN ANCIENT ROMAN TIMES, SERVANTS  
WERE A PART OF THE HOUSE, JUST LIKE  
FURNITURE OR HOUSEWARES.  
SERVANTS WERE SLAVES.

HISTORIAN WALTER SIMONS EXPLAINS...



Slavery mostly  
disappeared from  
Europe in the  
Middle Ages, but  
ten per cent of  
female household  
help in Renaissance  
Italy were mostly  
female Muslim slaves.

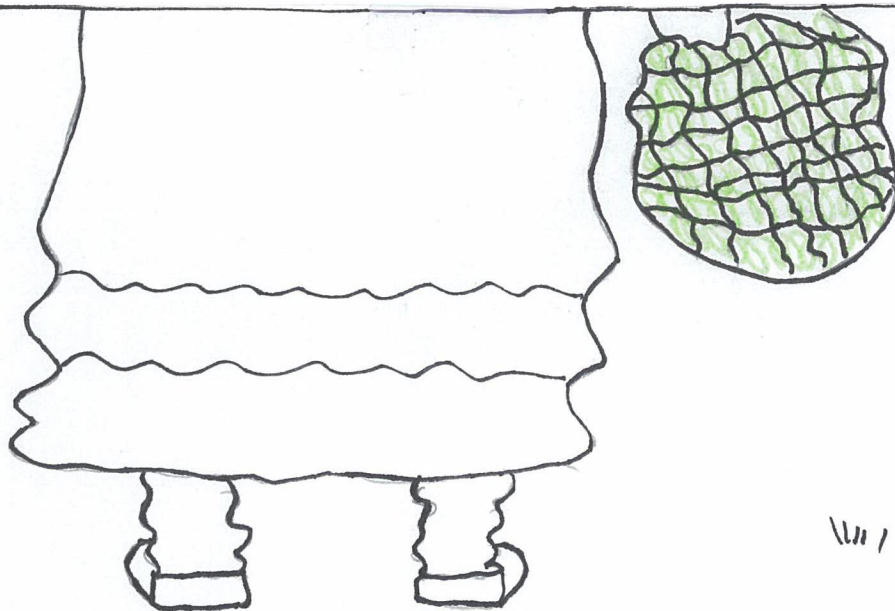
I once taught a course on female servants in literature and film. Since teaching the course, my interest has gone beyond the search for "subjectivity" in maids and servants, or their absence thereof given that they were often interchangeable characters (in fiction) assigned interchangeable names (Rose, Rosalie, Rosine, Felicite, ...). Now I want popular culture and real history and sociology to inform each other as I explore female domesticity once more.





HISTORICALLY THE MAIDS FOUND  
IN FICTION REFLECTED A SOCIAL  
REALITY, ONE IN WHICH WEALTHIER  
HOUSEHOLDS EMPLOYED WOMEN FROM  
POORER HOUSEHOLDS.

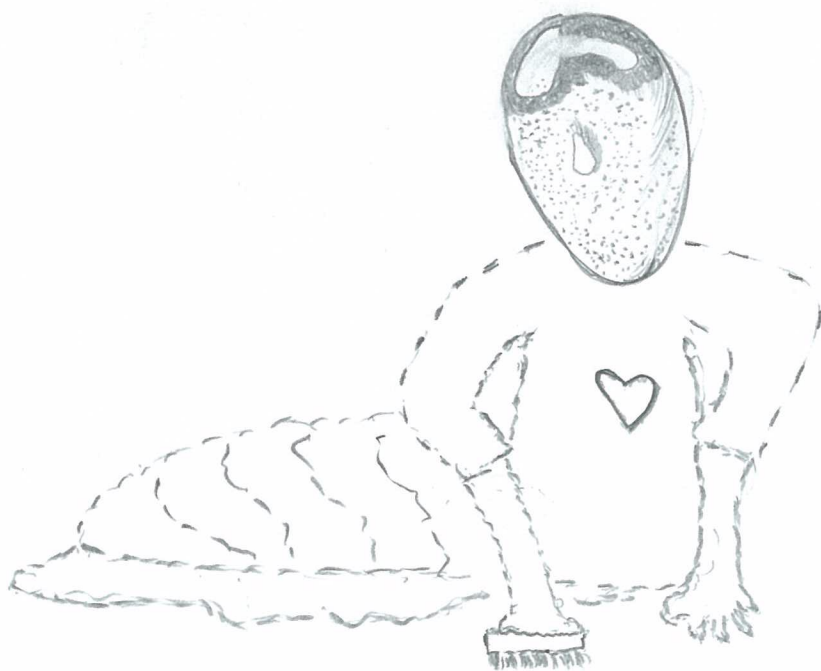
WITH NO FAMILY OF THEIR OWN, THEY  
HAD NEITHER THE WORKING-CLASS  
IDENTITY OF THEIR ORIGINS, DESPITE  
BEING OPPRESSED AND MISTREATED  
(BY THEIR EMPLOYERS, BUT ALSO OFTEN  
BY THEIR FAMILY OF ORIGIN).



NEITHER DID THEY HAVE THE BOURGEOIS  
IDENTITY OF THEIR MASTERS/EMPLOYERS,  
ALTHOUGH SOME (MANY?) ASPIRED TO IT.

THIS SYSTEM OF EMPLOYMENT INVOLVED  
MIGRATION (FROM COUNTRY TO CITY,  
AND, MORE RECENTLY, ACROSS INTERNATIONAL  
BORDERS), UPROOTING (FROM THE FAMILY OF  
BIRTH TO THE EMPLOYER'S FAMILY) AND  
EXTREMES OF DOMINATION OF THE EMPLOYER  
OVER THE EMPLOYEE.

POPULAR CULTURE HAS ALSO INFORMED  
REAL LABOR RELATIONS BETWEEN MASTER  
AND SERVANT. THE STEREOTYPE OF THE  
"PEARL," OR THE MAID WHO CAN DO NO WRONG,  
HAS INFLUENCED REAL EMPLOYERS WHO  
EXPECT A PERFECT, UNSEEN AND UNHEARD,  
LABORER.





I want to take a more global view of maids, although my focus will remain somewhat limited to Europe and North America. Men do partake in paid (and unpaid) domestic labor, but women are still the dominant gender in that field.

We will see whether the continuing presence of the FEMALE domestic worker maintains...



...The patriarchal family ideal of gendered divisions of labor.

GEOGRAPHER J. H. MOMSEN

# HANNAH CULLWICK PROVIDES AN INTERESTING EXAMPLE OF A VICTORIAN MAID IN ENGLAND.



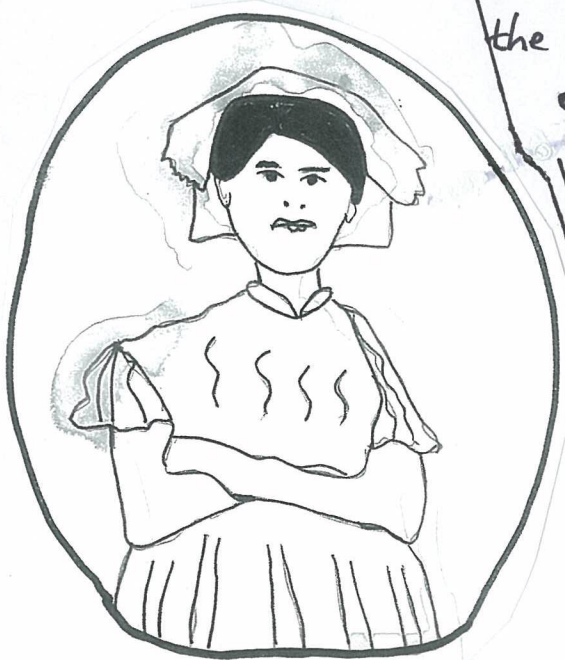
I was born in Shropshire England.

I worked and lived as a maid in a number of households before moving to London where I had a peculiar servile relationship with my master whom I eventually married.

I kept a diary, and it is partly thanks to that diary...



...that you get to learn what the daily life of a Victorian era maid entailed.





As I was cleaning the hall on my hands and knees one morning a gentleman came down to go out, and I let him step over me as he was in a hurry. Of course he never thought anything of it, neither did I, only of the difference 'twixt him and me.

(excerpt from Cullwick's diary)

---

MAIDS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN INVISIBLE.

FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT SEXUAL FAVORS GRANTED TO THE MASTER (OR MISTRESS SOMETIMES) AND THE MALE OFFSPRING, TO THE DISCRETION WITH WHICH THEY CLEAN HOUSES AND SERVE MEALS, FEMALE SERVANTS MUST BE PRESENT BUT INVISIBLE.

THEIR UNIFORMS OF BLACK DRESSES AND WHITE APRONS, STANDARDIZED DURING THE VICTORIAN ERA IN ENGLAND, WAS A WAY OF DISGUISED PERSONAL IDENTITY. ASSIGNING GENERIC FIRST NAMES TO MAIDS, AS WAS THE PRACTICE IN FRENCH NOVELS, ALSO TOOK AWAY THEIR IDENTITY. REAL MAIDS ARE ALSO OFTEN ADDRESSED BY THEIR FIRST NAMES ONLY.

THE MOVIE ANGELS AND INSECTS SHOWS FACELESS, BLURRY SERVANTS FILMED ALWAYS FROM THE BACK AS A MEANS TO CONVEY THEIR INVISIBILITY.

THE FILM EXPLORES OTHER THEMES TYPICAL OF MASTER/SERVANT NARRATIVES, INCLUDING THE SEXUAL MISCONDUCT OF THE MASTER CLASS AND THE REPRESSED DESIRE OF HIGHER END DOMESTIC WORKERS, NAMELY THE GOVERNESS (PLAYED BY KRISTIN SCOTT-THOMAS).

SERVANTS AND THEIR DESIRE ARE TO REMAIN INVISIBLE, RESTRAINED, REPRESSED, WHILE THE MASTERS DISOBEY THE STRICT MORAL CODE OF THEIR OWN MAKING.





FEMALE SERVANTS WERE MORE INVISIBLE THAN THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS IN PART BECAUSE OF THEIR LOWER RANK.

THE DUTIES THAT THEY PERFORMED - CLEANING & COOKING - MADE THEIR CLOTHES, HANDS & FACE DIRTY. MEANWHILE FOOTMEN AND BUTLERS GREETED THEIR MASTER AT THE DOOR OR OUTSIDE THE RESIDENCE, IN FULL VIEW OF GUESTS AND ONLOOKERS. BECAUSE THEY HAD TO LOOK CLEAN AND WELL ATTIRED, MALE SERVANTS WERE MORE VISIBLE.



SUSAN YATES, WHO HAS WRITTEN ON  
SERVANTS IN LITERATURE, NOTES THAT  
THE GENDER DIFFERENCE...



is linked to a socio-economic shift from a rural to an urban economy in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. This meant a shift from bigger to smaller living quarters, which was in turn accompanied by a shrinking of the domestic staff.

Women were perceived as being more submissive and easier to manage than men were, and their inferior condition was deemed natural by many thinkers of the time who saw women's roles as caring for the home.



DOMESTICITY IS MUCH  
LESS UNPLEASANT  
FOR WOMEN  
THAN IT IS FOR MEN.

WHAT A  
SEXIST BASTARD  
YOU ARE.

OH PAPA,  
SHUT UP.



Socialist Philosopher P-J Proudhon and two of his children  
after Gustave Courbet

Anna Bell 2022

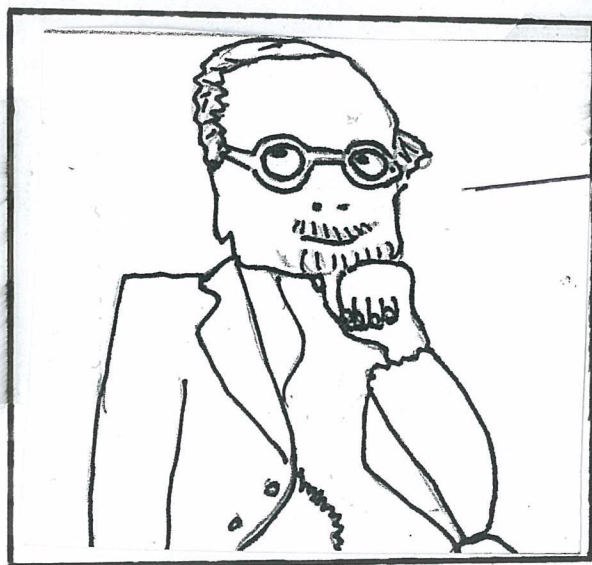
BEFORE THIS SHIFT TO SMALLER  
STAFFS, WHICH OFTEN MEANT ONE  
"SINGLE" WOMAN, THE HIGHEST RANK  
A FEMALE SERVANT COULD HOPE TO  
ATTAIN WAS LADY IN WAITING TO AN  
ARISTOCRATIC OR ROYAL MISTRESS, OR,  
IN BOURGEOIS HOUSEHOLDS WITH LARGE  
MEANS, HOUSEKEEPER.



A FAMOUS VISUAL EXAMPLE OF A "LADY IN WAITING" IS, QUITE LITERALLY, A LADY WAITING. ART HISTORIAN PASCAL BONAFOUX BELIEVES THAT THERE IS...

VERMEER'S  
Lady Writing  
a letter  
with her  
Maid\*

1670-1671



... complicity and intimacy  
between the two women.  
The mistress is actually  
writing a love letter.

\* The title says "Maid" but her  
dress is much too fancy for a maid.



HOW DO WE KNOW IT'S A LOVE LETTER?  
WHATEVER INTERPRETATIONS EXIST REGARD-  
ING THE MAID'S FACIAL EXPRESSION...



COMPLICITY?



IMPATIENCE?



RESTLESSNESS?

...SHE IS DEFINITELY WAITING.

WRITING ABOUT FEMALE LABOR IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND, OLWEN HUFTON MAKES THE POINT THAT...



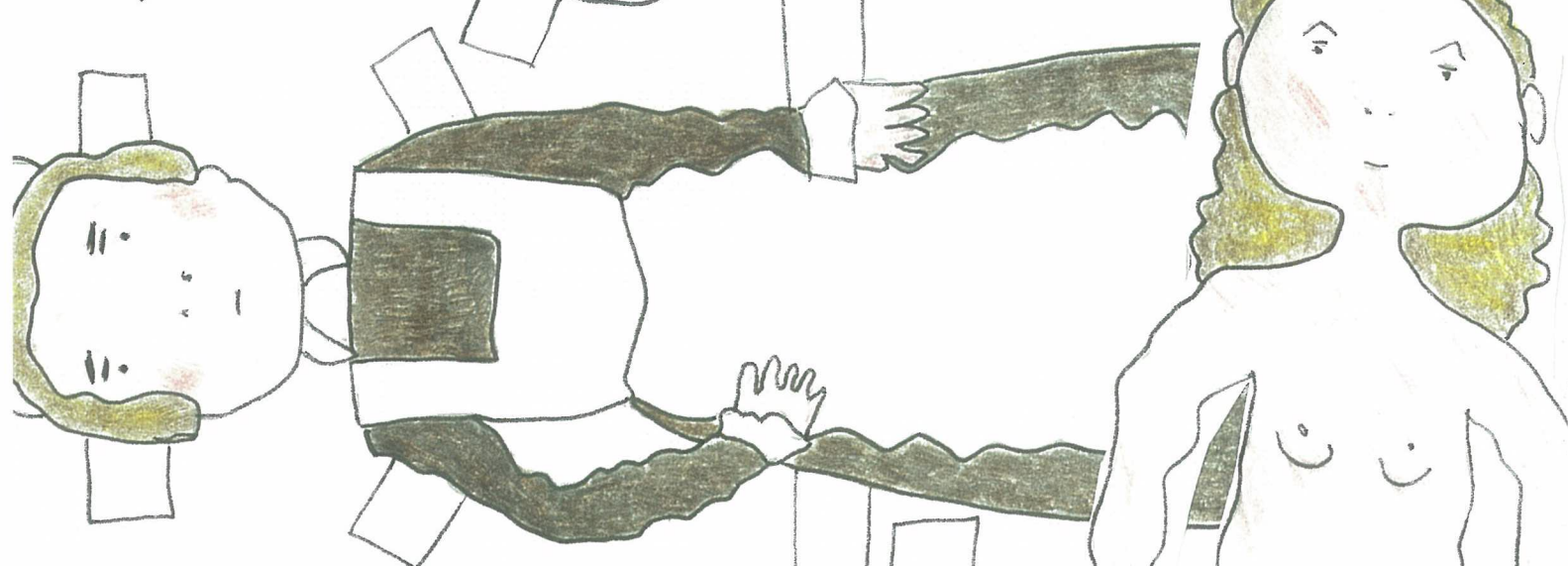
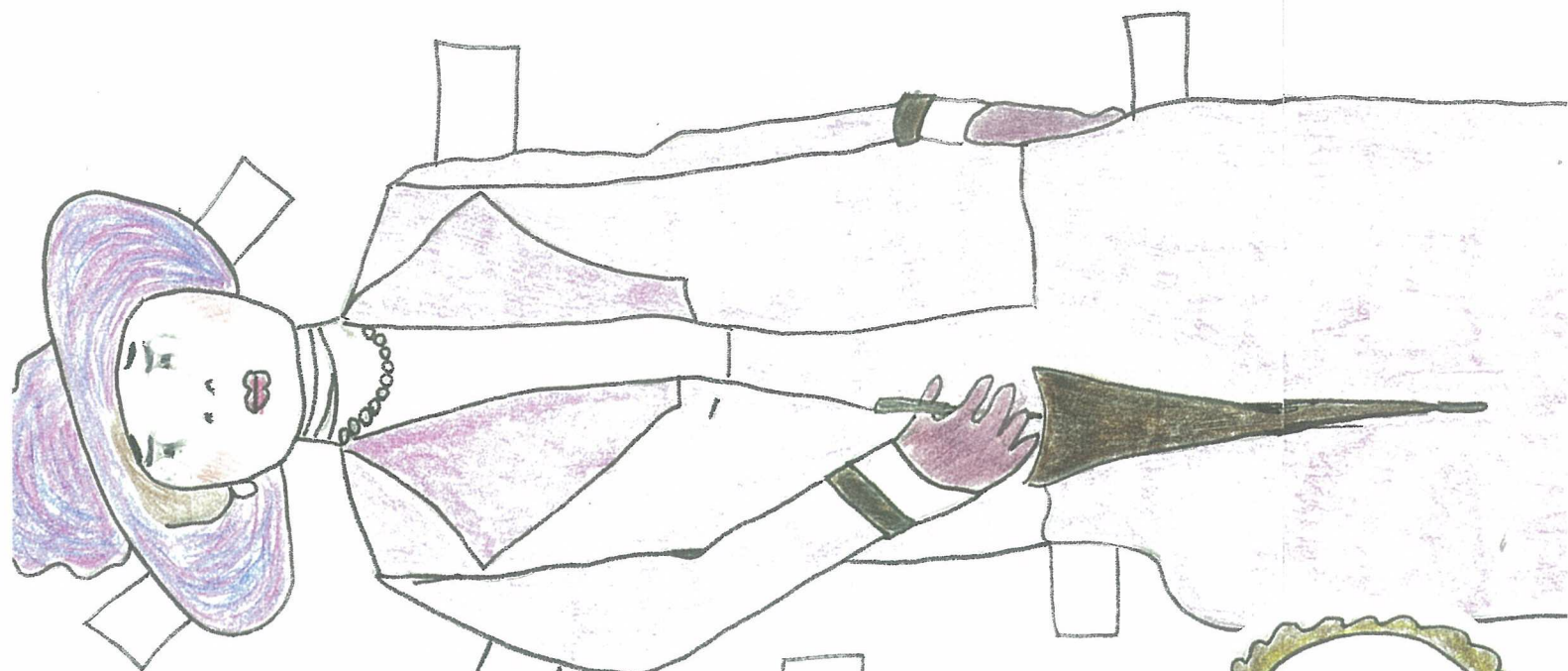
... female labor was cheaper than male labor. Masters with little means would likely seek out female domestics so that they could pay them less and have more of them.

OLWEN HUFTON EXPLAINS FURTHER THAT IT WAS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO MAKE A CAREER OUT OF BEING A MAID BECAUSE OF THE OBSTACLES IN THE WAY, LIKE...

being impregnated by a male member of the household, and subsequently thrown out of her job, or being unable to save money because she was expected to send all her earnings to her penniless family, or being passed over for promotion by a new hire. There was intense competition among servants for promotion.









IN THE FILM, "THE FAVOURITE," THE NEWBIE CHARACTER PLAYED BY EMMA STONE EMBODIES ALL THE DIFFICULTIES AND OBSTACLES. EVEN WHEN SHE DOES BECOME THE QUEEN'S FAVOURITE, SHE CONTINUES A LIFE OF SERVITUDE, ALBEIT IN MORE COMFORTABLE CIRCUMSTANCES THAN THOSE OF A SCULLERY MAID.



BEFORE



AFTER



FAMOUSLY, ANOTHER ROYAL FAVOURITE, JANE SEYMOUR, BECAME HENRY VIII'S WIFE AFTER BEING LADY IN WAITING TO HIS FIRST TWO WIVES. ONLY TO DIE IN CHILD BIRTH, BUT THAT'S ANOTHER STORY.



"Jane Seymour, Queen of England" by Hans Holbein the Younger

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien

In the painting by Holbein, she is looking away. I have redirected her gaze toward the viewer.

THE INVISIBILITY OF SERVANT LABOR CONTINUES STILL TODAY. GEOGRAPHER JANET HENSHALL MOMSEN STATES THAT...



... until recently, women were statistically invisible in migration data and, by taking up jobs within the private domestic sphere, remained largely unrecorded in censuses, and often out of reach of labor unions and non-governmental organizations.

ON THE TV SERIES "MAID," THE TITLE CHARACTER (NAMED ALEX) IS INSTRUCTED BY THE HOUSEKEEPING AGENCY TO SHOW UP WHEN NOBODY IS HOME. ONE EXPLANATION FOR THIS RULE HAS TO DO WITH THE DUBIOUS LEGALITY OF THE MAID'S TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT (DECLARED OR UNDECLARED?)





THE TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT WERE FIRST SET BY THE NOBILITY WHO CREATED A VERY RIGID CLASS SYSTEM WITH LITTLE CHANCE OF PROMOTION FROM ONE SOCIAL RUNG TO A HIGHER ONE.

LATER, WITH THE RISE OF CAPITALISM, TO REMAIN IN CONTROL OF THE SOCIAL ORDER, THE NEWLY DOMINANT BOURGEOISIE IMAGINED A WORLD WHERE ORDER REIGNED OVER CHAOS.

EMPHASIS ON "IMAGINED."

bourgeoisie | bʊəʒwaɪziː | noun [treated as a singular or plural] the middle class, typically with reference to its perceived materialistic values or conventional attitudes: the rise of the bourgeoisie at the end of the eighteenth century | the landed gentry were replaced by a local bourgeoisie • (in Marxist contexts) the capitalist class who owns most of society's wealth and means of production: the conflict of interest between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.



IN THEIR SEMINAL WORK ON HIERARCHIES, HISTORIANS PETER STALLYBRASS AND ALAN WHITE STATED THAT, IN WESTERN SOCIETY...

... A recurrent pattern emerges: the "top" attempts to reject and eliminate the "bottom" for reasons of status, only to discover, not only that it is in some way frequently dependent upon that low-Other [...] but also ... that the top includes that low symbolically, as a primary ...



... eroticized constituent of its own fantasy life.

- Scholars can often speak in heavy and cryptic tones.
- However,

MAIDS ARE NOT JUST SYMBOLICALLY EROTICIZED BY THE WAY. THIS "INCLUSION" OF THE «BOTTOM» IN THE «TOP» IS QUITE OFTEN LITERAL, AS IN MASTERS CREATING NEW MIXED BLOODLINES WHEN FATHERING CHILDREN WITH THEIR SERVANTS.

The result is a mobile, conflictual fusion of power, fear and desire in the construction of subjectivity. A psychological dependence...  
...upon precisely those Others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded...



Stallybrass and White  
have a great deal to  
say on the matter.



... at the social level. The low-Other is despised and denied at the level of political organization and social being whilst it is instrumentally...

... constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture.

THESE ARE SOME OF THE REASONS WHY DOMESTIC LABOR IS HIDDEN FROM VIEW IF NOT UNDERVALUED AND DISPARAGED. THE POWER OF THE BOURGEOISIE IS FRAGILE BECAUSE IT DEPENDS IN PART ON A SEMBLANCE OF ORDER OVER CHAOS, OF A CLEAN HOUSE OVER A DIRTY ONE. THE FAMILY SEEMS HAPPY AND WHOLE WHEN, IN FACT, IT IS IN FINANCIAL TROUBLE (OR SOME KIND OF TROUBLE) AND ABOUT TO FALL APART.



