“THAT INEVITABLE WOMAN”: THE PAID FEMALE COMPANION AND SYMPATHY IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

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For Chris, who has traveled along this road—and many others—by my side

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INTRODUCTION

SYMPATHY FOR HIRE

In William Makepeace Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair* (1847), the narrator breaks the thread of the story to provide his readers with an ironic aside on the paid female companion:

> An article as necessary to a lady in this position as her brougham or her bouquet is her companion. I have always admired the way in which the tender creatures, who cannot exist without sympathy, hire an exceedingly plain friend of their own sex from whom they are almost inseparable. The sight of that inevitable woman in her faded gown seated behind her dear friend in the opera-box, or occupying the back seat of the barouche, is always a wholesome and moral one to me. (395)

Thackeray's comment alludes to the ambiguous power dynamics involved in the female companion position, especially when such a figure is "hire[d]" and paid for her services. She is an "article" to her mistress, a fashionable accessory, always "behind her" and in "the back seat;" yet the companion is simultaneously "inseparable" from her employer, "necessary" for providing protection, amusement, and above all, "sympathy." Thackeray's narrator is imprecise regarding this sympathy the "tender creature" desires and the "plain friend" can provide, however. In *Vanity Fair* and other Victorian novels featuring a paid female companion, sympathy functions as the central aspect of the mistress-companion relationship. The companion must identify and, in a sense, identify *with* her mistress's needs, whims, opinions and moods, as well as her reputation and marriage prospects. In short, she should sympathize and adapt with her mistress. But what are the consequences of this sympathy for hire? What avenues to power and

advantage might it allow between two women whose intimate bond is characterized by the superimposition of an economic, employment relationship? Further, what opportunities does this ambiguous dynamic offer authors in the Victorian period?

There are several companion figures in *Vanity Fair*, but Thackeray's Rebecca Sharp is the Victorian era's most memorable example of a companion who manipulates her relationship with her mistress, and specifically the sympathetic expectations that defined the role, to achieve her own ends. By the time Miss Matilda Crawley visits Queen's Crawley, Becky has already succeeded in ingratiating herself with Sir Pitt. By finding "many different ways of being useful to him" and becoming "interested in everything appertaining to the estate," Becky makes herself more than just the governess of Sir Pitt's daughters; she becomes "almost the mistress of the house" but does so with such "circumspection" and "great prudence" that no one suspects her of any self-serving design (93). Ever tongue-in-cheek and suggestive, Thackeray's narrator says nothing of all this other than that Becky "was a very clever woman" (96).

When Miss Crawley arrives, Becky is quick to turn her attentions to the family's wealthy matriarch: "Miss Crawley had not been long established at the Hall before Rebecca's fascinations had won the heart of that good-natured London rake" (106). Becky makes "a conquest of her" by taking the initiative to *present herself* as Miss Crawley's companion. From the moment they meet, Becky begins to fulfill a companion's duties with the charisma and adeptness that characterize her, and make her so dangerous, throughout the novel. In addition to "Having made [Miss Crawley] laugh four times, and amused her" during a carriage ride, Becky also runs Miss Crawley's "errands, execute[s] her millinery, and read[s] her to sleep with French novels, every

night" (106-7). Becky's scheme succeeds and when Miss Crawley falls ill and must return to London, she takes Becky with her as companion and nurse. No longer a governess, Becky has graduated to another role. As Thackeray showcases throughout the scenes in London, Becky's ability to assess and cater to Miss Crawley's personality with lightning facility allows her, in the embittered words of the maid Firkin, to "bewidge" Miss Crawley (134). The best example of this is Becky's ability to sympathize with Miss Crawley's crueler tendencies. During her illness, Miss Crawley "show[s] her friendship by abusing all her intimate acquaintances to her new confidante" and, in turn, Miss Crawley is never more attached to Becky than when she is performing her malicious "perfect imitations" of her mistress's many sycophantic attendants and family members (140, 135). Yet throughout Becky's campaign to attach herself to Miss Crawley, Becky is hard at work on another, related project: the seduction of Rawdon Crawley, Miss Crawley's favorite.

After Becky refuses Sir Pitt's proposal of marriage because she is already secretly married to Rawdon, the "poor orphan—deserted—girl" uses the attachment and sympathy she has calculatingly fostered in her mistress to prepare Miss Crawley to learn the truth. As Becky cries, "'O my friends! O my benefactors! may not my love, my life, my duty, try to repay the confidence you have shown me?,'" she sinks "down in a chair so pathetically, that most of the audience present were perfectly melted with her sadness" (151). Becky continues her manipulations of sympathy later with her mistress in private: "she laid her head upon Miss Crawley's shoulder and wept there so naturally that the old lady, surprised into sympathy, embraced her with an almost maternal kindness, uttered many soothing protests of regard and affection for her, vowed that she loved her as a

daughter, and would do everything in her power to serve her" (154). Miss Crawley's response, a result of Becky's present performances but more an effect of the path she has carefully paved, leads Becky to proceed with confidence, believing that she has succeeded so well in her scheme that her mistress "is so fond of me that I don't think she could be comfortable without me" (156). Becky has made herself so indispensable to her mistress through her perfect performance of the companion role, has "twined herself round the heart of Miss Crawley" so completely, that Miss Crawley clings to her "with the greatest energy" (160, 147).

A letter Becky writes to Rawdon reveals the true extent of her scheming ingratiation with Miss Crawley:

> She will be shaken when she first hears the news. But need we fear anything beyond momentary anger? I think not: *I am sure not*. She dotes upon you so […] that she will pardon you *anything*: and, indeed, I believe, the next place in her heart is mine: and that she would be miserable without me. Dearest! something *tells me* we shall conquer. You shall leave that odious regiment: quit gaming, racing, and *be a good boy*; and we shall live in Park Lane [with Miss Crawley], and *ma tante* shall leave us all her money. (156)

Through her various, expert simulations of affection, intimacy, sympathy, and usefulness, Becky manipulates the entire Crawley family to achieve her own goals: retirement from the labor market in marriage, social status, security, and wealth. Arguably the most clever, talented, and dangerous companion in Victorian fiction, Thackeray's Becky Sharp epitomizes the palimpsest of threats the companion can pose as she manipulates her position and relationship to sympathy to promote her own interests.

In this dissertation, I argue that through their companion characters, Victorian writers interrogated and deconstructed sympathy while simultaneously experimenting with the opportunities the companion's ambiguous, ancillary position allowed for their

narratives. I show that representations of the mistress-companion relationship in the novel reveal how some writers in the Victorian period turned away from the eighteenth-century conception of sympathy as a force which forges bonds of sentimental understanding between individuals, underpinning social hierarchies and stability. The novels I discuss portray sympathy not as a selfless, empathetic understanding of others' suffering but as a manipulative mode of relating. In these texts, published during the fifty-year period spanning the 1830s and 1880s, sympathy is represented as a *self*-centered strategy for gaining transgressive power, social mobility, romantic attachments, and narrative centrality. For reasons I will explore shortly, the darker side of sympathy became a topic of concern during these mid-century years.

Victorian authors such as Thackeray had a rich and varied array of literary predecessors to draw upon when creating their companion characters. Oliver Goldsmith's novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) features detailed accounts of companions' duties, qualifications, and remuneration in the eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, Frances Burney includes a companion character in almost every one of her major novels, and *The Wanderer* (1814), Burney's last novel, takes a companion as its heroine. Jane Austen also explored the companion as a cultural figure in Fanny Price's companion-like situation with the Bertrams in *Mansfield Park* (1814), and her portrayal of the subtly manipulative Mrs. Clay in *Persuasion* (1818) is perhaps the Victorians' most significant precursor.

Although the female companion character did not originate in the literature of Queen Victoria's reign, the figure rose to a degree of popularity in the high-Victorian novel not seen before or after. The paid female companion as a novelistic figure provides

a useful archive for exploring representations of sympathy because of the distinctive nature of the mistress-companion relationship in Victorian fiction. In this dissertation, I discuss canonical and non-canonical texts by several Victorian authors who feature paid female companions in their works. Each author depicts the role of the female companion as fraught with ambiguity. The companion's qualifications, duties, compensation, her status in society and in the household where she serves, as well as her relationship with her mistress are never definite and are rarely standard across texts. In some novels, the companion is little more than a plaything or lackey, while in others the companion is the sole confidante and friend upon whom her mistress depends and is treated as a sister or daughter.

The companions in these novels blur the lines between commodity, employee, servant, friend and even family member; the figure represents, in Margorie Garber's terms, a "category crisis." Victorian writers' representations of the mistress-companion relationship are symptomatic of a whole series of cultural beliefs and concerns in the Victorian era. Authors used their companion characters to address issues of gender, power, and ethics, among other social anxieties such as class mobility and the relationship between public and private spheres. Any one of these could have been the primary focus of this study. I have chosen to concentrate on what the mistress-companion relationship reveals about conceptions of sympathy in the period because it allows for an examination of many of these other, equally important, literary functions of the companion. The one constant in these novels is the representation of sympathy as a definitive consideration in the mistress-companion relationship. The paid female companion in the Victorian novel is far from a stable, conventional entity, and this

ambiguity in the mistress-companion relationship makes it ripe for sympathetic manipulations—on either side of the equation.

This study contributes to the rich and varied body of criticism concerning women's work in the nineteenth century. The companion's status as an intersection of class, economic, and affective investments troubles the very meaning of women's work in the Victorian period, necessitating a complication and expansion of critical terms. The companion is lost to historical and literary studies, hidden in the crux of scholarship on the governess and domestic servant, lingering only in the Victorian novels we read today. As such, this project introduces the figure into the critical dialogue on nineteenth-century women's work, both highlighting the pervasiveness of the figure in Victorian literature and illuminating contemporary issues as diverse as gender roles, employment dynamics, eroticism, sympathy, and narrative structure in their work.

The ambiguities and unique structures of sympathy that characterize the mistress-companion dyad also complicate our understanding of female interpersonal relationships in Victorian fiction. Recent scholarship such as Sharon Marcus's *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (2007) has brought these concerns to the forefront of attention in literary studies. This project dismantles some of both the Victorians' and our own conceptions about women's relationships with one another by revealing how integral, and problematic, considerations such as power, money, desire, and sympathy were in associations between women. Through their depictions of the mistress-companion dyad, Victorian authors contemplated the ambiguous dynamics that characterized all women's relationships with one another and the ways in which even female friendship could be situated in the marketplace.

The ambiguity in the mistress-companion relationship enabled Victorian writers to explore the diverse narrative versatility of the companion character. The companion figure has a special relationship to narrativity because she provides an unstable, mobile locus authors can use to perform necessary but ancillary narrative functions. By definition, the companion is always ancillary, an accessory in both senses of the word, for her mistress within the story as well as for the author in the narrative's discourse. Even in those novels in which the companion character explodes these boundaries to become more central to a narrative or to assume the role of heroine or narrator, we understand her in these terms. Thus, companion characters can reveal and promulgate supplementary knowledge and meaning to other characters and to the reader and even to address the very relationship among author, text, and reader in often unexpected ways. As helpmates to their narratives' aims, companions also serve as companion to the author and to the reader, contributing to their narratives without being constitutive.

In addition to offering a series of related arguments about the companion as a cultural figure and what the mistress-companion relationship reveals about conceptions of sympathy in the Victorian period, each chapter also examines the diverse narrative functions companion characters performed. The companion's distinctive ambiguity, mobility, and ancillary status allowed the figure to serve as narrative assistants or participants, exposing and disseminating knowledge to other characters and readers alike, to complicate and blur the boundaries of character rank and mobility throughout a narrative hierarchy, to interrogate the methods and motivations of narration, to address their own anxieties regarding the reception of their work, and to probe the relationship among author, text, and reader.

I. The Companion

Paid female companions in the Victorian era were generally genteel or middle-class "redundant" women, either single or widowed. The role was one of the few available employment options for women of this social status and was the only respectable choice that did not involve teaching. Like governesses, companions usually found employment by posting or answering advertisements or through familial connections; in fact, many ladies served as companion to members of their own extended family when their financial situations required that they find some form of genteel labor. Often, governesses like Mrs. Pryor in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* and Mrs. Vesey in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* remained in their employer's household as companions once their female charges had outgrown the age for lessons. While governesses suffered from the tedium of long hours with often unruly, disrespectful young children, companions enjoyed (or sometimes endured) close personal service with the mistress or older daughter of a household and interaction with a genteel family and its guests rather than the more isolating instruction of children. Unlike the governess, there was rarely if ever any question of where the companion should take her meals, where she would sit in a coach, or how she was to be treated by her mistress's domestic servants. Definitively a member of the "upstairs" region of the Victorian home, the companion was the constant, *genteel* attendant to her mistress and therefore superior to the servants; her status as neither equal nor servant to her mistress, however, left her in a position perhaps even more problematic than that of the governess. Although usually of the same or only slightly lower class position than their mistresses, companions were nevertheless often

expected to act with servility and endure disrespect and a lack of consideration from their employers.

The companion's job description required her to set aside her own desires, beliefs, and feelings in order to cater to those of her mistress. In Thomas Hardy's *Desperate Remedies*, Cytherea Graye immediately recognizes the self-abnegation she must endure as a companion when she laments the way in which she must accept "her dependence upon the whims of a strange woman, the necessity of quenching all individuality of character in herself, and relinquishing her own peculiar tastes to help on the wheel of this alien establishment" (67). Forced to work for their self-preservation despite their social status, and victimized by their personal situations as well as by the stigma associated with being single, these women often suffered from the coarsening and demeaning effects of their sycophantic, dependent occupation. Charlotte Brontë was just as aware of the trials of the companion occupation as she was of those of the governess; in *Villette* (1853), after one stint as companion to Miss Marchmont, Lucy Snowe determines that she is "no bright lady's shadow" and refuses to be "the foil of any gem, and adjunct of any beauty, the appendage of any greatness in Christendom" (Brontë 382-83). Lucy asserts that "Rather than be a companion, I would have made shirts and starved," a sentiment which echoes Charlotte's tongue-in-cheek remarks in a letter to Ellen Nussey on 15 April 1839 in which she claims she would much prefer to hire herself out as a housemaid than as a "lady's-maid [and] far less a lady's companion" (64).

A companion's duties ranged from keeping her mistress company at home and abroad, amusing her and tending to her whims, to serving as chaperone whenever the mistress entertained men. Companions read to their mistresses, played music for them,

ran errands; they acted as both lackey and confidant—a "friend" who was always at her employer's disposal as a sympathetic receptacle for blame and frustration, light-hearted gossip, or intimate conversation. The companion's chief social function was to act as a monitor for her mistress; thus, the companion satisfied a cultural impulse to contain the mistress's autonomy as well. The families of single and even married women often encouraged or made them hire companions who in effect served to temper their independence while also protecting their chaste reputations. In *David Copperfield*, David finds himself up against Jane Murdstone once more during his courtship of Dora Spenlow; Mr. Spenlow has hired Miss Murdstone as his daughter's companion and chaperone: a "confidential friend [...] companion and protector" since Dora "unhappily, [has] no mother" (Dickens 333). Although married to Rawdon Crawley, Becky Sharp requires a "*moral* shepherd's dog" or, as she explains, "A dog to keep the wolves off me, [...] a companion" who will act as "guardian of her innocence and reputation" (Thackeray 396, 432).

A companion's compensation for her work varied as widely as the catalog of her duties often did. While some companions were paid a salary, others received only room and board in exchange for their services. Anthony Trollope depicts the wide spectrum of remunerative possibilities, and the lack of any form of regulation regarding a companion's compensation, in *The Eustace Diamonds* (1872). While Lizzie Eustace pays her companion, Julia Macnulty, seventy pounds *per annum* in addition to "her 'keep,' and first class travelling," Lucy Morris is hired as Lady Linlithgow's companion "without salary, indeed—but receiving shelter, guardianship, and bread and meat" in return for "no duties" other than "talking and listening to the countess" (Trollope 236,

315, 347). Other companions were paid in gifts; in *Vanity Fair*, for example, Miss Crawley pays Becky Sharp by giving her "a couple of new gowns, and an old necklace and shawl" (Thackeray 140).

To fulfill the diverse and often contradictory requirements of her position, a companion's qualifications included good breeding, an array of feminine accomplishments with which to entertain her mistress, and a capacity for loyalty, humility, and especially sympathy. With the rise of the cult of domesticity in the nineteenth century, sympathy became the core of the ideological feminine ideal—a specifically female trait that could allow women to personify Sarah Stickney Ellis's call for "disinterested kindness" and to be the moral foundation of the home and nation. "As the centers of Victorian domestic life," Audrey Jaffe writes, "women were expected to defer their own desires and work toward the fulfillment of others', and the name given that generalized identification was frequently sympathy" (17). Perhaps these very cultural expectations were among the factors that necessitated the role of the paid female companion in the Victorian period. For these mistresses, burdened with the responsibility of providing sympathy themselves, the companion could fulfill their own needs for attention, emotional connection, and control which they were not able to access from their families or social circles. A consolidation of the expectations of women, coupled with increasing diversification of the labor market, resulted in the increased prominence of the paid female companion.

Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* illustrates the centrality of sympathy in the mistress-companion relationship: the narrator incessantly reiterates Lizzie Eustace's demands for sympathy from her companion, Miss Macnulty. Lizzie:

> declared to herself that she could pour herself out on Miss Macnulty's bosom, and mingle her tears even with Miss Macnulty's, if only Miss Macnulty would believe in her [...] Lizzie—so she told herself—would have showered all the sweets of female friendship even on Miss Macnulty's head. But Miss Macnulty was as hard as a deal board. She did what she was bidden, thereby earning her bread. But there was no tenderness in her; —no delicacy,—no feeling; —no comprehension. (226-7)

In this moment and throughout the novel, Lizzie longs in vain for the "counsel and confidence" she handsomely pays her companion to provide for her (83). The antithesis of Becky Sharp, Miss Macnulty cannot bring herself to express a sympathy that is not genuine: "When Lady Eustace called on her for sympathy, she had not courage enough to dare to attempt the bit of acting which would be necessary for sympathetic expression. She was like a dog or a child, and unable not to be true" (234). While Miss Macnulty's refusal to perform false sympathy is laudable in moral terms, within the mistress-companion dynamic it is a fault, a failure. As the narrator makes clear, "Certainly Miss Macnulty had fallen into a profession for which she was not suited" (235).

Employing a companion could permit a Victorian lady with enough disposable income the opportunity to *receive* sympathy without the necessity of reciprocation. As I will discuss in chapter four, because the mistress-companion relationship was situated within the domestic space and was defined as a dynamic between two women, traditional codes of paternalism and even increasing government regulation often did not apply or could not reach within the private sphere to protect the companion from mistreatment at the hands of her employer. For example, legislation limiting working hours for women and children passed during the early decades of the nineteenth century protected those laboring in factories but could not reach within the discrete walls of the genteel home to

regulate a companion's hours; similarly, the Truck Acts, which dictated that employees be compensated in "the current coin of the realm" could not extend to the mistress-companion employment relationship, as many Victorian authors show.

Victorian novelists explored how the power dynamics inherent in the employer-employee aspect of the mistress-companion relationship caused confusion in the female bond of reciprocity and obligation. While Becky Sharp is perhaps the most dangerous companion in Victorian literature, she is also one of the most dangerous and manipulative mistresses. Late in *Vanity Fair*, when Becky hires Miss Briggs—formerly the companion to Miss Crawley whom Becky usurped in Miss Crawley's favor—as her own companion, Becky frequently takes gross advantage of her and even steals the inheritance Miss Briggs received from Miss Crawley after her death. Charles Dickens also provides a striking depiction of the ways in which a mistress can take advantage of the sympathy her companion is required to supply, in turn endangering her companion. In one of his early novels, *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838), Kate Nickleby is hired by Mrs. Wititterly, a woman whose "very excitable," "very delicate," and "very fragile" nature causes her to require "a companion, in whom there is great gentleness, great sweetness, excessive sympathy, and perfect repose" (262-3). When the Wititterlys go to the opera, Kate is "compelled" to introduce her mistress to a group of aristocratic men she met through her Uncle Ralph (339). Sir Mulberry Hawk takes advantage of Kate's precarious position by detaining her in the opera box after her mistress has left it, and Kate is quick to blame her "sex" and "helpless situation" as companion for the liberties he takes with her (342). One of the companion's primary functions is to act as chaperone for her mistress; however, Kate has no one to fulfill this role for her and so she is at the mercy of Hawk's "coarse and

unmanly persecution." Mrs. Wititterly fails here and elsewhere to provide reciprocal sympathy and protection for her attendant.

Even though Kate is "well nigh distracted" by the events at the opera, she is still required to fulfill her duties as companion the following morning. For Kate, "still worse and more trying was the necessity of rendering herself agreeable to Mrs. Wititterly, who, being in low spirits after the fatigue of the preceding night, of course expected her companion (else wherefore had she board and salary?) to be in the best spirits possible" (344-45). When Mrs. Wititterly notices that her companion looks "pale," Kate indicates that she is weary from the previous night, but a sensitive reaction to the exertion of society is Mrs. Wititterly's province and she is offended by what she interprets as Kate's pretension: "'How very odd!' exclaimed Mrs. Wititterly, with a look of surprise. And certainly, when one comes to think of it, it *was* very odd that anything should have disturbed a companion. A steam-engine, or other ingenious piece of mechanism out of order, would have been nothing to it" (346). The narrator's indirect discourse pokes fun at this mistress's egoistic ignorance, but this passage also represents Dickens's critique of those who viewed the companion as an automaton with no emotions of her own but only sympathy for the feelings of her employer. The comparison of the malfunctioning companion to the indefatigable steam engine suggests, through the hyperbolically unsympathetic, ridiculousness of the analogy, that a human being's emotions must be accounted for in the employment relationship, even if she is expected to perform like a machine.

In order gain access to Kate, Hawk, Lord Verisopht, Pluck, and Pyke make themselves "agreeable to the foolish mistress of the house" and are granted an invitation

to visit the Wititterly home whenever they choose. By gauging "the extent of Mrs. Wititterly's appetite for adulation," the men "proceeded to administer that commodity in very large doses, thus affording Sir Mulberry Hawk an opportunity of pestering Miss Nickleby with questions and remarks to which she was absolutely obliged to make some reply" (348). Dickens is clear on this point: the companion is "absolutely obliged" to receive the attentions of Hawk because her mistress has invited these men into her home and is accepting them herself. As the men become even more forward in their behavior toward her mistress, Kate's vulnerability grows more desperate: "If the mistress put such a high construction upon the behaviour of her new friends, what could the companion urge against them? If they accustomed themselves to very little restraint before the lady of the house, with how much more freedom could they address her paid dependent!" (350). Hawk's "well-laid plans" are indeed effective as he successfully opens the door to an even more degrading treatment of Kate and simultaneously forecloses any possibility of protest from her. As Mrs. Wititterly's dependent and chaperone, Kate has no possibility for escape from the men she dreads; she is "*exposed* to the constant and unremitting persecution of Sir Mulberry Hawk" (350, my emphasis).

Mrs. Wititterly is neither sympathetic nor even aware of her companion's suffering. Far from realizing her own culpability in the situation, she becomes jealous of her companion and begins to mistreat her. When Mrs. Wititterly accuses Kate of impropriety, the mistress's self-absorption proves too much for the companion to bear. As Kate defends herself, Dickens articulates the dangerous lack of reciprocity that often characterizes the mistress-companion relationship—a one-sidedness that, as Dickens shows, can lead to grave consequences for the companion:

> "Is it possible!" cried Kate, "that any one of my own sex can have sat by, and not have seen the misery these men have caused me! Is it possible that you, ma'am, can have been present, and failed to mark the insulting freedom that their every look bespoke? Is it possible that you can have avoided seeing, that these liberties, in their utter disrespect for you, and utter disregard of all gentlemanly behaviour and almost of decency, have had but one object in introducing themselves here, and that the furtherance of their designs upon a friendless, helpless girl, who, without this humiliating confession, might have hoped to receive from one so much her senior something like womanly aid and sympathy?" (352-53)

Kate appeals first and foremost to the women's common gender; she is shocked that one of her "own sex" could be incapable of sympathizing with her plight as a "friendless, helpless girl" pursued by unscrupulous men. However, implicit in her speech, there is also a commentary on the responsibilities involved in each of these women's respective roles in the mistress-companion dynamic. Mrs. Wititterly is not only "so much her senior" in years, but more important, she is Kate's superior in that she is her employer. Kate, and Dickens, demand a degree of reciprocity in this relationship—the companion has her duties to fulfill, but so too does the mistress. As Kate points out, these responsibilities are more pronounced because the mistress-companion relationship is a uniquely intimate bond between two women. She is not a "steam-engine," but a person, despite her dependent status, and Kate asserts her right as an employee to a degree of consideration, compassion, and "*womanly* aid." Kate's brother Nicholas rescues her before any real harm can come to her, but, as I will discuss in chapter four, not every fictional Victorian companion is so lucky.

However, as chapters one, two, and three prove, Victorian writers were, like Thackeray, often interested in exploring the opportunities for manipulations of sympathy on the part of the companion as well. As the paid friends of other women, companions

were expected to enact the private virtues supposed to be organic to relationships between women in exchange for money or alternative forms of compensation such as room, board, and other material “gifts,” but this economic aspect of the relationship was problematic. A sympathy that is in essence purchased like a commodity immediately loses its sense of being an altruistic emotional interaction. This, coupled with the mistress’s expectations of an almost automatic, sympathy-upon-demand allows for the possibility of a manipulative, counterfeit sympathy in that the potential for genuine sympathy is already corrupt. Throughout the Victorian novel, authors portrayed companions who, like Becky Sharp, use their sycophantic positions to further their own interests. Whether their aim is to obtain a husband like *Little Dorrit*’s Mrs. General and *Anne Hereford*’s Charlotte Delves Penn, to gain wealth and social mobility like *Lady Audley’s Secret*’s Phoebe Marks and *The New Magdalen*’s Mercy Merrick, or to attain power or revenge like *Poor Miss Finch*’s Madame Pratolungo and *David Copperfield*’s Rosa Dartle, companion characters show how sympathy can be manipulated to achieve their own desires at the expense of their employers. The mistress-companion relationship reveals a latent darker, destabilizing side to sympathy.

II. Sympathy

As scholars such as Brigid Lowe, Nancy Roberts, and Thomas J. McCarthy have noted, the meaning and usage of the word “sympathy” has changed since the nineteenth century, particularly as a result of the emergence of new terminology in our lexicon such as “empathy” and “identification.” My own use of the term maintains the Victorians’ understanding of the concept. Thus, I base my definition of sympathy in its Greek root:

"sympatheia," meaning "to feel" or "to suffer with." For my purposes, this "with" is essential as it connotes participation, a sharing in the feelings and experiences of another. In the Victorian novel, the companion was expected to do just this: to serve as an active participant in her mistress's daily experiences, desires, and emotions.

Sympathy has proven a pivotal philosophical as well as fictional category for scholars, and this dissertation constructs an argument that complicates the ways in which critics have conceptualized sympathy in the novel and in the Victorian period. This project is in conversation with several recent studies on sympathy, particularly Nancy Roberts's *Schools of Sympathy: Gender and Identification through the Novel* (1997), Audrey Jaffe's *Scenes of Sympathy* (2000), and Rachel Ablow's *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (2007). These and other critical books have established sympathy as a concept rife with concerns of power, class, identity, economics, and gender. My dissertation uses this dialogue as a foundation from which to illustrate how many Victorian authors were invested in interrogating sympathy as a positive structure in interpersonal relations and in society at large. The novels analyzed in this study deconstruct the concept of sympathy to explore the ways in which it can be performed artificially and manipulated to become a self-serving, even damaging, weapon.

The Victorians were the heirs to one hundred and fifty years of philosophical investigation, fictional analysis, and cultural invocation of the concept of sympathy. For Victorians, the concept of sympathy was rooted in Enlightenment philosophy, specifically in the theories of David Hume and Adam Smith. Both philosophers championed a positive view of human nature as a corrective to Hobbes's theories of the egocentricity of humanity and situated themselves within the burgeoning tradition of

moral philosophy which based ethics in emotion over rationality. Like the Earl of Shaftesbury, who viewed sympathy as one of the bases of the "benevolent affections" in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, Etc* (1711), Hume and Smith saw sympathy as a source for moral action. In the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Hume writes that "No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than the propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own" (316). Hume asserts that sympathy is psychological and arises out of the observation and consequent transmission of emotions among individuals: when an individual is in company, affective signs can evoke an idea of another's emotional state and that "idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion" in the observer (317). This communication of emotion often results in a concern for others—"we have no […] extensive concern for society but from sympathy"—and, later in his work, Hume posits sympathy as the root of moral sentiments as well as the way in which those sentiments may be evaluated (579).

For Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), sympathy is grounded in an innate desire to relate with others and to have others relate to us; this exchange, in turn, not only allows us to become aware of ourselves but also forms the basis for acts of social benevolence and general harmony. Smith bases his understanding of sympathy in the imagination and spectatorship. When a situation excites his sentiments, an individual spectator uses his imagination to understand and even feel the emotions of another by effecting an illusory, "imaginary change of situation" with the observed (7, 22). Smith's

conception involves more distance—a less literal and complete, more "imaginary" union or transmission—between the sympathizer and the other who is sympathized with. Yet, in Smith's view, as in Hume's, sympathy "cannot in any sense be regarded as a selfish principle" (50). It is precisely this understanding of sympathy as an altruistic force, and in turn the implications for society if sympathy could be used as a manipulative, egocentric mode of relating, that was at stake for Victorian authors seeking to challenge these previously-held conceptions of sympathy.

Victorian literature on sympathy was also influenced by a long tradition of literary engagement with the concept. In the eighteenth century, sentimental novels such as Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) dramatized contemporary philosophical understandings of sympathy in fiction. In *Relationships of Sympathy: The Writer and the Reader in British Romanticism* (1997), Thomas J. McCarthy argues that the Enlightenment notion of sympathy continued on into the Romantic period as writers explored ways of interrogating and blurring the boundaries between the self and the Other. Romantic era novelists such as William Godwin and Mary Shelley envisioned the consequences of failed sympathy in *Caleb Williams* (1794) and *Frankenstein* (1818), even as poets such as Coleridge and Shelley privileged sympathy, and its connection with the imagination, as central to artistic achievement.

By the Victorian era, George Eliot and others still held to an understanding of sympathy grounded in Enlightenment theories. Eliot is, without question, the most prominent and important literary voice on sympathy in the nineteenth century. "As a liberal humanist," Ellen Argyros writes, Eliot "had confidence in the powers of

sympathetic identification to help resolve some of the most disturbing class and gender differences of her day" (1). For Eliot, moral judgment and action are based in sympathy; as she writes in a letter to Charles Bray in 1857, "My own experience and development deepen every day my conviction that our moral progress may be measured by the degree in which we sympathise with individual suffering and individual joy" (356-57). Throughout her fiction, Eliot represents characters who act as models of sympathy (Dinah Morris or Dorothea Brooke) and those who are on a journey throughout a narrative to learn fellow-feeling with others (Adam Bede or Silas Marner). Throughout her oeuvre, Eliot strives to elicit and develop readers' sympathies. Eliot is perhaps most explicit with regards to her theories of sympathy in *Adam Bede* (1859). In an interlude opening Book II, "In Which the Story Pauses a Little," the narrator explains to the reader the importance of representing common folk in realistic terms. Realism itself is a school of sympathy for Eliot: "It is more needful that I should have a fibre of sympathy connecting me with that vulgar citizen who weighs out my sugar in a vilely assorted cravat and waistcoat, than with the handsome rascal in red scarf and green feathers;—more needful that my heart should swell with loving admiration at some trait of gentle goodness in the faulty people who sit at the hearth with me […] than at the deeds of heroes whom I shall never know except by hearsay" (180-81). For Eliot, sympathy is the tie that binds families and communities together: "the one poor word which includes all our best insight and our best love" (488).

Perhaps Eliot was aware of the ways in which her contemporaries were employing the mistress-companion relationship to interrogate sympathy in their works. There is a conspicuous absence of the companion in Eliot's novels, which accounts for

Eliot's own absence from this study. In *Middlemarch*, for example, Eliot has Dorothea Brooke refuse several characters' urgings to accept "the severe prescription" of a hired "lady companion" not once but four times (760). At the beginning of the novel, Mr. Brooke considers hiring a companion for his nieces, but "he himself dreaded so much the sort of superior woman likely to be available for such a position, that he allowed himself to be dissuaded by Dorothea's objections, and was in this case brave enough to defy the world" (13). When Dorothea and Casaubon discuss their honeymoon in Rome, Casaubon tells his fiancée he "should feel more at liberty if [she] had a companion." Dorothea, quick to realize Casaubon wants her chaperoned and amused while he works on "some manuscripts in the Vatican," responds, "rather haughtily," with, "'I beg you will not refer to this again'" (87). After Casaubon's death, Dorothea twice resists the pressures of Lady Chettam, Mrs. Cadwallader, and others in the community who find it unseemly that "a young widow would think of living alone in the house" when she refuses the companion services of Mrs. Vigo, who "had been reader and secretary to royal personages" (519). In *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver is deemed unfit to serve as a companion: "Miss Kirke who had a spinal complaint and wanted a reader and companion, felt quite sure that Maggie's mind must be of a quality with which she, for her part, could not risk *any* contact" (638). Certainly, as even these few passages show, Eliot was conscious of the complex considerations of reputation, power, and the public influences that defined women's lives. But, in lieu of her fellow authors' portrayals of the mistress-companion relationship examined in this project, Eliot's refusal to include the companion figure in her fiction serves to further establish her as the most significant advocate of sympathy as

a redeeming, stabilizing force in the Victorian period. Her definitively hopeful social outlook distinguishes her from many of her contemporaries.

While Eliot invoked sympathy as a talisman to conjure all she believed in regarding the potential for human community, many other Victorian writers drew on this tradition as a well-spring—challenging it and revising it in ways far darker than were often realized. Thackeray, Dickens, and others show how sympathy could be a means of self-serving manipulation and an emotionally ambivalent charge in interpersonal relationships. Why did some Victorians become suspicious of eighteenth-and early nineteenth-century understandings of sympathy set out by the philosophers and writers preceding them? The destabilizing cultural impact of the French and Industrial revolutions, the Chartist movement, and legislation such as the Reform Acts led to social and political anxieties regarding class relations, the stability of society, and the power and rights of Victorian citizens. As Rachel Ablow writes, "despite the popularity of [positive] notions of sympathy in the mid-eighteenth century, tensions inherent to those notions, the violence of the French Revolution, and the utilitarian critique of feeling's failure to regulate behavior, had undermined any exclusive faith in the power of sympathy to restore social ills" (3). In response, writers began to question the possibilities of sympathy's success and envisioned contradictory forms in which sympathy was a socially unsettling mechanism. As many scholars have established, the excesses of the cult of sensibility and romanticism also produced a counter-reaction among the next generation of writers. In addition, individual authors chose to explore negative aspects of sympathy because of personal decisions motivated by biographical

experiences, professional choices, and artistic investments in particular genres and themes.

The recurrent use of the mistress-companion relationship to explore sympathy in these authors' work suggests that the principal factor leading to Victorians' scrutiny of sympathy lay in anxieties produced and perpetuated by capitalism. As Victorian society became increasingly defined by economic concerns such as competition, power, social mobility, and money—issues that repeatedly vex the mistress-companion dynamic in the Victorian novel—its denizens clearly began to wonder if genuine sympathy, as defined by the moral philosophers, could still exist in a world where the self-promoting strategies of the marketplace reigned supreme. In response to these concerns, women and the domestic sphere came to be idealized as strongholds of morality and sympathy, there to preserve the nation's morality. However, what the writers in this project reveal, through their portrayals of the mistress-companion relationship, is that even these bastions, neither the home nor women, were superior to or separate from the corrupting influences of capitalism.

This dissertation consists of four chapters and a brief conclusion. I have arranged my chapters chronologically according to the publication dates of the novels I study in order to illuminate developments in writers' representations of the companion throughout the Victorian period. I begin with none other than the Victorian period's most renowned writer, Charles Dickens, who featured companion characters in four of his major novels. In *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit*, Rosa Dartle and Mrs. General manipulate their companion positions, and the expectations for sympathy therein, not only in the hope of

marriage, but more significantly, to achieve a kind of extra-textual critical position with the narratives themselves. In these two novels, Dickens uses the unique social and narrative position of his companion characters to reveal information the respective narrators cannot comfortably "tell" and to evaluate his other characters' social and moral values. In chapter two, I explore how sensation novelists Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Ellen Wood make the companion's relation to narrativity more explicit by using their companion characters to represent an alternative, feminine mode of detection. In *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Anne Hereford*, complex economies of competing sympathetic investments reveal the companion's distinctive opportunities for detection as they simultaneously expose the permeable boundaries between false and genuine sympathy and between the domestic and public spheres.

In chapter three, I shift my focus from sympathy exclusively between characters to analysis that accounts for the reader's sympathies. In *Poor Miss Finch* and *The New Magdalen*, Wilkie Collins's companion characters direct and even evaluate readers' sympathetic engagement with the narratives, allowing Collins to address the relationship among author, text, and reader. My final chapter on Thomas Hardy reverses the paradigm of previous chapters in which the companion figure is the character manipulating sympathy in the mistress-companion relationship to achieve her own self-serving ends. In *Desperate Remedies* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy represents his mistresses as self-absorbed women who take flagrant advantage of their dependent companions as a means of interrogating responsibility and reciprocity in the employer-employee dynamic. Hardy's work with the companion toward the end of the nineteenth century elucidates an underlying question at the heart of all the novels in this study: what

happens to the culturally idealized female friendship when the economic, employment relationship is superimposed upon it? Finally, my conclusion addresses the twilight of the Victorian period and the concomitant fading of the companion from literary prominence; there, I suggest that changes in both societal and novelistic structures made the companion figure obsolete in literature as in society. The companion is a figure Victorian authors returned to again and again in their efforts to explore and challenge the beliefs of their own cultural moment. Truly "that inevitable woman," the companion unlocks the door to an array of new insights into Victorian literature and culture.

CHAPTER I

"SHE BRINGS EVERYTHING TO A GRINDSTONE": THE COMPANION'S CRITICAL WORK IN *DAVID COPPERFIELD* AND *LITTLE DORRIT*

During his first visit to the Steerforth home, David Copperfield witnesses a curious exchange between his friend James Steerforth and Rosa Dartle, Mrs. Steerforth's paid female companion. Rosa initiates the conversation, feigning ignorance as she asks Steerforth about his views on class difference. While he lectures her on the "pretty wide separation between them and us" by detailing the lack of refinement and feeling in the lower classes, Rosa appears to accept the lesson gratefully; however, her response is rife with judgment, highlighting the injustice in Steerforth's opinion of his social inferiors as "animals and clods": "'Really!' said Miss Dartle. 'Well, I don't know, now, when I have been better pleased than to hear that. It's so consoling! It's such a delight to know that, when they suffer, they don't feel! Sometimes I have been quite uneasy for that sort of people; but now I shall just dismiss the idea of them, altogether. Live and learn.'" Rosa concludes her satirical but veiled rebuttal by emphasizing the interrogative method she has used to achieve this critique of Steerforth, all the while maintaining the appearance of sympathetic agreement: "'I had my doubts, I confess, but now they're cleared up. I didn't know, and now I do know, and that shows the advantage of asking—don't it?'" (252-53). Rosa has drawn Steerforth out, revealing his prejudices to the reader and to David, by posing a loaded question to which she already knows the answers—both the just answer as well as the reply her interlocutor will supply. This scene demonstrates one of the

many ways in which Charles Dickens uses Rosa—a figure who is at once outsider and insider within the domestic circle—to reveal and comment on the Steerforths' true natures.

In this chapter, I argue that in *David Copperfield* (1850), as in another of his mid-century novels, *Little Dorrit* (1855), female companion characters function for Dickens as critics from within the narratives themselves. In these two novels, Dickens uses his companions to evaluate his other characters' social and moral values. The companion figures' false enactments of sympathy, wherein they feign sympathy to accomplish their own goals, serve as a façade that prevents their employers from realizing their critical work. A kind of nodal point of sympathy in *David Copperfield*, Rosa relates to the characters she encounters—David, Mrs. Steerforth, and Emily—through her desire for James Steerforth. However, Rosa manipulates that sympathy, using it as a tool rather than an earnest, altruistic sentiment. Her close observations, affective expression, interrogative insinuations, and passionate reprimands work to expose as well as to judge those who cross her path. In the later text, Mrs. General mirrors William Dorrit's social pretensions to excess, and this act of apparent sympathy serves to critique that which it simultaneously encourages within the diegesis. These companions provide Dickens with an intricate mode of characterization, a subtle narrative method that reaches beyond what the novels' respective narrators can comfortably "tell." More important, Rosa Dartle and Mrs. General function as Dickens's arbiters, invoking judgment upon characters' problematic attitudes and behaviors. In this way, the companion characters model the act of critique for Dickens's readers to emulate.

I. The Companion as Dickensian "edge-tool"

While Victorian fiction provides us with a handful of companion characters who are central figures or even heroines, companions are most often minor characters that exist at the periphery of their narratives. But as Alex Woloch points out in *The One vs. the Many*, minor status does not preclude a character from contributing significantly to the aggregate meaning of a text. Beginning with the works of Fanny Burney and Jane Austen and continuing throughout the nineteenth century even into a couple novels by Henry James, minor companion characters range from the flat and static to the round and dynamic. Yet, as Dickens in particular proves, companions on both sides of this characterological spectrum are capable of critical work. Rosa Dartle falls into E.M. Forster's "round" category as a figure who is certainly "capable of surprising in a convincing way" as she carries out her critical work in unexpected, subversive ways; Mrs. General is situated at the opposite end of this scale. Defining flat characters as those "constructed round a single idea or quality," Forster argued that even this type of character has its advantages: "It is a convenience for an author when he can strike with his full force at once, and flat characters are very useful to him, since they never need reintroducing, never run away, have not to be watched for development, and provide their own atmosphere—little luminous disks of pre-arranged size, pushed hither and thither like counters across the void or between the stars; most satisfactory" (67, 69). Mrs. General functions in just such a way—she is a "disk" bumping into other characters in *Little Dorrit*, at once pushing on them and helping to define them. What Dickens show us in *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit* is that, because of the characteristic ambiguity

of her position as well as her unique relationship to sympathy, the companion as minor, and even flat, character can do significant, because unexpected, narrative work.

In his 1908 Preface to the New York edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James writes that "The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will" (45-6). In *David Copperfield*, Rosa's "individual vision" and her "individual will" to assert her own perspective provide an alternative, supplementary narrative to David's first-person narration. In James's formulation, she offers us another window into David's story. In fact, David describes how Rosa's visage "pass[ed] from window to window, like a wandering light, until it fixed itself in one, and watched us" (365). Rosa acts as an almost extra-textual presence in the novel as she seems to see through both David as narrator and the narrative itself. She observes and analyzes her fellow characters from a position that is at once part of the story and removed from it—just as her companion position situates her within the plot as both an insider and an outsider in the Steerforth family. Like the reader or critic, Rosa often views the action of the plot from the outside looking in, a technique which allows her a degree of distance from which she can achieve her narrative work within the frame of the novel.

Although never an actual narrator like Esther Summerson, Rosa functions as a kind of narrative assistant for Dickens and for David. In this way, Dickens's companion resembles what Henry James would call a *ficelle*. James offers his fullest articulation of his theory of the *ficelle* in the Preface to *The Ambassadors* (1903). Borrowing from

nineteenth-century French theatre, James defines the *ficelle* as “the reader’s friend,” an “enrolled, a direct, aid to lucidity” (47). The *ficelle* is “enrolled” by the author, assigned the role of assisting the narrative in conveying its meaning. For James, creating a character whose function was to illuminate for the reader information that could not otherwise be conveyed was as necessary as it was artistically thrilling. He describes his use of Maria Gostrey as *ficelle* as an “artful expedient for mere consistency of form,” a solution to the limitations of first person narration, but he also viewed his *ficelles* as “the refinements and ecstasies of method”—a “clear source of enjoyment for the infatuated artist” (49). The *ficelle* was not only a tool to aid reader and author alike but also a kind of trick; as Julian Wolfreys and Harun Karim Thomas write, “James knew full well what dubieties were implied by ficelle in French. Ficelles were no innocent balls of yarn. Une ficelle is also a trick done on stage, a performed deception, a crime even; it’s a trickster, a deceiver, a kind of criminal” (363). This alternative characterization of the *ficelle* is also appropriate to Rosa, who performs her narrative work in an underhanded manner, feigning sympathy with her employers only to expose and then mercilessly critique their family secrets. Dickens’s characterization of his companion in *David Copperfield* is deeply ambivalent; Rosa draws other characters, as well as the reader, toward her and repulses them at the same time.

In the Preface to *The Ambassadors* James considers the constraints first person narration places upon the author and his ability not only to convey certain information but also to keep the “form amusing while sticking so close to [the] central figure” of the narrative. Here, James even mentions *David Copperfield* as an example of a text which manages to grant its narrator/hero “the double privilege of subject and object” (46).

James's solution, similar to that of Dickens before him, is to give his hero "a confidant or two" who can, through her interactions with a variety of characters, reveal that which the narrator/hero cannot.[1] As a companion, Rosa's primary purpose is to act as a confidant to her mistress, Mrs. Steerforth. By occupation she is expected to be at once servile and sympathetic not only to her mistress's every daily whim, but also to her secrets and emotions. An intimate observer and participant in the domestic scene, made a party to the private dynamics of the Steerforth family—a family in whom David is deeply interested—Rosa's position makes her the perfect candidate for the *ficelle* role. She knows things about the Steerforth family that David cannot access or refuses to see because of his attachment to Steerforth. Her knowledge and power to convey that knowledge places her in direct narrative competition with David, but also, ultimately, works to assist him in telling his own story. Her bitterness in response to the suffering and betrayal she has experienced in the Steerforth home leads her to manipulate her position and the expectations for sympathy that define it in an effort to avenge herself. Dickens creates for himself a narrative assistant who possesses both the means she needs

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[1] In *Character and the* Novel, W.J. Harvey delineates the ficelle's "many functions": "he may become a transitional agent between protagonist and society; he may afford relief and contrast of the simplest kind. […] he may allow us the pleasurable relaxation of recognizing the limited and familiar after our struggle with the involvements or complexities of the protagonist. In innumerable ways he may act as foil to the protagonist, creating what I have called the perspective of depth. By his misunderstanding and partial view he may focus the protagonist's dilemma more clearly. Alternatively, by a flash of insight or simply by being the spokesman of sober reality and common sense, he may illuminate the protagonist's blindness and folly. He may stand as a possible alternative to the protagonist, incarnating what the character might have been. […] Or he may embody in a simpler form some analogue, positive or negative, to the hero's experience. […] He may be the moral touchstone by which we judge the aberration of others; he may, by being simple and static, become the point of reference by which we measure change and growth elsewhere" (63).

to perform her function as well as a clear motivation that preserves what James called "consistency of form."

In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens created another companion to effect similar narrative work but through much different means. Unlike Rosa, who is grounded in the narrative but also capable of hovering outside it, Mrs. General is deeply entrenched in the narrative of *Little Dorrit*. She is so embedded that the satire she represents pervades the text, allowing Dickens to use her as part catalyst, part barometer for the social dysfunction he seeks to critique in the novel.[2] Although Mrs. General is not a *ficelle*, Dickens's use of her resembles the kind of narrative trickery Henry James associated with that figure. Because, while Mrs. General herself is only a flat, allegorical personification—a satire—she is simultaneously the figure who elucidates, and also threatens, the complexity of the characters surrounding her. Mrs. General reads on the "surface," through her iconic representation of the designing woman scheming for a husband as through her endless repetition of empty phrases, as a blatant caricature, both insufferable and amusing. However, this overt emptiness of character allows Dickens to define both Little Dorrit and Mr. Dorrit more fully. For Amy, Mrs. General is a considerable adversary within the plot and a foil within the narrative structure of the novel. She serves to heighten our understanding of Amy as not only a paragon of virtue but also as an unfaltering exemplar of genuine sympathy. For Mr. Dorrit, Mrs. General acts as both representative and

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[2] One might imagine the difference I am articulating between these two companions' narrative functions— alike in goal although discrete in method—as similar to Woloch's distinction between his two kinds of minor characters: "the *worker* and the *eccentric*." While Mrs. General resembles the former, "the flat character who is reduced to a single functional use within the narrative," Rosa is akin to the latter, Woloch's "fragmentary character who plays a disruptive, oppositional role within the plot" (25).

warning for the type of *character* he is in danger of becoming—in both senses of the word: the type of man he is becoming within the fictional world of *Little Dorrit*, and the type of figure he is becoming, flat and empty, as an actor in the structure of the narrative.

As Forster writes, "Part of the genius of Dickens is that he does use types and caricatures, people whom we recognize the instant they re-enter, and yet achieves effects that are not mechanical and a vision of humanity that is not shallow. […] his immense success with types suggests that there may be more in flatness than the severer critics admit" (Forster 71-2).[3] Forster's assessment also holds true, I think, for Dickens's mobilization of his rounder yet nevertheless definitively minor characters, such as Rosa Dartle. In these two novels, Dickens reveals how, although often little more than minor characters, and sometimes nothing more than flat figures of satire, the companion and characters like her can come to play a variety of crucial roles in the novel. Chief among these is the companion's ability to convey necessary information to other characters and to readers. Many other Victorian writers seem to have agreed with Dickens, employing their own companions to various narrative and thematic ends.

[3] Roger Lund seems to agree with Forster and writes that "It has become a rather dubious commonplace of Dickensian criticism that 'Dickens's people are nearly always flat,' that he usually focuses on the externals of human behavior at the expense of a more complex psychological development." Lund goes on to argue that "in *Little Dorrit*, Dickens' emphasis upon the external surfaces and idiosyncrasies of character is far more sophisticated and self-conscious" (48). I am taking the same position in this chapter by arguing that Dickens's portrayal of these companions as seemingly flat and minor characters is a narrative strategy the author employs in order to guide his reader to a realization of a meaning beneath the surface of the text.

II. "She is always dangerous": Rosa Dartle

Unlike David Copperfield, Rosa Dartle appears to have no "Personal History." During David's first sojourn at the Steerforth home in chapter twenty, James Steerforth states, "'She was the motherless child of a sort of cousin of my father's. He died one day. My mother, who was then a widow, brought her here to be company to her. She has a couple of thousand pounds of her own, and saves the interest of it every year, to add to the principal. There's the history of Miss Rosa Dartle for you'" (253). The brevity and commonality of this "history" position Rosa for the reader as the hapless, "redundant" woman turned genteel companion. Major life events such as her orphaning are relayed with curt nonchalance—"he died one day"—and she is granted no significant identity beyond her dependent service in the Steerforth family. David is initially complicit in this subtle act of containing Rosa's character in stereotypes; upon meeting her, he concludes that "she was about thirty years of age, and that she wished to be married. She was a little dilapidated—like a house—with having been so long to let" (251). Rosa takes up this metaphor of domesticity near the end of the Steerforth narrative when she describes herself, in terms of her relationship to her mistress and Steerforth, as "'a mere disfigured piece of furniture between you both; having no eyes, no ears, no feelings, no remembrances'" (674). The double emphasis on the domestic in these two passages is significant. David assumes that as a single, dependent woman, Rosa's only desire can be to marry and, in this case, he is not incorrect. From Rosa's perspective, she is ensconced in the home (even in the home of her marital choice) but not in the sense that she should be. This space is not her own and these characters would like us to believe that she is little more than a non-entity there, an inanimate "piece of furniture." Even Rosa

participates in this effacement of her importance to the text; her assertion that she has no eyes or feelings is, as I will show, a moment of irony for her as well as for Dickens. For, throughout *David Copperfield*, Rosa Dartle's character resists such attempts at containment.

Rosa's history is not obscured by or subsidiary to the Steerforths'—her history *is* that of the Steerforths, and this companion serves as the vehicle through which that common history is revealed. Rosa's careful exploitation of her station enables her to appear, for a time, as nothing more than a "dilapidated," powerless woman, dutifully fulfilling her role as sympathetic companion. But as her trajectory through the narrative leads her to an ever-increasing vocality and ascendancy, it becomes clear that Rosa's apparent sympathy is a manipulative tool she distorts to gain access to and divulge her employers' faults. Rosa thus does and undoes sympathy at the same time. Like many of her fellow companion characters throughout Victorian literature, her performance of sympathy simultaneously makes possible its antithesis: her merciless exposure and critique of her employers.

i. Rosa Dartle's Critical Affect and Speech

Rosa's specialized language, conveyed not only through her intricate speech but likewise through the affective power of her appearance, both mirrors the Steerforths' flaws back to them as well as passes judgment upon them. The Steerforths' story is written on Rosa Dartle's face for David, as well as for the reader, to "read." Throughout the novel, the companion's facial markers, specifically her eyes and scar, signify as words would, creating a language of feeling in her physical appearance; I will refer to this

phenomenon as Rosa's "affective language." The companion uses this subtle form of communication as a means of circumventing her subservient position which prevents her from direct speech against her employers. Rosa speaks with her face through expressions and her scar, and these serve as a mode of interpretation and critique. From his first encounter with Rosa, David is disconcerted by the power of her mere presence in the Steerforth home. He states that, in addition to Mrs. Steerforth, "There was a second lady in the dining-room, of a slight short figure, dark, and not agreeable to look at, but with some appearance of good looks too, who attracted my attention: perhaps because I had not expected to see her; perhaps because I found myself sitting opposite to her; perhaps because of something really remarkable in her." David cannot discern why Rosa is so striking to him, despite his multiple attempts at defining her effect on him. Eventually, he locates the strength of her presence in her appearance: "She had black hair and eager black eyes, and was thin, […] Her thinness seemed to be the effect of some wasting fire within her, which found a vent in her gaunt eyes" (251). For David, Rosa's emotion shapes her physical frame and becomes legible there; yet her body cannot delimit the smoldering within her, which leaks out from her eyes. As it becomes increasingly clear that Rosa "seemed to pervade the whole house," and that "the fire within" her was originally lit and is continually fanned by her mistress and Steerforth, David begins to keep a close watch on Rosa's face in an attempt to translate the meaning he finds there (366).

Yet, Rosa is not content to sit idly by as David studies her eyes; she also expresses her version of the Steerforth narrative through close observation. In one revealing passage, David describes the way in which he and Rosa gaze at one another:

> what I particularly observed, before I had been half-an-hour in the house, was the close and attentive watch Miss Dartle kept upon me; and the lurking manner in which she seemed to compare my face with Steerforth's, and Steerforth's with mine, and to lie in wait for something to come out between the two. So surely as I looked towards her, did I see that eager visage, with its gaunt black eyes and searching brow, intent on mine; or passing suddenly from mine to Steerforth's; or comprehending both of us at once. In this lynx-like scrutiny she was so far from faltering when she saw I observed it, that at such a time she only fixed her piercing look upon me with a more intent expression still. Blameless as I was, and knew that I was, in reference to any wrong she could possibly suspect me of, I shrunk before her strange eyes, quite unable to endure their hungry luster. (365)

Seeking to comprehend the relationship between the men, the companion mimics David's position as narrator by watching in order to "read" *him*; in her unobtrusive, "lurking manner," she "lie[s] in wait" for information to interpret. Rosa challenges David's narration first and foremost by adopting, and then conquering him with, his own specific mode of story-telling: observation. Michael Greenstein points out that observation is central to David's narrative mode when he writes, "The title of the second chapter, "I Observe," as well as the novel's full title (with its *Observations of David Copperfield*), calls for a tentative exegesis of modes of observation, points of view, or multiple perspectives" (75). However, when David returns her gaze, the true force of Rosa's surveillance is revealed. In this moment, David the character and David the narrator coalesce as the protagonist struggles with the companion for narrative control. Rosa understands more than David can as she meets David's eyes and looks through him and into the narrative itself. Dickens appears to endow his narrative assistant with the power of foresight here and throughout the novel; as Rosa studies David in an attempt to determine this newcomer's place in the Steerforth family drama, she seems to know he will play some crucial role in their futures. David recognizes her power in this moment:

his reference to blame here, for example, echoes his later assertions that he is not responsible for Steerforth's elopement with Emily Peggotty. At the mercy of her power to see through and preempt the story he has set out to tell, David "shr[inks] before her strange eyes." While Rosa's gaze toward David is "far from faltering," David is "quite unable to endure" hers, and Rosa emerges as the more adept, and dangerous, story-teller in this scene.

David is discomfited by the lack of narrative control he has over Rosa's affective language because of what it reveals about the Steerforths and about himself as well. Rosa's eyes are not the only instrument through which she absorbs, interprets, and asserts information. David is equally captivated by the distinctive scar which "cut through her mouth, downward towards the chin" (251).[4] In response to David's questions concerning the mark, Steerforth again obscures the details of Rosa's past, focusing the narrative on himself rather than the companion. We do not know what provoked Steerforth, only that it was no accident, as David assumes: "'No. I was a young boy, and she exasperated me, and I threw a hammer at her. A promising young angel I must have been!'" (253). While this retelling all but erases Rosa from the incident, eliding any emotional reaction she

[4] Scholars have shown themselves to be just as interested in Rosa's scar as David. John Jordan and Harvey Sucksmith read the mark in terms of Steerforth's dysfunctional sexuality. While Jordan refers to the scar as "the mark of Steerforth's sexual violence on her" (69), Sucksmith asserts that "It has become a symbolic rape, expressing her deepest longings, her sense of humiliation and outrage, and her hatred" (29). In contrast, Barbara Black, who refers to the mark as "an image of female genitalia" (95), and Mary Ann O'Farrell, who calls it "vaginal and Medusan" (87), view the scar as a specifically feminine locus of power and sexuality. Rachel Ablow examines the scar from a different angle when she writes that Rosa's scar is like a novel: "the scar registers how Rosa feels, even as it also serves as a memento of the love affair that provides the most relevant context for those feelings. It thus provides observers with everything they need to understand her feelings and so presumably sympathize with them: like a novel, it reveals the content of her responses, their immediate cause, and the historical circumstances that have gone into producing them" (34).

might have had preceding or following the attack, the scar remains to function as a perpetuating sign of Rosa's affective life. As the revelation and constant reminder of Steerforth's rage, and Mrs. Steerforth's neglect, the scar acts as a visible history. The dysfunction the scar represents cannot be contained as a family secret to be hidden from view; instead, it is broadcast on the companion's face.

However, Rosa is no passive text to be written on and then read. Her scar is not a static indictment of the Steerforths, but a vehicle she can manipulate to signify their transgressions; in this way, she gleans power from the attack, transforming herself from victim to subtle aggressor—just as she maneuvers within her dependent companion position to achieve the power of critic. As David notes, "It was not long before I observed that it was the most susceptible part of her face, and that, when she turned pale, that mark altered first, and became a dull, lead-coloured streak, lengthening out to its full extent, like a mark in invisible ink brought to the fire" (253). Rosa's scar is the "invisible ink" through which she, and Dickens, can articulate the Steerforth characters in ways that David cannot directly express—it is the sub-text beneath the story that David tells and the only way that David can see beyond his own biased perspective to expose the Steerforths for himself and his reader.

When David finds a portrait of Rosa hanging in his bedroom, his struggle with Rosa early in the novel becomes clear. Threatened by the competitive narrative she represents, he wonders "peevishly why they couldn't put her anywhere else instead of quartering her on me." Unable to escape or control her, David attempts to master her and the information her affect divulges by symbolically repeating Steerforth's attack: "The painter hadn't made the scar, but I made it; and there it was, coming and going; now

confined to the upper lip as I had seen it at dinner, and now showing the whole extent of the wound inflicted by the hammer, as I had seen it when she was passionate." In an effort to manage Rosa's scar, David forms the mark himself so that it, like the rest of the novel, is more fully his own creation and so under his control. His strategy fails him, however. As he tries to "get rid of her" by going to sleep, he "could not forget that she was still there looking." Although David, the focal character in the text, might sleep, in effect halting narrative time, Rosa remains active—always watching and always offering her interpretation of the story. In his dreams, David even finds himself unable to speak (narrate) outside of Rosa's own distinctive speech patterns: "when I awoke in the night, I found that I was uneasily asking all sorts of people in my dreams whether it really was or not—without knowing what I meant" (255).

In this scene, the companion's affective language threatens to overtake not only the narrative itself, but also the voice of the narrator as David temporarily takes on Rosa's characteristic form of speech: asking questions to obtain crucial, often damaging information. According to James's definition, a *ficelle* figure is the "reader's friend," not the narrator's, and the battle being waged in these scenes proves this is the case for Dickens's Rosa Dartle as well. Because he is narrating the story through the lens of his perceptions at the time, David cannot accept Rosa's perspective as a complement to his own at this stage in the novel; rather, he struggles against the story she is trying to reveal. David does not yet understand that he needs her knowledge in order to complete his depiction of the Steerforths and even his portrayal of himself. Regardless of David's wishes, Dickens's narrative agent, Rosa Dartle, prevails. David clearly loses his initial

battles with the companion, not only in person but even when she is nothing more than a portrait on the wall.[5]

The silent, narrative power of Rosa's eyes and scar allow her to be critical of David and the Steerforths while still retaining the appearance of submissive sympathy. Only David is aware of the subtle signification inherent in Rosa's countenance. However, Rosa's critique of the Steerforths and her impingement on David's narrative are not restricted to her expressive face. As Graham Storey writes, "her voice, her constant insinuation of her views, combined with a trick of questioning everything first, gives her a major impact" (62). Early in David's acquaintance with Mrs. Steerforth and her companion, Rosa employs an indirect mode of speech to reveal the flaws in the Steerforths' opinions as well as in their behavior toward one another. Rosa habitually interjects herself into conversations through questioning others' assertions in order to attain information. Recalling one particular visit to the Steerforth home, David notes that while he conversed with Mrs. Steerforth "all day" about her son, "Miss Dartle was full of hints and mysterious questions, but took a great interest in all our proceedings there, and said, 'Was it really though?' and so forth, so often" (304). Rosa consistently presents her questions as motivated by curiosity, by an innocent desire "to know," through couching

[5] Shortly after this scene, David admits that, if only for a moment, he felt himself "falling a little in love with" Rosa (304). Michael Léger reads this scene as "of no little significance" because immediately preceding this statement, David spends the day "talking with her about the man they *both* love." He continues, "In the Girardian paradigm, David falls 'a bit' in love with Dartle because of Steerforth's past love for her" (313). In terms of my argument, I interpret this scene first as representative of the power of the sympathetic identification between David and Rosa in their common love for Steerforth; their sympathy on this point becomes so clear here that David confuses his feelings for one with his feelings for the other. Second, David's fleeting infatuation is a response to Rosa's domination of him—just as he is attracted to Steerforth's power over him, so too does he find Rosa's narrative competition seductive.

her critical inquiries in language such as "'I ask because I always want to be informed, when I am ignorant'" and "'Oh! I am glad to know that, because I always like to be put right when I am wrong'" (365-7). In this way, Rosa plays the role of the eager student, desperate to be enlightened and ready to be sympathetic to the speaker's views. However, she cannot fool David; he realizes that, despite her ostensibly ingenuous strategy, she always "got everything […] she wanted to know" (304).

Rosa's furtive questions are a mode of questioning the beliefs and relationships of those around her. David acknowledges this when he states, "Her own views of every question, and her correction of everything that was said to which she was opposed, Miss Dartle insinuated in the same way: sometimes, I could not conceal from myself, with great power" (252).[6] Rosa's passive-aggressive form of interrogation allows her to address the Steerforths' views on herself and one another. Irritated by Rosa's circuitous form of speech, Mrs. Steerforth accuses her of being "mysterious" by refusing to "speak plainly, in [her] own natural manner." Rosa's docile but loaded response, "'Now you must really bear with me, because I ask for information. We never know ourselves,'" reveals the audacity of Mrs. Steerforth's statement—the reason for the change in Rosa is no "mystery." This point is further emphasized when Mrs. Steerforth returns, "'I remember,—and so must you, I think,—when your manner was different, Rosa; when it was not so guarded, and was more trustful.'" The companion responds by feigning an ignorance that only serves to mirror and thereby reveal the purposeful forgetfulness of

[6] Francoise Basch discusses how Rosa's character was believed to be based on one Mrs. Brown, "ex-governess, and intimate friend of Miss Burdett-Coutts." Basch reveals, "In his letters Dickens alludes to the taste for contradiction and the extreme susceptibility of the woman he called the 'general objector'" (149).

her mistress: "'Really? Less guarded and more trustful? How can I, imperceptibly, have changed, I wonder! Well, that's very odd! I must study to regain my former self'" (367-68). As Mary Ann O'Farrell notes, because she is "scarred, she *cannot* imperceptively have changed" (89). Both women know that Rosa has "changed" due to her experiences with Steerforth, his toying with her affections as well as his disfiguring attack on her face, and Rosa mimics Mrs. Steerforth's pretended ignorance as a way to call attention to its injustice. She does not, however, refrain from a parting gesture that will drive the point home: she asserts that she will "learn frankness" from Steerforth. David, positioned like the reader as a silent witness of this exchange, notes that "there was always some effect of sarcasm in what Rosa Dartle said, though it was said, as this was, in the most unconscious manner in the world" (368). This hint of criticism is subtle enough, and while David catches it, the Steerforths have no idea that the companion is anything but sympathetic with their views.[7] It is this intimate access, united with the freedom from suspicion that the companion's performance of sympathy allows, which situates the companion throughout Victorian fiction in the perfect position to function as an agent of the narrative.

Immediately following this exchange, Rosa again exhibits powers of foresight when she foreshadows the approaching rift between mother and son by questioning the pair about their relationship. As if in warning, Rosa inquires "'whether people, who are

[7] Mrs. Steerforth's recognition that Rosa speaks in a "mysterious" way proves that she does realize Rosa is doing *something* with her speech; nevertheless, Dickens never implies that Rosa's mistress attributes this abnormality to anything more than her companion's harmless eccentricity. Steerforth, too, seems aware that Rosa may be "dangerous" to him. This is most apparent when he tells David, "'Confound the girl, I am half afraid of her. She's like a goblin to me'" (258). Like his mother, however, it is clear that Steerforth is never able to see through Rosa's pretense of sympathy with the family.

alike in their moral constitution, are in greater danger than people not so circumstanced, supposing any serious cause of variance to arise between them, of being divided angrily and deeply?'" Unaware that, in her initial delicacy, Rosa refers to them, Steerforth answers in the affirmative. Yet, once she makes her meaning clear, Mrs. Steerforth interjects that she and her son will never be divided because they know their "duty" to each other. Rosa's caustic reply functions as a shrewd rebuttal to her mistress's defensive response: "'To be sure. *That* would prevent it? Why, of course it would. Exactly. Now, I am glad that I have been so foolish as to put the case, for it is so very good to know that your duty to each other would prevent it!'" (368). Dickens's phrasing here makes the companion's assessment of the Steerforths' joint lack of self-awareness and their resulting self-satisfaction clear. In this scene, Rosa has uncovered the roots of the mother and son's dysfunction, their likeness as well as their fixation on one another, and foreseen its destructive end. In addition, Rosa has once again preempted David's narrative as she interprets the Steerforths' relationship and future for the reader in a way that David cannot. Despite her efforts, neither the Steerforths nor David can heed her forewarning; like that of the *ficelle*, her interpretation is for the reader more than for the characters.

ii. Rosa Dartle Exposed

When the Steerforth plot transforms into one of scandal, anger, and alienation, no character serves as an indicator of this shift more than Rosa Dartle. Upon learning that Steerforth has run away with Emily Peggotty, Rosa embarks on a new mode of communication with those around her. No longer signifying through her eyes and scar or

suggestive inquiries, she unleashes the full power of her passionate nature in judgment on her mistress and Steerforth. Ultimately abandoning her false performances of sympathy, Rosa makes her critical position within the family known. In the latter part of the Steerforth sections, Dickens brings Rosa's affective and verbal language together to form a clear critique of Mrs. Steerforth and her son. However, Rosa's outbursts begin to represent a loss of control and thus serve as a revelation of her own character as well.

Rosa's eyes and scar continue to inform David's articulation of the Steerforth narrative. When David brings news of Steerforth's actions with Emily to Mrs. Steerforth, Rosa initially acts the role of sympathetic companion. She "glided" to her station behind her mistress's chair, "touched her" and "tried to soothe her" (395, 398). Nevertheless, David notes that her "keen glance comprehended" them all, and once David and Mr. Peggotty have withdrawn, Rosa pursues them to the door of the Steerforth home. David describes how "Such a concentration of rage and scorn as darkened her face, and flashed in her jet-black eyes, I could not have thought compressible even into that face. The scar made by the hammer was, as usual in this excited state of her features, strongly marked. When the throbbing I had seen before, came into it as I looked at her, she absolutely lifted up her hand, and struck it" (399). Rosa's reaction clarifies for the reader the depths of Steerforth's transgression, an act which arises out of the very behaviors Rosa criticizes throughout the novel. Rosa's predictions have come to fruition. As if to emphasize that her emotional reaction carries significance, Rosa strikes her scar, drawing David's attention to the condemnation written on her face. However, Rosa's self-flagellation in this scene also represents for David and the reader her own inward, jealous pain.

Repeating Steerforth's original brutality, Rosa's action suggests that she views Steerforth's elopement as yet another act of violence against her.

This time, Rosa does not stop there; she complements her affective response with speech that is more direct and accusatory than anything she has uttered to this point in the novel. "'Don't you know that they are both mad with their own self-will and pride?,'" she asks David. As she continues to assail the Steerforths, asserting that Steerforth "'has a false, corrupt heart, and is a traitor,'" Rosa's affect and speech exceeds both David's and the companion's control. David admits that the intensity of her response supersedes what he as narrator can describe: "The mere vehemence of her words can convey, I am sensible, but a weak impression of the passion by which she was possessed, and which made itself articulate in her whole figure" (399-400). But, Rosa also betrays her own investment in Steerforth's actions in her loss of verbal control. David notes that as she speaks Rosa puts "her hand on her bosom, as if to prevent the storm that was raging there" (399). In this scene, Rosa not only provides her most explicit assessment of the Steerforths, she also fully emerges as a figure who is not solely a source of removed, interpretive perspective—not just the "writing on the wall"—but one who is mired in the very milieu she works to expose. For the first time in the novel, it is undeniably clear that, despite her intensive criticism of his shortcomings, Rosa Dartle is still in love with James Steerforth. While her previous simulations of sympathy were a tool which allowed Rosa to collect information and criticize her employers without their knowledge, we learn here, once she has abandoned that technique, that it has also served as an apparatus of self-management for the companion. When she openly acts outside of the expectations of

her companion position, it is as if she also loses control of her critical methods, inadvertently revealing something of her *own* character to the narrator and reader.

For a time, Rosa turns her critical attention toward Emily. Perhaps she is not yet ready to confront the Steerforths themselves or her own feelings for them directly in this new, more open manner, and so she uses Emily as a kind of detour for her emotion. Eager to formulate her own narrative of the woman who has captured "James Steerforth's fancy," Rosa finds Emily in Martha's garret and confronts her. Throughout her attack on Steerforth's lover, Rosa emphasizes her need to *see* Emily: "'I have come to look at you. […] I have come to see, […] I want to know what such a thing is like'" (604). Just as she observed the interaction between David and Steerforth earlier in the novel, Rosa has come to "read" Emily. In this scene, Rosa once again appears to transcend David's narrative powers: while he, likewise, "came here to see," David is unable to witness the exchange visually; for much of the episode, he can only hear what is said. Yet, in this moment David shows that he has finally accepted the force of Rosa's affective language and learned to interpret its meaning in order to supplement his own narration. Although David cannot physically see the enraged companion, he states, "I saw the flashing black eyes, and the passion-wasted figure; and I saw the scar, with its white track cutting through her lips, quivering and throbbing as she spoke" as "if I had seen her standing in the light" (604). As in his encounter with the painting, David can "see" the signification of Rosa's expression without literally standing before her. He understands her judgment upon Emily and the Steerforths alike, but, this time, he accepts her response as a way of describing the full meaning of the scene for his reader. Rather than fight the competitive

narrative Rosa presents, he accepts it and assimilates it into his own depiction of the episode.

Although Rosa's mission, in keeping with her previous behavior, would seem to be to interpret Emily in order to reveal something about Steerforth's character, what emerges in this scene is a critique not of Steerforth or Emily but of Rosa herself. David once again describes her struggle to contain herself in order to prevent the exposure of her personal investments: "Her lips were tightly compressed, as if she knew that she must keep a strong constraint upon herself" (605). But, as Rosa denies any commonality between herself and the fallen girl, she in effect proves the underlying sympathy between them, a point which Emily addresses directly when she states, "'If you live in his home and know him, you know, perhaps, what his power with a weak, vain girl might be'" (606). When Rosa responds, "'*You* love him? *You*? […] And tell that to *me*,'" she confirms Emily's assertion.[8] Having served as a mirror to the Steerforths' dysfunction throughout the narrative, Rosa cannot abide the reflection of *herself* in Emily: "'I can't breathe freely in the air you breathe. I find it sickly'" (607). As she leaves Emily's presence, recommending that she "consecrate [her] existence to the recollection of James Steerforth's tenderness" or "die," Rosa has so exposed herself that the reader understands she simultaneously speaks to herself.

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[8] O'Farrell points out that Rosa's earlier statement to David and Mr. Peggotty, "I would have her branded on the face," and her various—but unconsummated—threats of physical violence in her encounter with Emily serve to elucidate the companion's implicit acknowledgement of sympathy between the two women. She writes, "Rosa Dartle's real cruelty toward Emily involves, despite itself, the mottled generosity of throwing a fit rather than a hammer, making a scene rather than a scar" (98).

By the time Rosa learns of James's death in the final scene of the Steerforth plot, the companion can no longer contain her judgment of the family nor deny her own passion. Leaving all pretense of sympathy behind, Rosa lays bare her critical stance for her mistress, David, and the reader. At the beginning of the scene, Rosa and David at last achieve an understanding as the companion and the protagonist/narrator collude to communicate solely through reading one another's faces. David states, "From the first moment of her dark eyes resting on me, I saw she knew I was the bearer of evil tidings. The scar sprung into view that instant. She withdrew herself a step behind the chair, to keep her own face out of Mrs. Steerforth's observation; and scrutinized me with a piercing gaze that never faltered, never shrunk." Immediately, Rosa interprets the nature of David's visit and, unwilling to include her mistress in this moment of exchange, she moves out of view. Shortly thereafter, David reveals his purpose: "I said, by the motion of my lips, to Rosa, 'Dead!'" (671). It is significant here that, although David's lips form the word, he does not actually say it aloud. Instead, he literalizes Rosa's interpretive and critical role in the narrative by giving her a word to read upon his mouth—just as he has been "reading" the scar upon her mouth throughout the novel.

David privileges Rosa by revealing the news to her before her mistress, perhaps partly out of sympathy in his understanding of her feelings for Steerforth, but also, no doubt, so that she can assist him in gently informing Mrs. Steerforth. Yet, as Mrs. Steerforth grows alarmed and calls to her companion, David describes how Rosa "came, but with no sympathy or gentleness" (673). With all hope of a union with Steerforth destroyed, Rosa orders her employer to realize the role she has played in her household: "'look at me! Moan, and groan, and look at me! Look here!'" The companion now

demands that Mrs. Steerforth look at and interpret *her* in the same way she has observed her mistress throughout the novel. First, Rosa forces Mrs. Steerforth to acknowledge her scar, and as she disallows her mistress's sublimation of all that the mark represents, she blames the mother for making her son what he was.[9] Next, Rosa reveals her true feelings for Steerforth, indicting Mrs. Steerforth for her dysfunction and the role it played in keeping her from the man she so desired: "'Look at me, I say, proud mother of a proud false son! Moan for your nurture of him, moan for your corruption of him, moan for you loss of him, moan for mine!'" (673). While much of this information has been clear to David and the reader throughout, Rosa's skilled method of manipulative sympathy has kept Mrs. Steerforth from realizing Rosa's true motivations and goals. This scene marks the first time in which Rosa unveils her position as critic to her mistress. As she blames her employer for Steerforth's faults as well as for their estrangement, she also reveals the depths of her own obsession with her mistress's son.

Ultimately, Rosa makes it clear that she will now withhold nothing and show no mercy: "'I *will* speak to her. No power on earth should stop me, while I was standing here! Have I been silent all these years, and shall I not speak now? I loved him better than you ever loved him'" (673). As she unfolds the story of her youthful relationship with Steerforth and the reverberations it has had in her own life and that of the Steerforths, she exposes the whole of the Steerforth's history as well as her own. Here, more than ever before, Rosa narrates the story that David cannot tell as she reveals the full chronicle of her courtship with Steerforth, Mrs. Steerforth's cruel disapproval, and

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[9] Several modern critics, including Gwendolyn B. Needham, John R. Reed, Arthur A. Adrian, and Mary Anne Andrade, have agreed with Rosa's appraisal of Mrs. Steerforth's guilt.

Steerforth's eventual betrayal and abandonment. This, a kind of origin story of the family's current dynamics, is Rosa's ultimate advantage over David. It is the necessary background that he cannot provide without the companion who is the only one willing to lay it bare for the reader.[10] But, for the last time, Rosa also reveals her own faults, again allowing David and the reader to turn a critical eye on her as well. In response to David's assertion that Steerforth, too, had his faults and that not all the blame lies with his mother, Rosa retorts: "'Faults! […] Who dares malign him? He had a soul worth millions of the friends to whom he stooped!'" (674). Denying that any responsibility for his wrongdoing lies with Steerforth, Rosa shows what she *cannot* interpret—she cannot fully see beyond her love. Restricted to blaming Emily, Mrs. Steerforth, and finally, David, the companion is unable to transcend her position in the Steerforth household. She is incapable of reconciling her own criticism of Steerforth with her love for him and so she cannot move forward, even after his death. Rosa is trapped in her critical role *ad infinitum*. Although she has proved an adept assistant, and even at times a worthy opponent, it is David who emerges as the superior story-teller in the novel. With Rosa's

[10] Considering the impact the relationship has had on her life, Rosa describes her affair with James very succinctly in this scene. She explains, "'I could sing to him, and talk to him, and show the ardour that I felt in all he did, and attain with labour to such knowledge as most interested him; and I attracted him. When he was freshest and truest, he loved me. Yes, he did! Many a time, when you were put off with a slight word, he has taken Me to his heart!'[…] I descended—as I might have known I should, but that he fascinated me with his boyish courtship—into a doll, a trifle for the occupation of an idle hour, to be dropped, and taken up, and trifled with, as the inconstant humour took him. When he grew weary, I grew weary. As his fancy died out, I would no more have tried to strengthen any power I had, than I would have married him on his being forced to take me for his wife. We fell away from one another without a word. Perhaps you saw it, and were not sorry" (674). Patricia Ingham interprets Rosa's assertion that she would not have forced James to marry her as an implicit admission of her sexual relationship with him. If we accept this reading, then Rosa's narrative here would be her most significant *self*-revelation in the novel: she reveals herself as a fallen woman.

help, David is able to transcend his biases and emotions regarding Steerforth, whereas Rosa, in the end, cannot.

Dickens establishes a rich, complex dynamic of sympathy and repulsion between these characters in *David Copperfield*. Rosa's ambivalent relationship with the Steerforth family allows her the ability to sympathize with her mistress and Steerforth, to understand their emotions and motivations, but it also simultaneously allows her to *undo* that sympathy in order to present the reader as well as David with a satire of the Steerforths' social pretension and familial dysfunction. Rosa warps sympathy so that it is useful to her and damaging, rather than salutary, to the recipient. For the companion, sympathy becomes a means of both obtaining information and exploiting it. By employing Rosa as both vexed character within the narrative frame and as an alternative perspective on that same narrative, Dickens is able to deconstruct sympathy in order to show that it can be just as vicious as its opposite.

III. "That eminent varnisher": Mrs. General

Five years after *David Copperfield*, Dickens created another companion who serves as a critical figure in *Little Dorrit*, but one who functions in a very different way from Rosa. Mrs. General does not covertly signify with her face or see through the narrative in an intricate power struggle with the narrator in order to offer her own interpretation of her employers. Instead, Mrs. General acts as a vehicle of critique through her very presence in the plot. Mrs. General holds up a mirror to the values William Dorrit espouses in Book II. Within the diegesis of the novel, she deliberately practices this mode of manipulative sympathy in order to seduce her employer and win

herself a husband. She is a literary exemplar of Susan Bernstein's suggestion that, for "any Victorian working woman, from streetwalkers to governesses, the ultimate objective of employment is retirement from the labor market through matrimony" (94). But Mrs. General not only pursues Mr. Dorrit through her identification with his goals, she also functions to define him—she is a minor character who brings a central character's limitations to the fore. She serves as a touchstone who, in her satiric, hyperbolic representation of Mr. Dorrit's aspirations, acts as Dickens's barometer of Mr. Dorrit's flaws.

Throughout *Little Dorrit*, Mr. Dorrit's character is defined in terms of place. In Book I, the Marshalsea prison serves first to buttress Dorrit's sense of self. In Book II, as the Dorrit family roams the continent, Mrs. General becomes that "place," a kind of narrative *coordinate*—the source by which he seeks to define his identity. But, if Mrs. General, her belief-system and behavior, is a goal for Mr. Dorrit within the plot of Dickens's novel, she is also a distinct coordinate on *Little Dorrit*'s character-spectrum of flat and round, static and dynamic character types. Thus, she represents a threat both within the plot and on the level of the narrative structure; that is, she is Dickens's signifier for what Dorrit is in danger of becoming throughout the trajectory of the novel.

Dickens repeatedly emphasizes Mrs. General's emptiness as a character. Devoid of affect, the companion, the narrator implies, is also without any degree of interiority: "If her eyes had no expression, it was probably because they had nothing to express. If she had few wrinkles, it was because her mind had never traced its name or any other inscription on her face." Unlike Rosa Dartle, Mrs. General's face is a blank slate that betrays nothing, and yet everything at the same time. We are also informed that Mrs.

General is “not to be told anything shocking” and “had no opinions.” Dickens even goes so far as to suggest that Mrs. General is incapable of critique because it is her practice “to cram all articles of difficulty into cupboards, lock them up, and say they had no existence” (503).[11] Yet, Dickens flirts with obscuring and revealing the possibility of a deeper function for this simple, minor character. In “Riches,” the first chapter of the second book, the narrator introduces Mrs. General as “the elderly lady, who was a model of accurate dressing, and whose manner was perfect, considered as a piece of machinery” (486). While this initial description seems, on the “surface,” to leave no doubt as to this new character’s persona—she is clearly a lady, “a model” and “perfect”—the language Dickens uses circles back on itself to undermine the dull characterization it appears to assert. “Accurate” is in discord with “perfect,” and the connotative associations in “machinery,” especially for a Victorian audience, suggest a different side to Mrs. General’s character and purpose. Although Mrs. General is beyond a doubt a “flat” character, Dickens’s final simile here hints that *he* may have “considered” Mrs. General a significant “piece of machinery” within his narrative.

It is *because* of Mrs. General’s empty face and mind that Dickens is able to use her to represent his critique of superficiality, social pretension, and the rejection of the

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[11] Here, Dickens sets up a parallel between Mrs. General and the Circumlocution Office in *Little Dorrit*. He writes, “Mrs. General had no opinions. Her way of forming a mind was to prevent it from forming opinions. She had a little circular set of mental grooves or rails on which she started little trains of other people’s opinions, which never overtook one another, and never got anywhere” (503). We see this description echoed later in that of the government agency: “A little humbug, and a groove, and everything goes on admirably, if you leave it alone” (718). Scholars have drawn connections between Mrs. General and several other characters or entities in the novel. Narain Shukla, among others, address the doubling of the companion and the circumlocution office; Roger Lund and Rodney Edgecombe identify Mrs. General with Blandois and Mrs. Merdle, respectively.

authentic self in Victorian society. As Roger Lund suggests, "In no other Dickens novel is the Victorian preoccupation with respectability and social position made to seem so odious, so dangerous, so grotesquely ridiculous," and William Dorrit is "Dickens' most penetrating and pathetic examination of the corrosive effects of snobbery and social climbing" (47, 59). We can read Mrs. General's dedication to "varnish[ing] the *surface* of every object that came under consideration" as an ironic ploy in Dickens's narrative craft in *Little Dorrit*; for, it is her province to help to uncover the *depths* of Mr. Dorrit's (and her own) dysfunction (503, my emphasis). Through Mrs. General, then, Dickens is able to offer a critical commentary on two of his characters and on a specific aspect of his society in "General."[12]

i. Mrs. General's Manipulative Sympathy

Dickens dedicates the second chapter of Book II to the new companion, suggesting, albeit with a hint of sarcasm, that she is of significance to the rest of the novel: "It is indispensable to present the accomplished lady who was of sufficient importance in the suite of the Dorrit family to have a line to herself in the Traveller's Book" (499). As the reader will soon discover, Mrs. General's "importance" arises out of her own sense of *self*-importance; and, while the narrator mocks her here, her self-assertion—so similar to Mr. Dorrit's own—is pervasive/persuasive enough to become the

[12] Dickens never reveals Mrs. General's first name, and this accentuates the potential general-ity inherent in her surname. Vereen Bell suggests that Mrs. General's name allows her "two identities, the one individual, the other representative or allegorical. As the first she is the rigorously military, autocratic governess of the Dorrit girls, a director of young lives, and the object of Mr. Dorrit's esteem; as the second she embodies what Dickens evidently considered the mid-century, middle-class ethos, a kind of female Everyman. Her attitudes are hers, and at the same time, Dickens implies, they are England's—vague, unoriginal, evasive" (179).

belief of Mr. Dorrit as well. After all, while having "a line to herself" in the patron log of a Swiss hotel is an impressive mark of Mrs. General's status in the family and, by extension, in society at large, Mrs. General herself is a status marker for Mr. Dorrit, who is likewise consumed by his own vanity. The position she fills and the services she provides, coupled with her own exceptional gentility, translate into yet one more signifier of Mr. Dorrit's persona as a man "doubtless possessing of fortune, carriages, and servants" (494). Mrs. General's presence in the book—both the Traveller's Book and the novel itself—simultaneously highlights and buttresses Mr. Dorrit's destructive sense of eminence.

A widow with a single previous position as governess/companion to her credit, Mrs. General's "testimonials" represent her as "a prodigy of piety, learning, virtue, and gentility;" so, when Mr. Dorrit sets out in search of "a lady, well-bred, accomplished, well-connected, well accustomed to good society, who was qualified at once to complete the education of his daughters, and to be their matron or chaperone," he deems himself lucky in finding Mrs. General (500-1). Mr. Dorrit's inventory of qualifications for his daughters' companion doubles as an articulation of his own motivations at this point in the narrative. His requirements represent everything he himself wishes to be. In the opening chapters of Book II, Mr. Dorrit has become "the Chief of the most important party" and feels it "incumbent on him to take the lead in most places." As he tries to solidify his new identity for himself and for those around him, Mrs. General serves as one of his many attempts to buffer the "number of fine scalpels that he felt to be incessantly engaged in dissecting his dignity" (493, 511).

Like the "Darkness and Night […] creeping up to the highest ridges of the Alps" during the Dorrits' journey through Switzerland, Mrs. General insinuates herself with Mr. Dorrit by epitomizing the genteel "surface" he desires for himself and for his family. For example, when discussing her salary with Mr. Dorrit, Mrs. General makes it clear that, to her, remuneration is:

> a subject on which I prefer to avoid entering. I have never entered on it with my friends here; and I cannot overcome the delicacy, Mr. Dorrit, with which I have always regarded it. I am not, as I hope you are aware, a governess— […] I cannot, therefore, put a price upon my services which it is a pleasure to me to render if I can render them spontaneously, but which I could not render in mere return for any consideration. Neither do I know how, or where, to find a case parallel to my own. It is peculiar. (501)

Her stance with Mr. Dorrit is a carefully crafted presentation as, just a page earlier, the narrator described the companion as well aware of such considerations: "Mrs. General, who had always occupied high ground, felt in a condition to keep it, and began by putting herself up at a very high figure" (500). Dickens's precise wording intimates that Mrs. General does not occupy the (moral) high ground, but she has been accustomed to a certain plane in society and refuses to let the necessity for employment sink her in that hierarchy. "Putting herself up at a very high figure" evokes prostitution, and in these two passages, Mrs. General separates herself from both prostitute and governess, thereby likening the two while simultaneously asserting her superior social position as genteel lady. Just as she cultivates a "surface" for herself and the ladies in her care, Mrs. General cloaks the true nature of her position, preferring to pretend—to herself e and to her employer alike—that she "renders" her "services" "spontaneously," as if out of the goodness of her heart alone. This "varnishing" of the less genteel facts of reality is precisely what Mr. Dorrit seeks as he struggles to efface his past.

Mrs. General is also firm with regards to her status in the family: "I can accept no second or inferior position. If the honour were proposed to me of becoming known to Mr. Dorrit's family [...] I could only accept it on terms of perfect equality, as a companion, protector, Mentor, and friend" (502). Her particular word choice, "if the honour were proposed to me," seems deliberate as she hints at her ultimate goal of receiving a very different kind of proposal from Mr. Dorrit. In addition, the ambiguity of Mrs. General's multi-faceted role here leaves the door open for the possibility of yet another. She presents herself as the embodiment of none of the four roles she lists, but as an amalgamation of them all; this catalog resembles the duties of a mother figure. In her complex, loaded but subtle language throughout her initial conversation with Mr. Dorrit, Mrs. General implicitly identifies herself with the Victorian feminine ideal—the Mother—and, by association, with the wife/mistress role as well.[13] Thus, from the beginning of her acquaintance with Mr. Dorrit, Mrs. General cunningly asserts herself as a potential wife through her careful self-presentation, including the regulation of her speech "through erasures and skirtings" that in many ways resemble Rosa Dartle's (Edgecombe 283).

Mrs. General is successful in her campaign, as shown by Mr. Dorrit's reaction: "Mr. Dorrit, in spite of his sense of his importance, felt as if it would be quite a kindness in her to accept it on any conditions. He almost said as much" (502). She has convinced

[13] Dickens hints that Mrs. General has tried using her governess/companion position in order to attain a husband before her acquaintance with the Dorrit family. In the chapter about Mrs. General's history, we learn that her previous position of seven years was with a widower's daughter. When that employer decides to remarry, he is quick to get rid of her: "The widower then finding Mrs. General both *inconvenient* and expensive, became of a sudden almost as much affected by her merits as the archdeacon had been and circulated such praises of her surpassing worth, in all quarters where he thought an opportunity might arise of transferring the blessing to somebody else (501, my emphasis).

him that she is the "honour" to the Dorrit family, not vice versa, and that she holds the key to the solidification of his own gentility. For this "article of that lustrous surface," Mr. Dorrit is willing to pay "any money" (four hundred pounds per annum, to be exact) (502). Once she is ensconced in her position within the family, Mrs. General plays her part well. After all, as the narrator notes, Mrs. General had "long ago formed her own surface to such perfection that it hid whatever was below it" (559). While her world view is naturally in "sympathy" with Mr. Dorrit's, who has now "convinced himself that character is merely the product of conscious creation, nothing more than the acquisition of the proper mannerisms and the appropriate vocabulary," her manipulation lies in the ways in which she interacts with her employer (Lund 59). She routinely responds to Mr. Dorrit in a manner that showcases her own gentility while bolstering his. The motives and manipulation behind Mrs. General's interactions with Mr. Dorrit remain hidden from him, but certainly not from the other characters or from the reader. The companion functions not only as a mirror, but also as a gauge of Mr. Dorrit's superficial goals; while she is the model Mr. Dorrit strives to emulate within the text, she simultaneously represents what Mr. Dorrit could become if he continues down this narrowing path.

ii. Little Amy Dorrit and the "Ordeal by General"

If Mrs. General exemplifies one type of character on a narrative spectrum of flat to round figures in *Little Dorrit*, then Amy Dorrit is her polar opposite. The eponymous heroine is one of the novel's few complex, dynamic characters and so it would seem that to look at her alongside her companion would yield little of critical value. However, the opposition Dickens crafts between these two characters, demonstrated in their tense

interactions with one another and Mr. Dorrit, reveals that Mrs. General and Amy Dorrit share two important narrative functions in common. If, as Mr. Dorrit tells his "favourite" daughter, Amy "systematically reproduce[s] what the rest of us blot out"—the family's poor, degrading past—then Mrs. General does just the reverse. She "systematically reproduce[s]" exactly what Mr. Dorrit desires to embody: inviolable, albeit empty, gentility and prestige (532). Amy Dorrit and Mrs. General, mistress and companion, represent competing modes of sympathy and critique in *Little Dorrit*.

Through these two characters, Dickens explores two potential sides to sympathy: a sympathy that is a genuine, selfless and even healing and a sympathy that is not only manipulative and self-serving but also damaging to the recipient. While Mrs. General sympathizes with Mr. Dorrit's new, superficial social ambitions, Amy both understands and sympathizes with her father's authentic self—the past and identity he cannot shake, despite his efforts. Amy sees through her father's attempts to deny his nature and become someone else. When "he tried to keep it out of her mind, and perhaps out of his own too, by immediately expatiating on the great riches and great company that had encompassed him," Amy never "fail[s] to recall that there were two under- currents, side by side, pervading all his discourse and all his manner" (703). While Mrs. General's presence fuels Mr. Dorrit's move toward flatness as a character, Amy's presence reveals and anchors the depth of his conflicted interiority. Thus, both characters function as a measure for Mr. Dorrit's current state as well as a potential goal for his character. If Mrs. General indicates the empty, flat character Mr. Dorrit is in danger of becoming, then Amy signifies the other end of the spectrum: the rich, complex character he could also be. But, Amy's interactions with her father in the novel are not only palliative and

encouraging; Dickens also uses *her* to critique Mr. Dorrit and the social ills he and Mrs. General represent. Just as Mrs. General embodies Dickens's critique of false gentility and pretension through her manipulative sympathy, Amy serves as an indictment of her father's dysfunction through her genuine sympathy with his struggle between his true, private self and his aspirations for an artificial, public self.

In Book II, Amy Dorrit senses an ever-widening gulf between herself and her father, and Mrs. General only serves to exacerbate the situation. In one long and poignant scene, Mr. Dorrit, "with a deference not incompatible with majestic serenity," requests to be "favoured" with Mrs. General's views regarding Amy (525). He expresses his impression that there is "something wrong" with his daughter because "she does not care to go about with us; she is lost in the society we have here; our tastes are evidently not her tastes" (527). Privileging a dependent employee above his own daughter, the companion's nominal "mistress," and giving Mrs. General the power to judge Amy from a superior position is a distortion of the prescribed mistress-companion relationship, and one that Dickens uses to further establish the awful parody of familial dynamics at work in the novel. This violation of Victorian domestic codes, as sexual and social desires trump paternal duties, solidifies the grotesque disarray of the Dorrit family for the reader. When Amy is summoned before them, the "conference" more closely resembles an ambush as Amy's father informs her: "'I sent for you, in order that I might say—hum—impressively say, in the presence of Mrs. General, to whom we are all so much indebted for obligingly being present among us, on—ha—on this or any other occasion,' Mrs. General shut her eyes, 'that I—ha hum—am not pleased with you. You make Mrs. General's a thankless task, You—ha—embarrass me very much'" (529). Poor Amy—for

the reader's sympathy is indisputably with her in this episode—is outnumbered; her father aligns himself with Amy's companion and reprimands her for not absorbing Mrs. General's "obligingly" offered tutelage. Mr. Dorrit emphasizes that he accosts her "in the presence of Mrs. General" to show that he is on her side and against Amy, and he represents the inconvenience her behavior is causing the companion as among the greatest of her crimes.

Mr. Dorrit's drive to assert his own status surmounts his loyalty to his daughter; if she is unable to uphold the family's new position, he will turn from her and associate himself with another who is capable of epitomizing his current values. In doing so, he also turns away from his more authentic emotions, with which Dickens identifies Amy throughout the novel. As David Holbrook writes, "Dorrit's genteel pretensions are exposed because we have been accustomed for so long to see him as an imprisoned pauper. Now he is equally imprisoned within the falsifications of 'the proprieties,' and Mrs. General is his jailer. She is inviolable in her propriety [...] and [he] is willing to sacrifice genuine love and relationship to the mere varnishings" (99-100). What Dickens makes clear throughout the novel is that Mr. Dorrit, perennially as helpless emotionally as he is physically and mentally at the narrative's close, needs Amy above all else; the love and sympathy Amy consistently offers Mr. Dorrit is his true buttress in Books I *and* II. Yet, Mr. Dorrit is unable to acknowledge this, and thus his express dependence upon the enabling Mrs. General is one of Dickens's most satiric ironies in *Little Dorrit*.

For a time, the companion forecloses Amy's sympathetic access to her father. This is a feat Mrs. General must achieve in order to cement her own control over Mr. Dorrit; she must block Amy's competing sympathy in order to win her employer as a

husband. Mrs. General attacks Amy in her very first, meek response to the verbal assault: "'Papa is a preferable mode of address,' observed Mrs. General. 'Father is rather vulgar, my dear. The word Papa, besides, gives a pretty form to the lips.'" (528-29). Mrs. General proves herself complicit in the alienation of father and daughter in this moment, taking advantage of the ascendancy Mr. Dorrit has extended to her. She barely lets Amy speak and her comment is a furtive attack on a significant element of their familial intimacy. By attempting to alter the way in which Amy has addressed her parent throughout her life, she cultivates the growing rift between them. Amy's name for her father represents their domestic bond—one which exists for both of them although Mr. Dorrit is slower to acknowledge it. Mrs. General chips away at this father-daughter relationship as she advocates a more formal mode of address, one that will incidentally flatter the physical appearance of a young lady's face as it also infantilizes her. As Mrs. General famously continues: "'Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prism are all very good words for the lips: especially prunes and prism, You will find it serviceable, in the formation of a demeanour, if you sometimes say to yourself in company—on entering a room, for instance—Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prism, prunes and prism" (529). Mrs. General's training is encapsulated in this lesson. Consisting exclusively of empty considerations regarding appearance, of "surface" representations of refinement, the companion's views are antithetical to Amy's character but in perfect sympathy with her father's new ideals.[14] Although this exchange only further enhances Amy's credibility as

[14] Scholars interested in Mrs. General have had much to say about this scene in particular. Both Vereen Bell and Rodney Edgecombe, for example, focus on the implications Mrs. General's instruction has on the Dorrit girls' language. Bell points out that, "From her instructions the Dorrit girls learn that one becomes socially refined by becoming morally and emotionally empty […] Her absurdly alliterative formula for

the model of genuine propriety and sympathy in the novel, it is for this very reason that she is doomed to fail at her "lessons" and therefore suffer her father's displeasure and distance. Meanwhile, Mrs. General's role as a divisive figure, drawing Mr. Dorrit away from his virtuous daughter and also farther and farther from Amy's character type, allows Dickens to portray more effectively the extent of Mr. Dorrit's descent.

Following this scene, and perhaps as a direct result of his overt rejection of Amy and all that she embodies, Mr. Dorrit takes a marked turn toward all that Mrs. General represents, both within the diegesis and as a type of character in the narrative structure of the novel. After Mrs. General leaves the room, Mr. Dorrit displays the extent of her influence over him. At this point in the novel, he can no longer speak for himself; instead, he parrots the companion he has come to esteem so much. He tells Amy: "It is for your sake that I wish you, under the auspices of Mrs. General, to form a—hum—surface. It is for your sake that I wish you to have a—ha—truly refined mind, and (in the striking words of Mrs. General) to be ignorant of everything that is not perfectly proper, placid, and pleasant'" (532-33). It is unclear whether the parenthetical interjection is Mr. Dorrit's aside or the narrator's attempt to ensure the reader notices Mr. Dorrit is aping Mrs. General; either way, Dickens makes his point. Not only has Mr. Dorrit become so overtaken by the companion that he can only ventriloquize her phrases, reminiscent of

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pretty lip formation has more significance than the usual Dickens leitmotif. […] Words are made to form lips, not to express thoughts. Even language and sense are sacrificed to appearance" (180). Edgecombe reads the companion's motives a slightly different way: "Part of Mrs. General's strategy in circumscribing the experience of the Dorrit girls, and fitting them to her procrustean yardstick, is to limit their capacity for speech." He goes on to suggest that "The inspiration behind the mantra of plosives is probably a scene in John Burgoyne's *The Heiress* (1786). Here the mischievous Lady Emily mocks an arriviste by having her copy a silly mannerism" (Edgecombe 285).

David's experience with Rosa's portrait, he also proves himself ruled by her in other ways. From this point in the narrative onward, he continually asks "What is Mrs. General's view?" and exhibits signs of intimidation (535). At one point, he reveals to Amy, "'I am careful to appeal to that lady for confirmation, before I express any displeasure at all. I—hum—I necessarily make that appeal within limited bounds, or I—ha—should render legible, by that lady, what I desire to be blotted out'" (532). In this moment, Dickens makes his use of Mrs. General as a touchstone explicit, and Mr. Dorrit's awareness that his character is "render[ed] legible" by her suggests that he too recognizes her role to some extent. If he does not conform to Mrs. General's principles, Mr. Dorrit will betray his past to her and to the world; but, as Dickens makes clear, in actively seeking to be like her, Mr. Dorrit is betraying his deeper self as well as his potential as a complex, round character.

Mrs. General has become the index of Mr. Dorrit's gentility, both for him as well as for Dickens. In this way, she serves as the medium through which Dickens can articulate his criticism of both their characters. In this series of scenes, as Mr. Dorrit attempts to think and act within the "limited bounds" of Mrs. General's flat character, Dickens portrays Mr. Dorrit as moving further toward Mrs. General's side of the characterological spectrum. Like Mrs. General, he is becoming a satire in and of himself. Mrs. General is truly driving "the proprieties four-in-hand" at this point in the novel, representing the "false" proprieties Dickens assigns to Mr. Dorrit, and, in so doing, Dickens's own assessment of what is *im*proper and *un*acceptable (499).

As he continues to push Amy away, informing her that she must be married off soon (and to the benefit of the family), Mr. Dorrit's intentions toward Mrs. General

finally become clear to Amy as she observes her father in the company of her companion.[15] However, Amy's observations of Mrs. General's response to Mr. Dorrit's open courtship are even more revealing: "The perfect formation of that accomplished lady's surface rendered it difficult to displace an atom of its genteel glaze, but Little Dorrit thought she descried a slight thaw of triumph in a corner of her frosty eye" (704). This passage is the first and only scene in which the narrative acknowledges some visible, affective mark of "design" hidden beneath Mrs. General's appearance and actions. It is significant, then, that it is Amy who finds the meaning beneath her companion's "surface." Amy's is an act of interpretation as she "thought she descried" this sign by reading Mrs. General's face as text. Amy now sees what Mrs. General represents and the danger her father is in. In this moment, Amy models the type of analysis and critique Dickens is calling his reader to perform.

In Chapter Nineteen, William Dorrit begins his courtship of Mrs. General in earnest, and by the end of that same chapter, he is dead. As Mr. Dorrit shows increasing signs of physical illness preceding his mental breakdown, the narrator begins to emphasize even more explicitly the father and daughter's mutual, silent understanding of Mr. Dorrit's internal struggle between his painful past and his shallow hopes for the future. As Amy greets her father upon his return from abroad, the narrator describes how

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[15] Patricia Ingram suggests that Amy cannot see Mrs. General's intentions clearly until she herself is urged to marry: "Amy will brook no other woman as a rival for her father's affections. […] Amy refuses to see what is going on until she feels herself to have cause for jealousy because her father suggests that she herself might marry." Indicating that Amy finally realizes the extent to which she has been replaced by Mrs. General, Ingham continues: "There is a literal truth in the idea that Mrs. General would be William Dorrit's second wife, succeeding Amy's dead mother; but the girl's own phrase, 'replace her,' referring to herself, makes *her* the faithful wife who is to be displaced. Her insistence on driving out the idea of another wife indicates a picture too horrible to entertain of herself betrayed, supplanted, in effect divorced" (Ingham 124).

“her look revived that former pain in her father’s breast; in his poor weak breast, so full of contradictions, vacillations, inconsistencies, the little peevish perplexities of this ignorant life” (699-700). Mr. Dorrit has continually distanced himself from Amy because of this “revival” she invokes; she disallows whatever sublimation of his shame and his higher self he strives to maintain with the help of Mrs. General. Amy knows, and simultaneously exposes to the reader, that Mr. Dorrit is not a one-dimensional, empty character, only one who is trying to be. Although Mr. Dorrit tries to push Amy away throughout Book II, when he suffers a psychic break at the Merdles’ dinner, his delirium allows him to realize that she is the one who is genuinely sympathetic to his innermost emotions and identity. He finally recognizes his dependence upon her. After his mind and body fail him, and “he knew of nothing beyond the Marshalsea,” Mr. Dorrit “would suffer no one but her to touch him” (711).

During this fatal illness, “they tried him with Mrs. General, but he had not the faintest knowledge of her.” Having ultimately aligned himself with Amy and the type of character she represents, Mr. Dorrit not only fails to recognize the symbol of his misplaced social desires, he also identifies her manipulative nature for the first time in the novel. As “some injurious suspicion lodged itself in his brain” regarding Mrs. General, he begs his caretakers to “turn her out” (710). Dickens thus emphasizes the clarity that his illness allows him. Mr. Dorrit’s health does not begin to wane until he actively begins pursuing his daughters’ companion; it is as if “the Father of the Marshalsea’s” mind and body cannot sustain the ultimate commitment to superficiality and social pretension that a

marriage to Mrs. General would represent.[16] It is through Amy, then, that Dickens rehabilitates Mr. Dorrit in the reader's sympathies before his death, infusing his character with fullness and pathos. Just as Mrs. General's character works to elucidate the failings in his character, Amy functions to uncover the authenticity and complexity that still lies somewhere within. *Little Dorrit* pits an idealized sympathy—Amy's enduring filial sympathy—against that of Mrs. General to demonstrate the artificiality, and potential danger, of purchased sympathy. Mrs. General's sympathy-for-hire is as contrived and hollow as the social pretensions she represents. For Dickens, the familial, private self proves itself stronger than the commodified, public persona in the end, and genuine sympathy conquers its synthetic counterpart.

IV. Conclusions: To Criticize the Critic

In *David Copperfield*, James Steerforth tells David, "'I told you she took everything, herself included, to a grindstone, and sharpened it. She is an edge-tool" (370). Rosa Dartle and Mrs. General, in their own disparate ways, indeed function as grindstones, sharpening and bringing into focus obscured histories and deeper meanings beneath the surface of their respective novels. In *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit*, Dickens utilizes the complex, ambiguous nature of the companion's position in society

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[16] Vereen Bell insightfully notes that Mr. Dorrit's "pursuit of Mrs. General has a sort of abstract, Gatsbyean rightness about it, for in wedding her he would be uniting himself with the epitome of all that is correct and admirable in Society; it would be a symbolic union. […] The burden of pretense, however, is too great for 'the broken wings' of his 'maimed spirit'; and in his first and only moment of self-understanding—on the verge of wedding Mrs. General, and fittingly in the company of the Bosom and her fashionable friends—he seems to see dimly that he has merely exchanged one kind of prison for another" (183).

and in the domestic circle to create critical figures within his narratives. However, Dickens does not reward his "edge-tool[s];" they do not ultimately benefit by executing the work he created them to do. In both of these novels, the companions are left unfulfilled and static.

Throughout Rosa's tirade, Mrs. Steerforth sits in an unresponsive, almost catatonic state—she cannot speak, she cannot cry, but only moan for her loss under the revealing attack of her trusted attendant. In the end, we do not know if Rosa's confrontation with her mistress even reaches the stunned Mrs. Steerforth, and the companion has no choice but to take "the impassive figure in her arms, and, still on her knees, [weep] over it, kissing it, calling to it, rocking it to and fro upon her bosom like a child" (675). Despite the history between them, no longer a secret, companion and mistress are stuck with one another. Perhaps, they are finally in a state of true sympathy as they mourn the loss of their common beloved. As David states before concluding the Steerforth plot, Mrs. Steerforth "was just the same, they told me; Miss Dartle never left her" (675). Graham Storey has called this scene "as melancholy as anything in Dickens," and indeed, this is a sad fate for the hyper-critical companion (85).

By exposing the Steerforths' dysfunction to David and his readers, Rosa can effect some vengeance for the way she has been treated, but Dickens cannot let this misuse of sympathy go unaddressed. In her critical work, Rosa betrays the Victorian standards for the companion position and womanhood alike through her manipulation and degradation of sympathy. Thus, as she reveals the transgressions of the Steerforths, she must also betray her own. Rosa reveals herself to be just like those she has attempted to expose throughout the novel; callous, stubborn, and obsessive, she is no different from

her mistress or her former lover. So while she succeeds in her critical work, her exposé inevitably turns on her, and in the end, Dickens robs her of whatever pleasure her function may have afforded her. With Steerforth dead and her mistress in need of more care than ever, Rosa is trapped in her painful position indefinitely. Having laid bare her full critique, there is nothing left for her to do, we suspect, but *properly* fulfill her prescribed role as submissive, sympathetic companion. However, Rosa's prowess as an agent of the narrative is acknowledged by David's very act of including her in his narrative in this way. After all, David narrates his story retrospectively; while his younger self is challenged by the companion, the older, narrator David ultimately accepts Rosa's role by willingly including her (even her temporary advantage over him) when he tells his story. But perhaps David's honest inclusion of Rosa's character represents more than his recognition of her as a worthy narrative adversary. His choice to portray Rosa's critical work, especially his own struggles with her, suggests he might harbor some feelings of guilt concerning Emily's and Steerforth's— possibly even Rosa's—fates. Rosa is the only character in the narrative to implicate him in the disastrous affairs of the Steerforth family, and although he repeatedly refuses to admit any culpability, his decision to include that aspect of Rosa's critique implies that he acknowledges his own complicity. Thus, while Rosa may be left to suffer in the diegesis, she is empowered in the narrative structure of the novel.

Mrs. General must also fail at the end of *Little Dorrit* because she both epitomizes in herself and, more importantly, helps to reveal in other characters, that which Dickens wishes to criticize in his novel. Like Rosa, Mrs. General is left in perpetual repetition; she must take her "proprieties" and manipulative sympathy elsewhere, still on the quest

to find a second husband and retire from the employment market. After Mr. Dorrit's death, his son "paid off Mrs. General instantly, and sent her out of the house" (763). As if to accentuate Mrs. General's less than idyllic end, Dickens also denies her any part of Dorrit's will in a novel that is in essence all about inheritances. At the end of the narrative, we learn, "here was Mrs. General, got home from foreign parts, sending a Prune and a Prism by post every other day, demanding a new Testimonial by way of recommendation to some vacant appointment or other" (873). Mrs. General thus ends the novel in the same position she was in when she entered it. Dickens does not show to his companion the same mercy he eventually provides for Mr. Dorrit in his rehabilitation. Mrs. General cannot learn from or identify with Amy's genuine sympathy and more honorable critical position—but, that is how Dickens made her.

Dickens employs Rosa Dartle and Mrs. General to perform critical work in *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit*, but he also critiques them in return. He takes advantage of the companion and the work she can accomplish both as an agent of the narrative and as a means of examining the concept of sympathy. Through Rosa and Mrs. General, Dickens deconstructs sympathy and illustrates that it can be a manipulative, egoistic, critical mode as well as an altruistic means of human interaction. In this sense, Rosa's and Mrs. General's form of sympathy stands in contrast to other manifestations of genuine sympathy in these novels. In the end, it is the characters who practice a selfless, generous version of sympathy who are rewarded. Thus, Dickens acknowledges, explores, and even at times seems to identity with the darker side of sympathy in *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit* but ultimately refuses to align himself with it. Although Rosa's use of her own malign form of sympathy becomes a narratological necessity for Dickens, he

eventually turns on his own narrative device, and while Mrs. General serves her purpose to perfection, she is a satire in and of herself. Both Rosa and Mrs. General, then, perform critical work in these novels but also act as critiques of themselves—two critiques of the critical companion and the manipulative modes of sympathy she uses to accomplish her self-serving goals.

CHAPTER II

"I WAS AT WORK IN YOUR HOUSE AS A DETECTIVE": THE COMPANION AND THE SECRETS OF THE HOUSE IN *LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET* AND *ANNE HEREFORD*

In *Anne Hereford* (1868), Ellen Wood is explicit regarding the connection between the companion and the detective. When forced to answer for her actions to the Chandos family and to the police at the end of the novel, Charlotte Delves Penn, companion to Mrs. Chandos, indignantly defends her devious manipulation of the role by claiming, "'All that I have done I was justified in doing. […] I was at work in your house as a detective: my acts bore but one aim—the discovery of your brother, the murderer. And I have succeeded'" (345). Mrs. Penn, as she has been known to her employers, believes herself "justified" in her underhanded behavior because she has assumed the mantle of detective. Indeed, she is "at work," and her spying, eavesdropping, and procuring evidence are not so different from the activities of Robert Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862). As Mrs. Penn continues, "'all stratagems are fair when the discovery of criminals, hiding from the law, is in question. I have only done my duty; I would do it again,'" she appeals to the pursuit of justice that defines the traditional detective's work in an attempt to legitimize her own actions (346). However, as Wood makes clear throughout the novel, Mrs. Penn is not motivated by any sense of universal justice but by her own unrequited desire for Edwin Barley, benefactor to the murder victim in question. In *Anne Hereford*, Wood explores the potential threat inherent in the companion's intimate position within the home and the way in which a

sympathy that is purchased, and thus always somewhat artificial, can be compromised when the companion's genuine sympathies lie elsewhere.

Kathleen Tillotson defined the sensation novel as "the novel-with-a-secret," and this much-cited claim has proven an apt term for scholars seeking to explore the genre. But also central to the concerns of the sensation novel is the accessing and circulation of that secret at the root of the narrative; as Peter Brooks writes, in any detective story, "what is at stake is a gain in knowledge, a self-conscious creation of meaning" (27). As this chapter will suggest, female sensation novelists in the mid-nineteenth century were interested in exploring modes of detection beyond the techniques of the burgeoning male detective character, whose strategies were based in the scientific and psychological discourses of the day. Although both Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Ellen Wood feature amateur male detective characters in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Anne Hereford*, they also imagined contrasting, competitive approaches for penetrating the dark secrets that lay hidden in the ideally impermeable domestic space: they envisioned a method of detection situated within that private realm itself. The paid female companion—a genteel figure who is at once an intimate in the private, domestic sphere as well as a participant in the public, professional world outside the home—provided these authors with the means to offer an alternative, affective mode of detection that complicates our current understanding of the mistress-companion relationship, sympathy, and the sensation novel as a genre.

The companion is well-suited to a genre so concerned with secrets, power, gender, and social mobility. According to Natalie and Ronald Schroeder, sensation fiction, with its portrayals of "domestic unrest," "bred and capitalized on fears that people

and events might not always be what they appeared to be. It joined realism and fantasy. It offered contradictory images of women" (16, 18). Companion characters throughout Victorian fiction are also rarely what they seem or what their employers expect them to be, and Braddon's and Wood's companion figures are no exception. Phoebe Marks's and Charlotte Delves Penn's secret backgrounds, motivations, and, most important, sympathetic investments prove dangerous to the security of the mystery at the center of both the home and the plot in their respective novels. In other words, these companions, paid to supply company and sympathy, prove themselves dangerous to their mistresses, whose secrets they strive to uncover for their own self-promotion.

In her study of the sensation novel, Elaine Showalter asserts that "women novelists made a powerful appeal to the female audience by subverting the traditions of feminine fiction to suit their own imaginative impulses, by expressing a wide range of suppressed female emotions, and by trapping and satisfying fantasies of protest and escape. [...] Sensation novels expressed female anger, frustration, and sexual energy more directly than had been done previously" (159-160). Showalter refers here to a cohort of now well-known sensation heroine/villainesses, such as Isabel Vane and Lady Audley. She articulates how these characters not only broke the bounds of cultural expectations for women but also represented a new mode of portraying female subjectivity in the novel. However, these characters' transgressive behaviors, so shocking to contemporary readers, reverberate in these rebellious women's paid help. The companion characters in the novels I will consider in this chapter prove themselves equally engaged in "fantasies of protest and escape" and just as willing to transgress social constraints to succeed by using their positions to enact the work of the detective.

The implications of the excess involved in this mirroring of "unfeminine" thought and action in the servant or companion figure are of note; one effect is a multiplicity of transgressive female behavior and the expression of "a wide range of suppressed female emotions," not only rooted in the often aristocratic central character, but at varied (and peripheral) levels within the narrative structure of these novels. If, as Maureen T. Reddy writes, the sensation novel "position[s] women as the dangerous Other that must be contained and controlled" by the "male detective [who] relentlessly pursu[es] a female opponent whose villainy consists entirely in the danger she poses to men and to patriarchal order," then the companion in these novels is *doubly* Other. She is both the dangerously "criminal" woman and the *other* detective.

In *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Anne Hereford*, the mistresses' and companions' criminal or manipulative actions are not orchestrated on discrete tracks, but instead, frequently collide. The companion characters in Braddon and Wood's works strive, through their position as intimate friends of aristocratic families, to gain a higher, or at least more secure, social position. Within the sensation model, the companion's chance at advancement lies not necessarily in marriage to a member of the employer's household, the strategy of Becky Sharp and Mrs. General, but instead, in the uncovering and exploitation of the family's secret. The companion's success can only come at the expense of her mistress. Thus, while these female characters are in a sense united in their unethical methods to achieve a better life, they are simultaneously at odds with one another. This is significant in that the mistress-companion dynamic pits women against each other when, especially in sensation fiction, the main tension of the text depicts women in conflict with men. As Anne Cvetkovich explains, "the sensation novel

exploits the disparity between apparently stable families and marriages and the horrifying secrets and extremes of passion that disrupt them [. . .] The genre's concern with the deceptiveness of domestic tranquility is linked to its representation of women" (45-46). In these novels, the "apparently stable" relationship between mistress and companion is also in question and ultimately proves injurious to the mistress and her family. Indeed, the companion characters serve to exacerbate the very "disrupt[ion]" and "deceptiveness of domestic tranquility" Cvetkovich describes.

In *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Anne Hereford*, the companion characters use the family secret not just for their own benefit, but also to the advantage of another character with whom they are genuinely sympathetic. As my Introduction and first chapter established, the female companion is paid to invest her sympathy in her employer—to be sympathetically available, as it were. Braddon and Wood portray the tensions that arise when the sympathy offered by the companion to her mistress is nothing more than an act in which the companion only appears to fulfill this duty while her true sympathy is placed elsewhere, away from her mistress and with another, opposing or rival character. In both novels, this "outside" character is male, and by locating their companions' competing, external economic and emotional investments in the figure of a male lover who wishes to harm the mistress or the mistress's family, both authors personify the public forces that can impinge upon the companion's relationship with her mistress. In other words, I read these male characters as synecdochic representations of the array of possible conflicts of interest that may interfere with the companion's ability or desire to provide her mistress with genuine sympathy. The site of the companion's sympathy (true or false), and its shifts to loci within or without the mistress-companion relationship and the domestic

space, become central to the conflict and forward movement of these narratives. However, the diffuse, fluid sympathy at work in these novels also causes narratological inconsistencies and erasures that serve to illustrate the unwieldy, complicated nature of sympathy that characterizes the mistress-companion relationship in Victorian literature. Nevertheless, sympathy becomes both the impetus and the method through which the companion discovers and distributes private, domestic knowledge. The complex configurations of sympathy in these novels illustrate the interdependent and porous nature of the divide between genuine and less admirable forms of sympathy just as they expose the permeability of the domestic sphere.

The companion in Victorian literature is an ambiguous figure whose double allegiance to the private and public spheres represents a significant threat to the sanctity of private knowledge within the domestic realm. Her position allows access to secret, familial knowledge, but in the absence of any genuine investment in those she serves, her status as a professional woman with investments exterior to her occupation simultaneously allows the companion the ability to disseminate that knowledge beyond the boundaries of the household. Therefore, the presence of the companion in the home represented the dangerous infiltration of the public, economic world into the domestic space and domestic relationships. The companion character's unique, professional penetration into the domestic space also results in a privileged relationship to the narratives themselves. By manipulating their distinctive access to secret knowledge as well as their ability to distribute that knowledge publicly among the characters and to the reader, Braddon's Phoebe Marks and Wood's Charlotte Delves Penn help to define these narratives as sensation fiction. In *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Anne Hereford*, the

companions are the *first* to learn the hidden scandals of their employers; and in fact, it is the discoveries of Phoebe Marks and Charlotte Delves Penn that make possible the male detective characters' ultimate findings in these narratives. Although unacknowledged in the criticism—or even explicitly within the texts themselves—the companion is the true detective in these two novels.

I. Detection, Narrativity, and the Female Detective

In "The Typology of Detective Fiction," Tsvetan Todorov argues that detective fiction "contains not one, but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. [...] the second story consists, in fact, in explaining how this very book came to be written" (122). By establishing the ways in which the genre's "two stories" bring story and discourse together, the way it "manages to make both of them present, puts[s] them side by side" (123), Todorov inaugurated a new critical discourse that views the detective narrative as "narrativity in its purest form" (Sweeney 3). Various scholars, Peter Brooks, Peter Hühn, and S.E. Sweeney among them, have since explored what the genre can contribute to our understanding of narrative in general by using detective fiction to explore such topics as plot and self-reflexivity in fiction. If, as Peter Brooks writes, the detective story is "the narrative of narratives, its classical structure a laying-bare of the structure of all narrative," then its central figure, the detective, in particular holds a privileged relation to the project of narrative itself (25). After all, it is the detective character's job to discover, reconstruct, and proclaim the "second story" upon which the narrative is based. Thus, it is not only the purpose of a specific narrative which the fictional detective helps to elucidate, but the purpose of all narrative more generally.

By representing their companion characters as detectives, then, authors like Braddon and Wood expose the companion's own important relationship to narrativity. The companion's role as a privileged receptacle for private, often secret, knowledge marks the figure as a potential disseminator of narrative meaning throughout numerous sub-genres of the Victorian novel, but in the sensation/proto-detective novel, the companion's capacity as mediator between domestic and public realms becomes more pronounced as the companion serves as an alternative detective figure.

Most critics acknowledge that the roots of modern detective fiction lie in the sensation fiction of the mid-nineteenth century. As Robin Woods writes, "the 1828 establishment of Robert Peel's Metropolitan Police heralded a new approach to crime fighting. [...] By mid-century a detective force had been added to the Metropolitan Police, [...] and as the uniformed policeman became a figure of justice and control in English society, the fictional detective arrived in literature as a corresponding symbol of order" (15). Distinguishing between the Newgate and sensation novel, Lyn Pykett has identified the ways in which the rise of the sensation novel in the 1860s marked a "shift of focus from crime to detection" that reflected these societal developments: "By the 1860s crime was no longer perceived as constituting a world of its own, 'one that invertedly mirrored the respectable world.' [...] A world in which everyone was potentially a criminal was a world of universal suspicion in which everyone became a detective or a suspect" (34). Michel Foucault and D.A. Miller have examined this rise of social discipline and surveillance and its effects. As Miller illustrates in *The Novel and the Police*, one result of the cultural climate Pykett describes is the influx of the professional or amateur detective figure in Victorian literature. While the professional

detective represented an authoritative force imbued with the power and knowledge associated with scientific, medical, and legal disciplines, the amateur detective, as Peter Thoms claims, "represents the idea—dear to the reader—that potentially anyone, given sufficient curiosity, could conduct an investigation. That the amateur is not literally the hand of the law seems of little consequence when he can [...] pass his explanation to the authorities or simply publicize the information himself" (11). In fiction, both men and women could be amateur detectives and the companion detectives discussed in this chapter illustrate Thoms's point that, with the right access and skill-set, "anyone" can be a detective, and that role represents a significant relationship to the reader's own role.

Ian Ousby asserts that "In the first half of the nineteenth century popular literature, keeping in step with developments in social history, portrayed the detective in an increasingly sympathetic manner" (80). Charles Dickens wrote a number of detective stories throughout the early 1850s for *Household Words* before representing the professional Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House* (1853). In *Sherlock's Sisters*, Joseph A. Kestner examines two works featuring female detectives in the 1860s: W.S. Hayward's *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, published sometime between 1861 and 1864, and Andrew Forrester Jr.'s *The Female Detective*, publish in May 1864 (6). As Pykett writes, "If one particularly striking difference between the sensation novel and its Newgate predecessors was the greater prominence given to female criminals, another was the sensation novel's development of the female (amateur) detective" (35).[1] In addition to

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[1] In her book *The Female Investigator in Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*, Lisa M. Dresner locates precursors to the sensation novel's amateur female detectives in the female gothic novel. Describing the gothic novel as "a genre rife with 'almost detectives'—investigating women whose attempts to discover a secret are only moderately successful," Dresner explains the failure of these early female detectives.

Phoebe Marks, Braddon also created Eleanor Vane and Jenny Milsom, two female characters who serve as lay detectives in *Eleanor's Victory* (1863) and *Run to Earth* (1868). Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859), often proclaimed the first sensation novel, features Marian Halcombe, who, like Magdalen Vanstone in *No Name* (1862), performs the work of the detective to save a loved one. But the female detective represents a threat not so different from that of the criminal whose offenses she seeks to discover and expose.

A number of critics have theorized the detective figure's relationship to criminality and transgression. In his study of male detective characters from Godwin to Doyle, Ousby writes that "Associated with corruption and dishonesty, [the detective] appears strikingly similar to the criminal himself." The figure of the detective thus "entered fiction not as a hero, but as, at worst, a villain and, at best, a suspect and ambiguous character" (18). In her work, Robin Woods also approaches the detective character in this way, articulating the ways in which "the fictional detective himself became an outcast, a link between crime and society who, by the nature of his task, had to work alone in order to protect his community from the taint of criminality. [...] as a result the detective himself would be condemned to a life of crime" (16). Female detectives, then, were even more problematic because, as Kathleen Gregory Kline writes, "Like the criminal, she is a member of society who does not conform to the status quo. Her presence pushes off-center the whole male/female, public/private, intellect/emotion,

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Because of the "limitations placed upon the female investigator by the gothic form," "no matter how strong her desire to investigate, and no matter how strong her linguistic and interpretive mastery, she is never allowed to bring her investigation to a successful conclusion through her own efforts" (39).

physical strength/weakness dichotomy" (4). In this way, the female detective—and as I will show, the female *companion*-detective in particular—serves to further destabilize the already tenuous worlds sensation and detective fiction depict.

Yet, in the sensation novels that gave birth to detective fiction as we know it, both the locus of crime as well as the attributes culturally defined as feminine in the Victorian period make women worthy candidates for the role of detective. Part of what distinguished the sensation novel from its predecessor, the Newgate novel, was its portrayal of criminal activity within the domestic sphere: "In the sensation novel the scene of the crime was more likely to be the home than the road, the drawing room rather than the drinking den. The sensation novel did not depict the criminal underworld, but rather it explored the dark underside of respectable society: the family is the locus of crime, and the secrets of the family are responsible for most of the plot complications" (Pykett 34). Furthermore, as Ousby points out, sensation novels are "rarely concerned solely with crime and are hardly 'crime stories' in the literal sense of the term. [...] Mystery does not take the form of those abstract and quasi-mathematical problems of Poe's Dupin tales or of much modern detective fiction. It arises instead out of confusions in human relationships" (81). For Victorians, the domestic space and the intimacies of human relationships were the province of women.

Critics interested in the female detective have explored how these characters could utilize the cultural stereotypes that defined them. Kline, for example, discusses how, although "a woman's script did not include setting up professionally in a job which so clearly required acknowledged masculine virtues like physical strength, logical thinking, and worldly experience," women could be successful detectives when they

"employed the more stereotypically feminine talents of gossip and intuition" (3). Carla T. Kungl's work on the more official female detectives of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveals how indebted later authors in the detective genre were to sensation novelists like Braddon and Wood whose: "Female detectives succeeded in part because 'detecting' came easily to women: they were seen as nosy, detail-oriented, and naturally inquisitive. They could go to places socially that men could not and gather information. They could use their intuitive insights to peer into the hearts of their fellow creatures and see hidden truths" (75).

The companions in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Anne Hereford* possess each of the attributes and privileged points of access Kline and Kungl describe; in fact, their position as companions represents heightened levels of access, intimacy, and opportunity that work to accentuate the means for detection available to women. In addition, the ambiguities surrounding the figure of the detective outlined by scholars such as Ousby and Robin Woods parallel the distinctive ambiguities of the companion's position that this project seeks to establish. Thoms's articulation of the detective characters' relationship to power and egoism mirrors that of the companion: "In gratifying a desire to control others, detection often appears as an expression of egoism; here the writing or assembling of a case becomes a method of imposing power upon individuals, who are given characters and assigned places within the plot the detective devises" (2). Although companions are hired to be loyal and sympathetic to their mistresses, their ability to use the domestic knowledge they are, by occupation, privy to represents an assertion of self-serving control. Like the companion-detective who manipulates the boundaries of her role to achieve mastery over her mistress, the detective's "desire for authorial mastery

disturbingly resembles the oppressive deeds of the criminal. Just as the criminal subjects his victims to his control, so the detective threatens the autonomy of individuals as he invades their privacy" (Thoms 2). Detection is, after all, the invasion of privacy, and Braddon's and Wood's companion-detectives show that, while she is paid to buttress domestic privacy and security, she can also be the means of its disruption and exposure.

II. "Amongst all the privileged spies": The Companion as Detective in *Lady Audley's Secret*

In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon presents a commentary on the figure of the lady's maid reminiscent of Thackeray's exposition on the companion in *Vanity Fair*:

> Amongst all the privileged spies, a lady's-maid has the highest privileges. [...] She has a hundred methods for the finding out of her mistress's secrets. She knows by the manner in which her victim jerks her head from under the hair-brush, or chafes at the gentlest administration of the comb, what hidden tortures are racking her breast—what secret perplexities are bewildering her brain. [...] she knows when the ivory complexion is bought and paid for—when the pearly teeth are foreign substances fashioned by the dentist—when the glossy plaits are the relics of the dead, rather than the property of the living; and she knows other and more sacred secrets than these. (336)

In this passage, Braddon considers the intimate access employers grant hired "outsiders" such as servants and companions. The lady's maid's "privileges" are slightly different from those of a companion. The companion is constantly in her mistress's presence and thus knows the details of her day, every word of her exchanges with visitors and those she visits, and often, the innermost secrets of her mistress's heart when she chooses to confide them. A companion may or may not have access to the lady's maid's realm,

however. The lady's maid knows every "jerk" of the head, every element of false, purchased beauty and refinement; she can "interpret the most obscure diagnoses" in her mistress's behavior (336). Braddon's point here is that a lady need not purposefully, verbally confide in her lady's maid—the servant can read the affective signs she betrays during vulnerable moments. The lady's maid is the inmate of the private space, the space where a lady should be secure from prying eyes and ears, and, as Katherine Montwieler emphasizes, the space where her gentility is assembled: "Through Helen Maldon and Phoebe Marks, Braddon shows us that women who plan can get ahead. [. . .] A lady's maid knows that being a lady is a performance. Indeed she helps to construct it" (57). Phoebe Marks, in her service for Lady Audley, is without a doubt the most "privileged" of "spies," for she has the access of both lady's maid *and* companion.

Braddon represents Phoebe Marks's attempts to rise in the world as intimately intertwined with those of her mistress. When Lucy Graham becomes Lady Audley, she brings Phoebe—a fellow employee at Mr. Dawson's—with her as her lady's maid. This promotion "was a wonderful piece of good fortune for Phoebe, who found her wages trebled and her work light in the well-ordered household at the Court; and who was therefore quite as much the object of envy among her particular friends as my lady herself in higher circles" (25). Lucy Graham's ascendance to fortune and power has reverberated, albeit on a smaller scale, to the Dawsons' former maid. Even the respect and jealousy Lucy garners from the genteel inhabitants in the community is reflected in working-class circles toward Phoebe. The connection between the two women's fortunes is not lost on the lady's maid: "'Why, what was [Lady Audley] in Mr. Dawson's house only three months ago? [. . .] What was she but a servant like me? Taking wages

and working for them as hard, or harder that I did'" (27). As she reflects on her mistress's sudden rise to security and wealth, it is clear that Phoebe understands, perhaps for the first time, that such social mobility is possible.

Phoebe's advancement rapidly continues as Lady Audley unofficially promotes her lady's maid to the status of companion shortly after the women's establishment at Audley Court. Lady Audley "hated reading, or study of any kind, and loved society" and so, "rather than be alone she would admit Phoebe Marks into her confidence, and loll on one of the sofas in her luxurious dressing-room, discussing a new costume for some coming dinner party, or sit chattering to the girl" (53). In her boredom and loneliness, Lady Audley "prattle[s] on" as if to a friend or companion, inviting a mere servant into a more equal relationship with her.[2] A typical day in the life of Lady Audley consists of "strolling into her dressing-room to talk to Phoebe Marks, and have her curls re-arranged for the third or fourth time; for the ringlets were always getting into disorder" (77). This passage appears simply to portray Lady Audley's idleness and frivolity; however, it also

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[2] Neither the narrator nor the other characters condone Lady Audley's intimacy with Phoebe. Lady Audley's step-daughter, Alicia Audley, is particularly disapproving. On one occasion she, "came into the dressing-room to bid her good night, and found the maid and mistress laughing aloud over one of the day's adventures. Alicia, who was never familiar with her servants, withdrew in disgust at my lady's frivolity" (58). Eve M. Lynch has articulated the thin lines that sometimes separated female servants from their employers, arguing that "In this newly feminized domestic empire, the finely stratified lines and duties demarcating servants from each other and from the mistress of the household were observed—in both senses of the word—to the point of obsession, as evidenced by the massive volume of household manuals and directives which replaced traditional conduct books to instruct young women in their domestic duties. But such obsessive narrating of the domestic structure also indicates how brittle and attenuated those demarcations were becoming as roles and identifications within the household broke in upon each other. Nineteenth-century novels as well as popular journals and magazines repeatedly record where class lines and domestic positions were vulnerable, articulating a Victorian anxiety about defining the servant's 'place' in the home and maintaining a distinct, inviolable middle class" (93).

betrays her need for company. The necessary perfection of her "ringlets" serves as a convenient pretext to pass the time by sharing her thoughts with Phoebe. Lady Audley even invites Phoebe into a physically intimate bond with her: the familiarity implied in her "smooth[ing] her maid's neutral-tinted hair with her plump, white, and bejeweled hand" as well as in her injunction, "'Kiss me, Phoebe'" exemplifies the connection, and dependence, Lady Audley feels toward her maid (58-59).[3] Ultimately, resigned to the fact that Phoebe is her only reliable sympathetic "society," Lady Audley takes action to make her friend a more fitting associate; it would not do for a lady to have a maid as her chief company, and so Lady Audley informally re-hires her maid as her companion. As both lady's maid and companion, Phoebe has an almost unlimited degree of access to her mistress's most private spaces and confidences, and these privileges allow her to perform her detective work in the novel.

While the companion's upward mobility is inextricable from Lady Audley's, a third character's fate is as connected to Phoebe's. Luke Marks benefits from his betrothed's position and takes advantage of both Phoebe and, through her, Lady Audley. This network of interdependency is complicated by the sympathetic identifications at work within it. Phoebe is at the apex of a triangle of sorts, sympathetically identifying—sometimes truly, other times falsely—with both her mistress and her lover to varying

[3] Natalie Schroeder addresses the homoeroticism inherent in this and similar scenes. She writes, "Homoeroticism is a component of Lady Audley's childishness; thus it is not surprising that the cold, selfish Lucy Audley forms an attachment to her lady's maid, Phoebe Marks, an adolescent who so closely resembles her mistress that in a certain light one could be mistaken for the other. […] Lady Audley's self-indulgent manner of attaining warmth-by wrapping herself in luxurious covers and by demanding a caress from Phoebe-suggests both masturbation and lesbianism" (90-1). While I do not address the eroticism common to the mistress-companion dynamic in this chapter, I do treat it extensively in chapter four.

degrees and at different stages in the novel. Her sympathy for each is mutually exclusive as her loyalty to one proves injurious to the other. Early in the novel, Braddon makes it clear that Phoebe Mark's sympathy is invested purely in her cousin and lover. Her interactions with Lady Audley, then, are purposeful simulations of the sympathy her position dictates that she provide; she only *appears* to sympathize with her mistress in order to further her own ends and those of Luke. Phoebe's performances of insincere sympathy are proven successful as shown by Lady Audley's dependence upon her and her promotion to companion.[4] Through Phoebe's competing investments in her employer and lover, Braddon is able to highlight the companion's vexed position as an active participant in both the domestic and the public realms. As companion she is an intimate in the Audley household, but as a member of the labor market and fiancée to Luke, Phoebe has ties that bind her to the world outside Audley Court. This triangulation makes her detection, and the dissemination of her findings, possible; Phoebe's contrived

[4] The narrator describes Phoebe as "exactly the sort of girl who is generally promoted from the post of lady's-maid to that of companion." She not only possesses the ambition and willingness to advance through any means necessary, traits unknown to her mistress at this point, but she also "had just sufficient education to enable her to understand her mistress when Lucy chose to allow herself to run riot in a species of intellectual tarantella." Further, "Phoebe knew enough of the French language to be able to dip into the yellow-paper-covered novels which my lady ordered from the Burlington Arcade, and to discourse with her mistress upon the questionable subjects of those romances" (104-105). Despite her working-class origins, Phoebe has several skills required of companions. She can converse with, or at least provide a sufficiently intelligent ear to, her mistress as well as read and discuss books with her. Beyond her education, Phoebe has the benefit of the gentility she herself believes she has been acquiring through her travels and stay at Audley Court in her mistress's service. As she explains to her lover, "they say traveling makes people genteel, Luke. I've been on the Continent with my lady, through all manner of curious places." Phoebe refers to her experiences abroad during the Audleys' honeymoon as lending her a new aura of gentility; the narrator emphasizes this change by noting "her hands [had] grown white in her new and easy service" (26). Even Phoebe's appearance recommends her for this type of promotion: "Her figure was slim and fragile, and in spite of her humble dress, she had something of the grace and carriage of a gentlewoman" (25).

and genuine sympathies both enable and motivate her work as detective in the novel. Phoebe's dual access, complicated by her conflicting sympathies, allows her to see and act in both spheres, breaking down the imaginary barriers that separate them.

i. Detection

Phoebe Marks's status as both lady's maid and companion to Lady Audley grants her exclusive access to Audley Court and to her mistress's confidence. Unlike the male detective figure in the novel, Robert Audley, who must seek out answers far and wide, Phoebe more or less stumbles across secret knowledge while fulfilling the duties of her occupation. Because she is not genuinely sympathetic with her mistress, but only supplies an artificial sympathy in keeping with her duties as companion, Phoebe passes on the private knowledge she discovers to Luke. Together, the couple manipulates the information in an effort to secure their own social and financial position, simultaneously setting into motion a chain reaction that drives the plot.

Braddon emphasizes Phoebe's role as a kind of gate-keeper or mediator between the private and public spaces of Audley Court, and by extension, between the private and public spaces of society. During Phoebe's first appearance in the novel, and before we ever see her interact with Lady Audley, Phoebe takes Luke on a tour of Audley Court—an excursion, the narrator is careful to point out, that the housekeeper condones.[5] Yet,

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[5] It is interesting that the housekeeper is so quick to allow Phoebe to take Luke on a tour of the Court. No doubt Phoebe knows she will receive permission or she would have been unlikely to have asked. Certainly estates like Audley Court were open to tourists, but the separation between public and private realms is particularly weak in this novel. As Elizabeth Langland points out, "Lady Audley's private spaces are curiously vulnerable to penetration. Audley Court provides her with little protection, as it both limits her range of motion and opens to visibility all of her activities, much like the

Phoebe does not restrict Luke's visit to the acceptable public spaces of the estate as the housekeeper no doubt expects. Instead, she "le[ads] the way," "beckon[ing] Luke to follow her" into her mistress's personal rooms (28). Braddon's language and repetition here underscores the lady's maid/companion's authority in the domestic sphere. As Phoebe "lifted a heavy green cloth curtain which hung across the door way, and led the astonished countryman into a fairy-like boudoir," she simultaneously lifts the barrier that contains Lady's Audley's most private place, allowing not only Luke, but also the reader, access to her mistress's secret space and possessions (29). Once inside, Luke's curiosity and Phoebe's eagerness to show off her mistress's wealth lead to Phoebe's first moment of detection in the novel.

The couple is not shy about rifling through Lady Audley's things; after all, in many ways her mistress's rooms are as much Phoebe's space as Lady Audley's. It is here that she spends most of her time and fulfills the majority of her duties. Although Phoebe has brought Luke to her lady's rooms in order to showcase her riches, when Luke reacts with excited avarice to the contents of Lady Audley's jewelry box, "'Why, one of those diamond things would set us up in life,'" Phoebe reprimands him: "'Put it down, Luke! Put it down directly! […] How can you speak about such things?'" (30). Phoebe proves she is more than willing to benefit from her mistress's position, but she will not steal; stealing connotes a lowness and inferior class identity, implied by her shocked

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Panopticon" (9). This dangerous "penetration" comes from without, as Robert Audley and George Talboys enter her rooms while she is away, but also from *within*, as in this scene in which Phoebe exceeds her legitimate access and rummages through her mistress's private drawers. Phoebe's transgression is amplified by her decision to bring her fiancé with her into Lady Audley's private space. Katherine Montwieler reads these scenes as "metaphorical rapes that function as violations of Lady Audley's identity" (53).

response to Luke's suggestion. Blackmail, on the other hand, appears much more glamorous and to Phoebe is clearly the more genteel means of getting ahead.

When they find the baby's shoe and lock of hair in the secret drawer of Lady Audley's jewelry box, "Phoebe's grey eyes dilated as she examined the little packet. 'So this is what my lady hides in the secret drawer,' she muttered. […] The girl's thin lips curved into a curious smile" (30). The narrator is careful to highlight the devious, almost malicious, nature of Phoebe's physical reaction to her discovery. This scene is an uninterrupted continuation of Phoebe's first appearance in the novel—we have yet to see her interact with her mistress—and thus Braddon firmly establishes Phoebe, from the beginning, as self-promoting and unethically ambitious. At this point in the narrative, Phoebe exhibits no concern for her mistress's well-being, no sympathy for the effects her own selfish actions could have on Lady Audley. Instead, her chief investment is in herself and, significantly, in her fiancé. Phoebe vows to undertake this blackmail endeavor solely for Luke's benefit: "'you shall have your public-house, Luke.'" While, as his betrothed, Phoebe stands to gain from the plot as well, her statement proves the degree of her sympathetic investment in her lover: it is he who she truly serves, not Lady Audley. The differences between stealing the diamonds and her new knowledge of her mistress's secret are clear to Phoebe: "'I'd rather have this than the diamond bracelet you would have liked to take'" (31). Not only is blackmail a more refined alternative to theft, it also has the potential to be far more profitable. Phoebe no doubt imagines an endless fount of not only riches from but also power over her employer.

The companion is simultaneously detective and perpetrator in this moment. Braddon thus explores the ambiguities of both the companion and the detective figures,

exposing at once the fragile boundaries between private and public spheres, companion and detective, and detection and criminality. But the scene in which Phoebe discovers the baby's shoe and hair also inaugurates Phoebe as a significant player in the narrative itself. In fact, it is Phoebe and her discoveries that situate the text in its genre since, before this moment, the narrative reads like a work of domestic fiction. Phoebe plans to blackmail her mistress by threatening to expose Lady Audley's secret past publicly, but she has already revealed it to Luke and to the reader. Her privileged status as intimate insider and hired outsider allows the companion to uncover hidden knowledge and promulgate it beyond the sacred borders of the home. As the first to discover and divulge that there is more to Lady Audley—and to herself—than there may appear, Phoebe exposes the relationship between the companion and detection as she simultaneously establishes the novel as a sensation narrative.

Braddon waits until nearly the last chapter of the novel to portray Phoebe's second moment of detection: the scene in which Phoebe witnesses Lady Audley's attempted murder of George Talboys. Braddon never actually depicts this scene; the reader, like the other characters, must rely on the companion's account. The *narrative* reliance on the companion's detection this effacement creates emphasizes the importance of the companion's role as detective in the text. But while this erasure is not necessarily surprising formally—as Robin Woods writes, "Critics have long noted that detective fiction is build around an absence: the crime which lies at the center of the story is never directly narrated, only retold at second hand by the detective" (16)—Braddon does not give Phoebe the opportunity to narrate her discovery directly. Instead, the reader learns of Phoebe's findings through Luke several hundred pages after the action occurs

"offstage." Recovering the scene of Lady Audley's attempted murder of George Talboys and the companion's attendant detective work reveals a significant expositional problem in the narrative of *Lady Audley's Secret*. The revelation of the crime itself, *and* the changing status of Phoebe's incompatible sympathetic investments which emerges in the retrospective representation of her discovery, are aligned through their simultaneous omission. The two events become synonymous—both Lady Audley's crime and Phoebe's detective techniques are transgressive, and each problematizes the other. The representation of these two central plot developments is so convoluted that Braddon's tortuous narrative strategy suggests the real conundrum the conflicting sympathies rooted in the mistress-companion dynamic create. The companion's ambiguous status and participation in both the private and public spheres—her mutually exclusive loyalties to mistress in the home and lover outside of it—are both necessary to the narrative's unraveling of the secret at the center of the plot and disruptive to the narrative's ability to convey that very same information. These narratological issues are a symptom as well as a representation of the complexity of the economy of sympathy at work in the mistress-companion relation and how that economy affects detection.

On his deathbed, Luke tells Robert how one day Phoebe had "'been sittin' at work at the window of her little room, which was at the top of the house, right up in one of the gables, and overlooked the lime-walk and the shrubbery and the well, when she see my lady walkin' with a strange gentleman'" (429). As a companion, Phoebe's responsibilities are to provide her mistress with company and conversation, entertaining her and listening to her confidences; so when her mistress has no need of her, Phoebe is free to pursue her own interests, and it is the liberty and trust inherent in this genteel form

of labor that allows Phoebe the opportunity to observe Lady Audley's crime. She is not "downstairs" slaving over chores or even in her mistress's rooms hanging dresses but enjoying herself at the window as she works on her own sewing. But Braddon is doing other, more significant work with the cultural expectations surrounding the companion here. In this scene, Phoebe is not enacting her role as chaperone; she does not accompany Lady Audley on her walk, even though her mistress is a married woman engaged in private conversation with another man. Nevertheless, Phoebe is fulfilling her monitoring function as she watches her mistress push George into the well. Braddon does not represent Phoebe's inadvertent "detective" work, then, as espionage, but as an alternative, more subtle mode of acting out the surveillance duties expected of her as a companion. Braddon thus reveals the subtle yet striking analogy between the duties of the companion and those of the detective while simultaneously highlighting the dangerous opportunities for detection available to the companion.

As Luke continues Phoebe's story, "'and [Lady Audley and the stranger] walked together for a long time, until by-the-by,'" Robert interrupts him, imploring him to stop (430). By this point, at the end of novel, Robert has also ascertained that Lady Audley tried to murder George, and he declines to hear it narrated. Although Robert's refusal to allow Luke to complete the story of Phoebe's discovery presumably arises out of his horror regarding the fate of his friend, he is also unwilling to acknowledge Phoebe's superior detective skills and so prevents Luke from reaching the climax of Phoebe's narrative. As an actual witness of the incident, Phoebe not only discovers the secret knowledge of Lady Audley's crime first, but also much more definitively than Robert, who has had to piece together clues from various sources over an extended period of

time. Braddon herself all but effaces Phoebe's detective prowess by revealing this information out of sequence, at the end of the novel, and through another, *male* character. In her role as companion, Phoebe is able to discover her mistress's most guarded secrets and then expose them to other characters and to the reader. The dangerous double agency—private and public—Phoebe's detection work represents is a significant threat to the Victorian ideal of the impenetrability of the sacred domestic space and one that must be contained, not only by the male characters, but even, in this moment, by the author herself.[6]

What emerges in this disjunction between the sequence of the narrative's account of key events and the actual order in which they occur within the plot, and in the representation of Phoebe's discovery through Luke, is an erasure of the moment in *Lady Audley's Secret* in which Phoebe's sympathetic allegiance shifts from Luke to Lady Audley. Before he learns what Phoebe has witnessed, Luke describes finding Phoebe in a strangely triumphant mood as a result of her discovery. According to Luke, the companion cryptically assured her fiancé, "'nobody could be friendlier towards me than my lady; I think she'd do anythink [sic] for me a'most, and I think whether it was a bit o'farming stock and furniture or such like, or whether it was the good-will of a public-

[6] By preventing Phoebe from speaking her own discovery, Braddon occludes her identity as female detective to some extent. As Thoms argues, "The detective becomes [...] a literary character of considerable power, whose oracular pronouncements are anxiously awaited by his fellow characters and the fiction's readers. Indeed, the effectiveness of the detective is intimately connected to the demand for his stories, which the fiction represents in its images of a public hungry for secrets" (10). Although she appears to be ultimately sympathetic with Phoebe—and clearly invested in the creation of a distinctly feminine mode of detection—Braddon denies Phoebe this manifestation of the detective's "power." Braddon seems aware that the scene in which the detective publicizes his/her findings is the moment "when his voice seems most influential, that the detective becomes most oppressive and most dangerous" (Thoms 10).

house, she wouldn't refuse me anything I asked her.'" During his narrative to Robert, Luke admits he was confused by this: "'I couldn't make out this, for it was only a few days before, as she'd told me her missus was selfish and extravagant, and we might wait a long time before we could get what we wanted from her.'" In this exchange, we learn that during the earlier point in the narrative to which Luke refers, the couple was unsure how to proceed with the information they had learned from Lady Audley's secret drawer; nevertheless, according to Luke, Phoebe still had every intention of using the hidden keepsakes to take advantage of her mistress. The significance of this passage lies in Luke's portrayal of his fiancée as wholly invested in himself with no thought for Lady Audley beyond using her to promote their selfish interests. He describes Phoebe as smiling, "just the same sort of smile as before" when they discovered the baby things, an ominous, malicious smile (429).

However, consistent with what Phoebe tells Lady Audley in an earlier scene when explaining how Luke learns of the "murder," Luke admits to having to harass and threaten Phoebe to "force" information about the crime from her. Luke then tells Robert: "'Well Phoebe told me all about what she see, and she told me as she'd met her lady almost directly afterwards, and somethin' had passed between 'em, not much, but enough to let her missus know that the servant what she looked down upon had found out that as would put her in that servant's power to the last day of her life'" (429). The fact that Phoebe immediately confronts her mistress with what she has witnessed supports, from Luke's perspective, the view that she is still acting in her own and her fiancé's interests. But, neither Luke nor the reader have access to this conversation and so are ignorant of the actual tenor of the exchange. Reading backwards, we know that Lady Audley and

Phoebe remain close after Phoebe witnesses the crime and confronts her mistress, and thus Lady Audley must not have felt too threatened by her companion. Perhaps Phoebe's initial reticence with Luke hints that she has begun to favor her mistress over her lover during the time Luke describes. If Phoebe's sympathies have changed sides, Luke is unaware of it; his portrayal of Phoebe at the end of the novel, while in keeping with what we learn of Phoebe at the beginning of the novel, problematizes representations of her in the middle and later sections of the narrative. At some point between the day of the attempted murder and the scene in which Luke describes the events to Robert, Phoebe's allegiance must have shifted. This confusion is a narrative effect that Braddon cultivates. The reader's uncertainty with regards to Phoebe's sympathies at different points throughout the novel mirrors that of the characters imbued in this complex economy of sympathy and loyalty.

ii. Competing Sympathies

Braddon's articulation of the many points of similarity between mistress and companion suggests that Phoebe's change in sympathy in *Lady Audley's Secret* arises out of her eventual recognition that sympathy with Lady Audley is more natural—it is easier to sympathize with Lady Audley because they already have so much in common. Or, perhaps, Phoebe has enacted her false sympathy with such virtuosity that she has even convinced herself: Phoebe becomes genuinely invested in Lady Audley because she *acts* like she is so convincingly and for so long. Or, maybe Phoebe remains ever-manipulative and simply determines at some point that loyalty to her mistress will serve her better in the long run. While the exact moment of Phoebe's shift from allegiance to Luke to

allegiance to Lady Audley is uncertain, Braddon leaves the reasons behind the switch even less clear. This mystification of the dynamic relationship between mistress and companion illustrates the very ambiguity that not only characterizes the mistress-companion bond but also makes moments of detection and revelation possible.

Braddon establishes Lady Audley and Phoebe as doubles in keeping with romantic and gothic traditions. If Phoebe learns to sympathize with her mistress due to the striking similarities between the two women, there are a number of possible points of identification: the companion's proximity to her mistress's own true social status and her deep, personal understanding of Lady Audley's social-climbing aims, the women's shared ability to appear to be other than what they are—particularly in terms of manipulative performances of sympathy and attachment—and the physical resemblance between them. Lucy Graham Audley, *nee* Helen Maldon Talboys, is, after all, not so different from her hired friend—this is, in fact, one of the novel's central secrets. When Sir Michael Audley proposes to Lucy, offering her social advancement that also promises a wealth of further, future advantages, Lucy is thrilled: "'No more dependence, no more drudgery, no more humiliations'" (12). Like her companion, Lucy Graham struggles against the social position and standard of living she has been dealt and longs to supersede it; she thus welcomes the opportunity and vows to profit from it despite her marriage to another man.

Lady Audley is also no less a practitioner of disingenuous, manipulative sympathy than her companion. She transitions from her role as humble governess to that of dutiful wife not in genuine sympathy and love for her husband but for her own benefit—just as Phoebe performs her own part as sympathetic companion. Both women

are able to deceive and manipulate others for their own gain, if only for a time.[7] Having created an alternative identity for herself, Lady Audley is the consummate actress. As his suspicions and knowledge of Lady Audley's past increase, Robert Audley refers to her "mask" and "the beautiful veil under which she hides her wickedness;" in one outburst of soliloquy he exclaims: "'Good heavens! what an actress this woman is. What an arch trickster—what an accomplished deceiver'" (145, 253, 256). Robert's abhorrence regarding his step-aunt arises from his discomfiture that she could be such a skilled actress that she can disguise not only her true identity but also her many criminal acts.

Beyond these similarities in their motivations and talents, "The likeness which the lady's-maid bore to Lucy Audley was, perhaps, a point of sympathy between the two women" (104). Between mistress and companion, "likeness" becomes a synonym or catalyst for "sympathy." As the narrator explains, "It was not to be called a striking likeness; a stranger might have seen them both together, and yet have failed to remark it. But there were certain dim and shadowy lights in which, meeting Phoebe Marks gliding softly through the dark oak passages of the Court, or under the shrouded avenues in the garden, you might have easily mistaken her for my lady" (104). Here, the narrator describes Phoebe as the darker doppelganger, moving surreptitiously "in the dim and shadowy lights" of the Court, but in this case she is a misrepresentation of Lady Audley. As we come to learn, both women will undertake their crimes among these "dark oak passages." Throughout the rest of the narrative, however, the narrator emphasizes

[7] Montwieler is one of the few scholars who explicitly addresses the parallels between Lady Audley and Phoebe; she asserts, "Phoebe and Helen's similarity is not even so much physical as temperamental. […] in addition to working hard for goals they want, both women also act craftily, unethically to further their own materialistic desires through bigamy or blackmail" (57).

Phoebe's paleness; in contrast to the flamboyantly bright and beautiful Lady Audley, the companion is "the pale face" girl with "light grey eyes," "small features and compressed lips" (25). Lady Audley acknowledges that she sees herself mirrored in her companion and this, no doubt, contributes to her willingness to confide in her. The mistress's vanity may also be a factor here; in Phoebe she sees a woman who resembles herself but is less beautiful. Phoebe represents a likeness that presents itself as unthreatening.

For Phoebe, the likeness between the two women represents the potential she has to follow in her mistress's footsteps. To Lady Audley, "beauty is a weapon," and as her companion, Phoebe is witness not only to Lady Audley's crimes but also to her mistress's methods of achieving her heart's desires. Pinched and colorless, Phoebe resembles the Helen Talboys of former, harder days—she has not yet mastered the full arts that her mistress has: the "transformation" that Phoebe, as a former lady's maid, helped to construct (337). Phoebe's realignment with Lady Audley mid-way through the narrative suggests that she has determined to try to accomplish what her mistress has, rather than accept her lot as the wife of a working-class man, even if he does possess a public-house and a bounty of hush-money.

The first sign of a relocation in Phoebe's sympathetic investments appears during a scene in which Lady Audley and Phoebe discuss the companion's pending marriage, hundreds of pages before Luke tells Robert how Phoebe watched her mistress with George Talboys. By reconstructing the narrative's circuitous sequence from the end of the novel backward, we learn that this conversation occurs after Lady Audley pushes George into the well. In this conversation, Phoebe's responses to Lady Audley's desire that she refuse to marry Luke are a blatant contradiction of her behavior toward Luke to

this point in the novel. Although she has appeared invested in their relationship, even willing to commit a crime against her mistress to see Luke rise in the world, Phoebe states: "'I don't think I can love him. We have been together from children, and I promised, when I was little better than fifteen, that I'd be his wife. I daren't break that promise now.'" Now, Phoebe depicts her fiancé as a trap; their imminent marriage is an inevitable contract she cannot avoid, rather than one she still looks forward to. Phoebe goes on to describe how she has contemplated calling off the engagement several times but is afraid of how Luke might react because of his violent nature.[8] When Lady Audley suspects that "There must be some secret at the bottom of all this," and Phoebe admits, "'There is, my lady,' [...] with her head turned away," Braddon portrays Phoebe as penitent for the first time in the novel (108).

In this scene, it becomes clear that Phoebe not only fears Luke's physical violence to herself if she should refuse to marry him, but also Luke's commencement of their blackmail plot. "Convulsively" taking her mistress's hands when Lady Audley promises to pay Luke off and send him away, Phoebe cries, "My lady—my good, kind mistress! [...] don't try to thwart me in this—don't ask me to thwart him. I tell you I must marry him. You don't know what he is. It will be my ruin, *and the ruin of others*, if I break my

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[8] Phoebe continues, "'There have been times when I've made up the very sentence I meant to say to him, telling him that I couldn't keep my faith with him; but the words have died upon my lips, and I've sat looking at him, with a choking sensation in my throat that wouldn't let me speak" (107). Phoebe's reference to choking establishes another implicit connection between mistress and companion. In the first chapter of the novel, Lucy Graham is depicted constantly fingering and pulling at the black ribbon keepsake around her neck, as if it were choking her, as she listens to and later considers Sir Michael's proposal. This necklace contains the proof of her past life as Helen Maldon. In this way, Braddon subtly parallels Helen's marriage to George with Phoebe's prospective marriage to Luke in order to emphasize the similar plight of these two women.

word. I must marry him!" (108, my emphasis). Here, the violation of Phoebe's body and Lady Audley's secret become synonymous, inseparable from one another. The real and ever-increasing similarities between them become a true identification that Phoebe can no longer deny. As Phoebe becomes more like her mistress—more similar physically in her growing gentility and more aware of Lady Audley's past plight as her feelings for Luke change—she becomes incapable of separating herself from Lady Audley. As Phoebe turns her head away as if in shame for her snooping and plotting in the past, Braddon implies Phoebe's sympathetic investments have shifted away from Luke and toward her mistress. Lady Audley cannot imagine it is her own secret to which her companion refers, but Phoebe now seems determined to protect her mistress if she can—even to the point of sacrificing her present genteel position and her very self through her marriage to Luke.

Shortly after this conversation, when Lady Audley voluntarily offers Luke monetary support on behalf of her beloved companion in honor of their upcoming nuptials, she discovers the blackmail plot as well as further proof of Phoebe's new sympathies. Offended at Luke's disrespectful response to her gift and quick to discern the true state of things, Lady Audley, "walking straight up to her maid, […] said in a high, piercing voice, peculiar to her in moments of intense agitation, 'Phoebe Marks, you have told *this man*!" (109). In this moment, Lady Audley understands her mistake in sharing her most private dwellings and confidences with the maid she has made her companion; she understands the dangers inherent in the companion's distinctive dual agency within and without the domestic space. Braddon emphasizes Lady Audley's shock with italics; the mistress is astonished at her companion, but feels even more

betrayed that she has put her in the power of such a *man* as Luke. Lady Audley's, and Braddon's, emphasis on gender here accentuates the reader's understanding of the problematic ambiguity of the companion's position. In allowing a "*man*" to intrude in their relationship, Phoebe betrays not only her mistress's secrets, but her primary duty as companion as well. The mistress-companion dynamic represents an intimate bond between two women in which emotions, sympathies, and secrets are ideally contained and safe—a security that the mistress pays to ensure. Through Luke, Braddon personifies the companion's competing public investments "outside" the mistress-companion relationship and the home. In this way, Braddon is able to more forcefully represent the threat the companion can pose to her mistress and also to the sacred independence of the domestic sphere. With stakes in both the private and the public realms, the companion can act as intermediary, moving between them but also conveying knowledge between them: she can disseminate domestic secrets beyond the home as well as bring outside influences in.

Yet, at this point in the narrative, Phoebe has turned her allegiance from Luke to her mistress: "The girl fell on her knees at my lady's feet. 'Oh forgive me, forgive me!' she cried. 'He forced it from me, or I would never, never have told!'" (109). Phoebe shows genuine regret and sorrow while simultaneously displacing the chief blame onto her fiancé. As Lady Audley's horror makes clear, Phoebe cannot be sympathetic with both her mistress and her fiancé, and the reverberation across this triangulated schema is that Phoebe's sympathy with *Luke* can now be nothing more than a pretense as her comments to her mistress regarding her marriage indicate. For Phoebe, protecting herself from Luke is now the same as protecting Lady Audley, and vice versa. Thus, Phoebe

enters into a marriage that mirrors Lady Audley's own, a marriage in which her sympathy with her husband is only an act. When Phoebe visits Lady Audley after her marriage, the twin reasons for her errands encompass her precarious position between her former mistress and her husband. She comes to warn Lady Audley that Robert is at the Castle Inn, but also to extort more money from her: "'I didn't come away of my own free will, my lady, […] I didn't want to come. I told Luke that it was too bad for us to worry you, first asking this favour, and then asking that, and never leaving you alone for a month together; but—but—he drove me down with his loud blustering talk, and he made me come'" (301). Phoebe's statement reveals that the couple's blackmail demands have been both ongoing and frequent as well as against Phoebe's wishes. All she can do is secretly try to aid Lady Audley by warning her of Robert's (the rival detective's) presence. Phoebe also continues to represent herself as Lady Audley's fellow victim, likewise suffering Luke's manipulations and violence, and this serves as yet another bond between them.

Despite the fact that her "jewel case has been half emptied" to "meet the claims" of Phoebe and her husband, Lady Audley cannot help but continue to lean on Phoebe for support in her trials: "Her frivolous nature clung to this weak shelter in the hour of her fear and suffering. […] she hated her step-daughter, and clung to this pale-faced, pale-haired girl, *whom she thought neither better nor worse than herself*" (299, my emphasis). With no one else to turn to, Lady Audley must depend on the very source of her trials, but now, Phoebe provides a genuinely sympathetic ear. Although Phoebe's selfish actions early in the novel threaten Lady Audley's position, they also reveal the women's common motivations; Lady Audley sees herself in her former companion and so

understands Phoebe's choices. Ironically, the blackmail plot brings them closer together by exhibiting just how completely mistress and companion can sympathize with one another.

In what may be considered the ultimate, and most surprising, display of sympathy in the novel, Lady Audley takes it upon herself to free Phoebe from her husband as a corollary in her scheme to rid herself of her own enemies. When Lady Audley burns Castle Inn to the ground, she intends to free herself of Robert Audley and Luke Marks in one awful crime; simultaneously, she liberates her former companion from her thuggish, violent husband.[9] The scene in which Lady Audley sets the fire represents Phoebe's third and final act of detection in the novel. For this crime, Lady Audley takes her former companion with her. Phoebe is not an accomplice, Lady Audley sets the fire without her, but she is once again a privileged witness. On the way back to the Court, as the two women watch the flames on the horizon, Phoebe intuits what her former mistress has done. However, this time she does not betray Lady Audley by reporting or capitalizing on the arson. Instead, as she sits by her husband's death-bed, "Not with any very tender expression in their pale light, but with a sharp, terrified anxiety, which showed that it was the coming of death itself that she dreaded, rather than the loss of her husband," Phoebe's thoughts are focused on protecting Lady Audley (409). When Robert, who has already exposed and condemned Lady Audley, comes to visit Luke, Phoebe begs, "'He doesn't suspect what I suspect at any rate, or he'd have spoken of it to anybody and everybody; but he's dreadful and spiteful against my lady'" (411). Finally, she asks where Lucy has

[9] Luke does not die in the actual fire, but it is the ultimate cause of his death. He is unable to overcome "the shock" of the experience due to a constitution "undermined by the habits of intoxication" (407).

been sent, and shares her hope that she will be well-treated because "'my lady was a kind mistress to me'" (411).

iii. The Companion-Detective as Future Mistress

As Braddon repeatedly makes clear, "There were sympathies between [Lady Audley] and [Phoebe], who was like herself, selfish, cold, and cruel, eager for her own advancement, and greedy of opulence and elegance, angry with the lot that had been cast her, and weary of dull dependence" (299). Mistress and companion are indeed alike, and their identification ultimately brings them into true sympathy with one another. However, Helen Maldon Talboys/Lucy Graham Audley has been defeated at the end of the novel. She is, as the famous chapter title asserts, "buried alive" in a madhouse abroad. Yet, this mistress has left her favorite maid/companion a gift as well as a legacy. There is no question of Luke's death at the close of the narrative, and there is no blood on Phoebe's hands. Lady Audley has helped her companion more effectively than she helped herself in her own schemes. What is more, Phoebe is likewise free of the mistress who tried to rule her and who knew of her own crimes. She is left with the opportunity to succeed where this mistress and mentor failed. If Phoebe is literally a *paler* version of her mistress, Lady Audley believes her companion has the potential to be just like herself—and Braddon implies Lady Audley does not refer only to physical appearance: "'you *are* like me, and your features are very nice; it is only colour that you want. […] Why, with a bottle of hair dye, such as we see advertised in the papers, and a pot of rouge, you'd be as good-looking as I any day, Phoebe'" (58). Lady Audley's encouragement serves as Braddon's hint to the reader. To succeed as Lady Audley has

for a time, Phoebe need only perform the part well. Already a master at manipulation and acting, she can learn from her mistress's example and from her mistakes.

Perhaps Phoebe's more hopeful ending is a result of her differences from her former mistress. Lady Audley chooses men and marriage to raise herself in the world; as Susan Bernstein points out, Lady Audley admits to "selling herself twice on the marriage market for upward mobility" (74). Phoebe takes a different route, though toward the same ends. Phoebe's chosen ladder to a higher socio-economic plane is through another woman, not a man; she enacts her social climbing not through her marriage but through her mistress. Initially, she intends to "sell" not herself, but another woman's secrets. By exploiting her mediating position as companion, Phoebe asserts herself as the novel's superior detective, uncovering secret domestic knowledge and promulgating it to other characters and to the reader. Rather than use her findings to bring her mistress to justice, Phoebe manipulates her dual agency within and without the home to further her own agenda and that of her fiancé. Eventually turning her attention from this scheme to align herself genuinely with Lady Audley as a result of the undeniable points of sympathy between them, Phoebe positions herself, at the end of the novel, to gain exactly what she has been seeking. Phoebe's final appearance in the novel shows her ready to commence a whole new life of opportunity (431). The novel ends with "the good people [...] all happy and at peace" and, counting Phoebe among these characters, Braddon herself evidently sympathizes with Phoebe's motivations and means (447). It is clear that, as Katherine Montwieler tantalizingly suggests, "If Helen Maldon has become Lady Audley, Phoebe Marks is next in line" (57).

III. "I have only done my duty": The Detective as Companion in *Anne Hereford*

Anne Hereford, published in December of 1867 in the *Argosy*, the periodical Ellen Wood owned and ran, features not one but two central companion characters: one the protagonist and one the villainess. After the death of her parents, the eponymous heroine and narrator Anne Hereford goes to live with her Aunt Selena, her aunt's husband Edwin Barley, and Charlotte Delves, a distant relative of Barley's who resides with the family. During Anne's stay, Edwin Barley's ward Philip King is murdered and the prime suspect is a family friend named George Heneage who disappears after the incident. Years later, when Anne goes to live on the Chandos estate as a companion to a married former school fellow, Emily Chandos de Mellissee, she is dismayed to find that Lady Chandos and her son Harry harbor a dreaded secret and are wary of strangers. However, when the mysterious Mrs. Penn arrives to fill another vacant companion position, she is immediately hired because of her claims to know the family's confidential situation. Although Anne fails to recognize her until near the end of the novel, this "Mrs. Penn" is the same Charlotte Delves who lived in the Barley household years before. Charlotte has come, posing as a companion-for-hire, in order to discover the whereabouts of the murderer George Heneage, who is actually George Heneage *Chandos* (Harry's older brother), in the hopes that her discovery will help her win the heart of the widower Edwin Barley.

Six years after the publication of *Lady Audley Secret*, Ellen Wood created Charlotte Delves Penn, a companion character who enters her employer's household for the express purpose of uncovering the secret she suspects lies hidden there. If Phoebe Marks represents a companion turned detective in Braddon's novel, Wood takes the next

step with Charlotte Delves Penn: she is a self-proclaimed detective posing as a companion. Both companion characters, like their creators, recognize the opportunities for the detection and exposure of family secrets available to the companion because of her complex, irreconcilable membership in both the private and public spheres. In *Anne Hereford,* Charlotte's and Anne's plots mirror and mobilize the novel's plot as the companions' economy of secrecy, the pursuit of knowledge, and the revelation of that knowledge represents the primary aims of the narrative itself.

While Braddon offers a triangulated economy of sympathy that reveals the porous divide between the domestic space and the outside world, Wood's novel presents an alternative, even more convoluted configuration that achieves the same effect. Like Phoebe Marks, Mrs. Penn performs her detective work in the Chandos estate with the intention of gaining information on behalf of another, rival, *male* character: her long-time (unrequited) love, and sworn enemy of the Chandos family, Edwin Barley. Convinced that the crime committed on his property at the beginning of the novel also led to the untimely death of his wife, and determined to avenge his ward and his wife by bringing the murderer to justice, Barley spends the intervening decade hunting George "off stage." After several years apart, the likewise widowed Mrs. Penn concocts her scheme, unbeknownst to Barley, in the hopes that if she can discover and capture George, Barley's gratitude will lead him to marry her.[10] When Mrs. Penn's attempts to ingratiate

[10] We learn later in the narrative that in the intervening time between her life at the Barley estate and her entrance into Chandos, "there occurred some rupture between [Barley] and Charlotte Delves, who had remained at Hallam all that time as the house's mistress. People thought she cherished visions of becoming its master's wife; if so, she was lamentably mistaken. Mr. Edwin Barley was wedded to Selina's and her memory; he had no intention whatever of exalting another to her place. Whether Charlotte found out this in too sudden a manner; whether the cause was totally unconnected with this, certain it

herself with the Chandos family fail, Mrs. Penn turns her attention to her fellow companion, Anne Hereford. Anne becomes the conduit for Mrs. Penn's schemes, and her strategy ultimately proves successful. Wood's representation of a companion performing disingenuous sympathy toward another companion, in an effort to attain power over their common employer on behalf of a fourth, rival party, forms a complicated schema of genuine and manipulative sympathetic investments that span the space within and outside of the home. Like Braddon before her, Wood recognizes and utilizes the companion's vexed relationship to sympathy to articulate the figure's role as a mediator of sympathy and information within and across the private and public spaces of the novel.

Several chapters, and ten years, after the murder takes place on the grounds of the Barley estate, Wood reunites Anne Hereford and Charlotte Delves at Chandos, where each serves as a paid female companion: Anne to Emily and "Mrs. Penn" to the mysterious "Mrs. Chandos."[11] Upon her arrival, Anne quickly discerns that Lady Chandos is displeased with her daughter for bringing a "stranger" to Chandos when she hears the lady tell her son Harry that the new companion's presence is "dangerous" to the family (131). Anne's immediate reaction to this conversation, as well as her later contemplations of it and other similar comments she overhears, are integral to the dichotomy Wood sets up between Anne and her malign counterpart, Mrs. Penn. We

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was that a rupture occurred and Charlotte resigned the housekeeping and left the house" (358). Following her exit from Hallam, Charlotte marries and, after she is widowed, serves as a companion for three different mistresses. At the end of the novel, Anne describes the reemergence of Charlotte's dormant feelings for Edwin Barley that drive her to enter Chandos to assist him: "Time softens most things. […] Her heart's allegiance to Edwin Barley returned; she was of his kin, and the wrongs inflicted by George Heneage, temporarily forgotten, resumed their sway within her" (358-59).

[11] For much of the novel, Anne—and thus the reader—do not know that this Mrs. Chandos is actually the wife of the accused murderer, George Heneage Chandos.

learn that Anne "sat, overwhelmed with shame and consternation. To be introduced in this unwelcome manner into a house, bringing annoyance and discomfort to its inmates, seemed to [her] little less than a crime" (132). Anne's response is the antithesis of that of Phoebe Marks and Mrs. Penn, companion figures who selfishly seek to take advantage of their mistress's secrets on behalf of a third party in whom they are genuinely invested. While Anne does not hide her curiosity regarding "the mystery" from the reader, what distinguishes her from her manipulative fellow companion is that she takes little to no direct action to uncover it.[12]

When Mrs. Penn appears at Chandos to apply for the position of Mrs. Chandos's companion in chapter seventeen, "The Stranger Applicant," neither Anne nor the reader are aware the "portly," well-dressed woman with "a mass of fiery red hair" is actually

[12] Throughout the novel, it is clear that Anne is the model companion in many ways, the foil to Mrs. Penn and her machinations. Both heroine and narrator, Anne's double status in the novel complicates the portrayal of her character in several ways, however. Not least among these complexities is Anne's narration of her continual, allegedly inadvertent, tendency to eavesdrop. At Chandos, Anne overhears conversation unbeknownst to the speakers on numerous occasions. She masks these episodes with remarks such as: "I became the involuntary hearer" (131), "Quite unintentionally, without being able to help myself, I overheard a few words spoken between Hill and Mr. Chandos" (219), and ""I went into my room but did not close the door […] I would have shut my door, but feared it might look ungracious to do so. They had eyes, and could see that it was open, if they please to look; therefore they might choose their subjects accordingly" (145-6). Anne's representation of her own spying as passive and unintentional implies the possibility of her unreliability as a narrator—does Anne become a spy in the Chandos household as well? In her Introduction to the Aegypan edition of *Anne Hereford*, Martha Bayless reads this issue as a weakness on Wood's part, arguing that the author's "interest is in making Anne a direct observer of the situation, not in making the most realistic use of the viewpoint." She continues, "As a consequence, Anne […] happens to overhear a good many more plot explanations than a real child would be privy to" (7). In the narrative sense, the reader needs Anne to eavesdrop; otherwise, we don't have access to the revealing conversations that drive Wood's plot. Nevertheless, in terms of the narrative form as well as its content, Anne must be true and innocent to serve as a touchstone by which to understand Mrs. Penn and to be worthy of her ultimate union with the novel's hero, Harry Chandos.

Charlotte Delves (191). Ironically, it is Mrs. Penn's existing knowledge of the family's affairs that secures her the position. With a self-important air that shocks Anne and Lady Chandos's vigilant housekeeper, Mrs. Penn demands to see Lady Chandos and informs them: "'I would only observe that I am acquainted with everything that occurred; all the details; and therefore I should be more eligible than some to reside at Chandos'" (193). Mrs. Penn claims to have come to this knowledge of the family's secret through a former position as companion to one of Lady Chandos's friends, Mrs. Sackville, who was staying with the family when the events involved in the Chandos mystery took place. Indeed, the family finds that Mrs. Penn knows "every unhappy syllable" of their secret scandal, even "more than my lady knows herself;" of course, as the reader will eventually learn when Mrs. Penn is revealed to be Charlotte Delves, Mrs. Penn acquired her knowledge not from Mrs. Sackville but from her presence at the Barley home during the murder (198). Nevertheless, this cover story allows Wood to foreshadow the potential dangers the companion can pose: Harry responds by bemoaning Lady Chandos's confiding in her friend Mrs. Sackville, who has, apparently, in turn shared all her secret knowledge with her confidential companion. But it is not this secret—the knowledge that one of the Chandos family is a fugitive murderer—that Mrs. Penn has come to Chandos to discover; her aim is to use the privileged, ambiguous position of the companion to uncover George's whereabouts in order to deliver him over to Barley.

i. Detection

By enacting her detective work under the guise of her companion role, Mrs. Penn not only provides herself with access to the most intimate spaces of the home and to the

family's confidences, she also invests herself with the cultural expectations of the companion as a genteel, trustworthy, and sympathetic figure. As a result of her "cover" as a companion, Mrs. Penn is able to practice her espionage more effectively than the traditional male detective figure while simultaneously remaining undetected and exempt from suspicion. Mrs. Penn begins her surveillance of the Chandos family by monitoring their mail. Like Phoebe, this companion's uninhibited admittance to the home and grounds allows her copious opportunities to achieve her work. Within "a day or two" of assuming her position as companion to Mrs. Chandos, Mrs. Penn "met the postman in the broad walk, and took [the mail] from him" (208). Although she is consequently reprimanded and told that all correspondence must be brought to the home by the postman and placed directly into Harry's hands, Anne later finds Mrs. Penn with the postman again; this time "she had stopped to look at the addresses of the letters he was bringing" (217). Yet, despite Mrs. Penn's suspicious behavior, not to mention her sly circumvention of a direct order from the current master of the house, the companion's excuse—that she is awaiting a letter carrying news of a sick friend—is immediately accepted as an adequate explanation in the eyes of even the careful Chandos family. Mrs. Penn is left free to continue her detective work unhindered and unsuspected.

Shortly after her arrival, mysterious thefts also begin to occur at Chandos as Mrs. Penn searches the estate for clues that will lead her to the discovery of George's hiding place. Using "a few skeleton keys that would open any lock in the house, " the companion steals Harry Chandos's journal from his locked desk and, in an effort to make her crime look like a common burglary, Mrs. Penn also takes some money and even pilfers some of her own lace and letters (304). Combing for evidence among the

Chandos family's belongings, Mrs. Penn cleverly ensures her own immunity from blame by representing herself as a victim as well. When she states, "'It is not the loss itself—as I say: it is the feeling of insecurity that it leaves, […] One cannot be sure that other things will not follow,'" she covertly taunts Harry and his family (232). Mrs. Penn's campaign is to search for information *and* destabilize the family home in the hopes that something will be revealed.

The genteel nature of her position and the cultural understanding of the companion as sympathetic to her mistress allow Mrs. Penn to practice her detective work but also place her above suspicion. As the "sympathetic" companion, Mrs. Penn is in the perfect position to provoke such domestic insecurity because she (and Anne) are automatically free from accusation in the eyes of the Chandos family. Despite an impressive degree of trust in their long-time servants, ultimately, the servants' belongings are searched while Harry "laughed pleasantly" at the suggestion that the companions' boxes should be likewise examined (248). Wood is careful to emphasize that Harry finds the idea of interrogating or incriminating the household's two companions to be a ridiculous waste of time. Anne holds these same prejudices. Although she may dislike and even distrust Mrs. Penn, the idea that her fellow companion might be duplicitous never enters her mind; her own, pure understanding of a companion's duty precludes her from suspecting her counterpart is treacherous.

Beyond her spying and stealing, Mrs. Penn attempts to ingratiate herself with her mistress, no doubt hoping that she will confide in her and reveal the whereabouts of her husband. Unlike Lady Audley, however, Mrs. Chandos will not allow any intimacy between herself and her companion. At the close of the chapter in which Mrs. Penn is

introduced into the household, almost as a footnote, Anne adds: "They were fortunate in this new companion. Gathering a word from one and another, I heard she was thoroughly efficient. And they made much of her, treating her essentially as a lady. She went out in the carriage with Mrs. Chandos; she talked to Mr. Chandos as an equal; she patronized me. But a whisper floated through the house that the only one who did not take kindly to her was Mrs. Chandos" (218). Mrs. Penn plays her part to perfection. She performs her companion duties well and flaunts her own gentility to prove she is to be trusted and welcomed into the family fold. Nevertheless, Mrs. Chandos dislikes her and will not treat her as a friend and confidante. Mrs. Penn even admits her mistress's distaste for her to Anne: "'The fact is—it is very unfortunate, but Mrs. Chandos appears to have taken a dislike to me. […] And not a word upon any subject, save the merest conversational trifles, will she speak'" (220). For Mrs. Penn, this is a grave setback; her role as companion defines her as a receptacle for her mistress's deepest concerns and emotions—confidences with which she is hired to be sympathetic. Mrs. Chandos's refusal to avail herself of her companion's full services hinders Mrs. Penn's ability to manipulative her companion guise to achieve her detective goals. However, Wood's resourceful detective-companion is undeterred by this obstacle, and instead, turns her attention to Anne.

ii. Competing Sympathies

When feigned sympathy has no effect on her employer, Mrs. Penn alters her plans and attempts to manipulate her fellow companion in the hopes of gaining the information she seeks. While Mrs. Penn represents self-serving, calculated sympathy, Anne

exemplifies the ideal companion whose sympathy with her mistress's interests is altruistic and genuine.[13] The reader gains much more exposure to, and thus insight into, Mrs. Penn's relationship with Anne than to Mrs. Penn's interactions with her mistress, and the two companions' relationship with one another becomes the central locus of sympathetic maneuvering within the novel. Mrs. Penn's interactions with Anne, meant to further her own detective work within the Chandos household, also initiate Anne as a second, unwilling companion-detective. As she is pulled into Mrs. Penn's manipulative web of insincere sympathy, Anne unwittingly becomes the detective tasked with discovering and exposing her villainous counterpart. Wood creates two companion-detectives at odds with one another: one working in the pursuit of justice in a way which complements her companion duty to protect and sympathize with her mistress's interests, the other selfishly striving to bring down her mistress and her mistress's family in order to serve her own and another, rival character's aims. By pitting these two companions, with their competing sympathies, against one another, Wood provides a variant of the manipulations of sympathy in the mistress-companion dynamic; here, both women are on equal ground—both dependents with neither mistress of the other. Wood reveals that while the companion is a useful site for interrogating sympathy because of the figure's status as a loaded, problematic site of sympathetic engagement in the Victorian period, manipulations of sympathy are not restricted to the relationship between mistress and companion. Like Braddon's, Wood's novel portrays the complexities of sympathy: its

[13] In this sense, Wood splits Phoebe's role in *Lady Audley's Secret* into two characters. Rather than depict a companion who begins by selfishly manipulating the sympathy expected of her, only to end up genuinely fulfilling her role, Wood pits two companions—one good and one bad, one sympathetic and one manipulative—against one another in *Anne Hereford*.

mobility, volatility, and its capacity to be used as either an altruistic, healing or egotistic, damaging force.

The intimacy of the two companions' relationship appears at first almost as complicated as that between mistress and companion. One moment, Anne describes her fellow companion as withholding and cryptic, while in the next she tells the reader that Mrs. Penn has, "in her manner an unconscious familiarity rarely indulged in save from old acquaintanceship" (218). Mrs. Penn recognizes her superior position—she knows part of the Chandos secret—and she uses this advantage to whet Anne's curiosity. This strategy allows Mrs. Penn to draw Anne closer to herself as well as to encourage her to learn more information from the family. Particularly with regards to the Chandos secret, Mrs. Penn oscillates between forthcoming and evasive with Anne. For example, after entering Anne's chamber "uninvited" one night, Mrs. Penn informs her younger counterpart that "'there is a sword hanging over the Chandos family […] an awful sword. It is suspended by a hair; and a chance word of betrayal might cause it to fall. Of that chance word the Chandoses live in dread'" (220-1). However, when Anne inquires as to the nature of this "sword," Mrs. Penn replies, "'I am unable to tell you, for two reasons. It is not my place to reveal private troubles of the family sheltering me; and its details would not be meet for a young lady's ears'" (221). Mrs. Penn has quickly learned that Anne is honest as well as protective of her hosts. While Mrs. Penn tantalizes her friend with what she knows of the Chandos secret, she carefully masquerades as the "faithful, good, discreet, and trustworthy" companion her references claim that she is; in this way, she manipulatively mirrors Anne's sympathetic sentiments to gain her trust (206). Mrs. Penn also plays the role of protective older woman here, protecting her from the

unseemly "details" as if she were Anne's own companion. Regarding the Chandos secrets, Mrs. Penn shows Anne she knows her duty as a companion: "'You would keep it, and I would keep it, as inmates of the family'" (220). Failing to see through Mrs. Penn's self-serving act, Anne slowly begins to trust her.

Once she has convinced Anne that they are both sympathetic with the interests of the Chandos family, and thereby in sympathy with one another, Mrs. Penn tries to capitalize on her friendship with Anne to assist her detection. Primarily, she attempts to use Anne's budding intimacy with Harry Chandos by convincing her to question Harry concerning the mysterious secrets of his family.[14] Barred from any intimacy with her own mistress, Mrs. Penn is envious of Anne's close relationship with a member of the Chandos family and determines to get information from Harry through Anne. First feigning jealousy that Anne is better friends with Harry than her, Mrs. Penn goes on to imply the benefits Anne gains from her intimacy with the current master of the house: "'It's good to be you, Anne Hereford'" and "'I wish I had this room to sit in.'" When Anne asks if Mrs. Chandos's rooms are not comfortable, Mrs. Penn complains that she has "'Not a soul to speak to from morning to night, but Mrs. Chandos. Here you have Mr. Chandos; are full of state and ceremony; and have the change of seeing all the visitors'" (258). Mrs. Penn addresses the many advantages Anne's relationship with Harry allow her; not only has she earned his trust, but their constant companionship gives

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[14] Wood redefines the role of the female companion here, portraying the relationship between man and woman as the only "unrestrained," intimate, companionate relationship in the household. Unlike Phoebe's relationship with Luke, Anne's investment in Harry does not create a conflict of interest that results in a threat to her mistress. Harry is a member of her mistress's family, not an outside, rival character; furthermore, Anne's own superior class status (even higher than that of the Chandos's, we find at the end of the novel) makes her a beneficial—rather than a dangerous—sister-in-law to Emily.

her access to the family's visitors and business associates. Forced to reside in a secluded wing of the estate with her reticent mistress and longing to be present in the more eventful areas of the house, Mrs. Penn attempts to capitalize on her tenuous friendship with Anne in order to learn what her fellow companion sees and hears in her time spent with Harry.

When Anne's (innocent) attempts to question Harry reveal nothing, Mrs. Penn grows desperate and accidentally drops her contrived veil of sympathy with Anne and the family's interests. Eager to catch a glimpse of the Chandos "ghost" she has heard about, Mrs. Penn asks to come to Anne's room one night: "'I want to watch from your windows. I want to see whether it is a ghost that is said to haunt the walks at nights: or—whether it is anything else'" (235). Mrs. Penn suspects the figure roaming the grounds at night might be George and attempts to use Anne yet again; however, this time she forgets to manipulate her by appearing to sympathize with Anne's more honorable respect for the family until it is too late. In response to Mrs. Penn's request, Anne lectures her on the "dishonorable" nature of her scheme and the "pain and annoyance" it could cause the family, and Mrs. Penn can do nothing but retreat, muttering that "'it never occurred to [her] that the family might feel annoyed at it'" (235-6). This failure to respect Anne's propriety and feeling of obligation to the Chandos family proves significant as Anne begins to suspect Mrs. Penn in earnest: "I did not trust her: she might steal in while I slept: and I turned the key of my door inside for the first time since I was at Chandos" (236). This moment inaugurates Anne's own detective work. Repeatedly expressing her belief that she is bound to protect the family she serves as companion, Anne begins to monitor Mrs. Penn.

In response, Mrs. Penn begins to plot Anne's removal from the Chandos estate. Just as Mrs. Penn realizes she has lost Anne's trust, and thereby any hope of her unintentional help, she also recognizes Anne will now be an impediment to her ability to complete her task. When her attempt to frame Anne for the various thefts fails (because of Harry's trust in Anne), Mrs. Penn tries to drive Anne away by hinting that Mrs. Chandos is actually Harry's estranged wife. Relaying this false information directly after Harry has professed his love to Anne, Mrs. Penn once again poses as Anne's sympathetic friend/companion, asserting, "'I want to save you'" (293). It is this final lie and manipulation of sympathy that allows Mrs. Penn to achieve her goal through Anne. Disgusted by what she perceives to be Harry's intention to keep her as a mistress under the same roof as his wife, Anne decides to leave Chandos immediately, and when she goes into the forbidden west wing to take her leave of Lady Chandos, she sees an emaciated, death-like figure who resembles Harry Chandos in one of the bedrooms. Frightened, but unaware that she has just discovered the whereabouts of George Heneage Chandos, Anne meets Mrs. Penn in the hall when she emerges from the west wing. In her shock and confusion, she blurts out what she has seen to Mrs. Penn. In this moment, Mrs. Penn's campaign with Anne proves successful; although Anne no longer trusts her fellow companion, they have grown close *enough* that when Anne is in great distress, she immediately confides in her.

However, Mrs. Penn's impulsive response to this revelation also provides Anne with the evidence *she* needs to expose Mrs. Penn's subterfuge. Mrs. Penn exclaims: "'I know too well who it is; and it explains the mystery of that west wing. All that has been so unaccountable to me since I have dwelt at Chandos is quite plain now. Dolt that I was,

never to have expected it! Oh! but they were clever dissemblers.'" As the detective-companion rejoices, "'Down now with the Chandoses!,'" Mrs. Penn's true motivations for taking a place as companion in the household are finally revealed to both Anne and to the reader (313-14). Determined to undo the damage she herself has caused, Anne intercepts a letter Mrs. Penn writes to Edwin Barley, informing him that George is at Chandos, and reveals the interloper to Harry. In this, the climax of the novel, both female detectives achieve their goals. Although their motivations place them at odds with one another, one's discovery is inextricably tied to the other's. At the end of the novel, Anne's unwilling but honorable acts of detection emerge as superior: her actions both solve Mrs. Penn's case and prevent her from capitalizing on them. When the police arrive, Mrs. Penn excitedly awaits George's capture, only to find that they have been called to apprehend her instead.

iii. The Detective-Companion as Criminal

Although Mrs. Penn succeeds in discovering the murderer's location, she can offer Barley nothing more than that: George Heneage Chandos, who has returned to hide at home due to a debilitating illness, dies before Barley can arrive at Chandos to claim his justice. Charlotte Delves Penn is victorious in her detection project, but because of forces beyond her control, she does not triumph over the Chandos family. Neither she nor Barley can have any satisfaction and, as a result, Mrs. Penn also fails in her ultimate aim of earning the sympathy and love of Edwin Barley. As in the end of *Lady Audley's Secret*, the "good" characters are rewarded. As the ideal companion whose genuine sympathy with her mistress leads her to perform her detective work on behalf of the

family she serves, Anne marries Harry Chandos, who is now (after the death of his brother) master of the estate. The Chandos family is left in peace without a secret to suffer under, and even Edwin Barley can move on with his life. For Mrs. Penn, the tragic irony that the very actions she took to earn Barley's love are exactly what bar her from him is incomprehensible to her. Mrs. Penn is unaware of the type of narrative she is in; believing herself part of a novel of manners that should end in her happy marriage, she learns her status as a sensational villainess precludes her from enjoying such an ending. As she painstakingly reviews her love and service to Edwin Barley, detailing ""her ever-anxious solicitude for his interests; his neglect and cruel non-recognition of them [and] the benefits she had wrought [for him] one by one," he rejects her again. The detective-companion emerges as the narrative's true villain and it is she, not the murderer George Heneage, whom Barley ultimately punishes.

In *Anne Hereford*, the problem lies in the unsuitability of a female detective and even more significantly, in Mrs. Penn's manipulation of the companion position. Mrs. Penn is not a professional detective, and she does not practice her sleuthing candidly. For Harry, her chief "treachery" lies in the fact that she was "living in [the] house under false colors" (344, 353). Although Mrs. Penn states, "I have acted my part effectually [...] a part that Sir Richard Mayne himself would say I was justified in playing," it is the fact that she has "played [a] part" at all, the part of the supposedly sympathetic companion, that makes her detection an "illegitimate mode [...] of investigation" (344, 350).[15] Harry

[15] Sir Richard Mayne was a barrister who became the first joint Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis for the London Metropolitan Police in 1829. He served as Commissioner for 39 years, the longest anyone has ever held the position. Mrs. Penn's belief that even Mayne would accept her methods emphasizes her belief that, even though

is "disgusted" by the "wickedness" and "the false deception of the whole affair" while Edwin Barley rejects Mrs. Penn because the methods she has employed are unladylike: "Mr. Edwin Barley might have winked at the peering and prying, might have encouraged the peeping into letters; but to steal things (even though but in appearance) he very much disapproved of" (352, 360). Having moved to the neighborhood to undertake some detective work of his own, Barley knows of Mrs. Penn's scheme; however, because she has used the companion position so maniacally, Barley refuses to acknowledge his own complicity in the affair: "'I knew nothing of this. Placed in the house by me, Sir Harry? She placed herself in the house, as I conclude; certainly I did not place her there. […] I have met her accidentally, not secretly. Twice, I think; or three times; I am not sure. She chose to repeat things to me; I did not ask for them. Not that they were of any value—as the unmolested retirement of George Heneage here proves'" (355-56). By posing as a companion, Mrs. Penn exposes the murderer, but she also represents the threat inherent in the companion role—a threat which, as in *Lady Audley's Secret*, the male characters in the novel, and the author herself, are quick to address. Through her detective-companion, Wood explores just how complete and devious the companion's manipulation of her position can be as well as how injurious sympathy can be when it is nothing more than an artificial simulation—a self-serving weapon.

III. The Companion's Feminine Modes of Detection

Unlike the male detective figure in the Victorian novel, Phoebe and Mrs. Penn do not act on behalf of justice or the law, and they do not use the same strategies

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her goal is to woo Barley, she has been acting on behalf of justice and so is justified in her actions.

traditionally employed by their male counterparts. Instead, they exploit their findings as a means for achieving their own self-promotion and capitalize upon their position as members of both the private and public spheres. Braddon and Wood's companions distribute the private knowledge they uncover publicly, to other characters and to the reader, as a way to break the bonds of both their social and economic positions. Their actions also allow them to achieve a more prominent narrative status. The companions' distinctively feminine mode of detection—their participation in and use of the domestic space as well as their manipulations of intimacy and sympathy—enable Phoebe and Mrs. Penn to emerge as alternative detectives.

In her discussion of Robert Audley as a detective, Anne Cvetkovich writes, "Because the detection occurs in its midst, the family can no longer serve as a refuge and instead becomes the scene of conflict and anxiety" (Cvetkovich 52-3). If Robert is disruptive to the domestic space as a detective figure because he is a member of the Audley family, then Phoebe is even more threatening in her constant attendance on her mistress and her access to Audley Court's most private realms. Phoebe has no need for the kind of "circumstantial" or "inductive evidence" on which Robert must rely (Braddon 120, 123). She acquires indisputable evidence in the baby things she discovers as well as by witnessing Lady Audley's attempted murder of George Talboys and the arson at Castle Inn with her own eyes. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Phoebe's affective mode of detection allows her to emerge as the most successful detective figure in the novel. Although she shares all of her findings with Barley, Mrs. Penn actually usurps Barley's position within the narrative structure of *Anne Hereford* through her active assumption of the detective role. Barley "should" be the detective figure, but all of his own attempts at

discovering George's whereabouts fail him. He lacks the advantages Mrs. Penn creates for herself as a detective-companion. Barley cannot achieve the domestic access nor the manipulative intimacy Mrs. Penn establishes at Chandos and so becomes nullified by her; the only role left for him in the novel is the position of Mrs. Penn's love interest. His rejection of her at the end of the novel—like Robert Audley's refusal to hear Phoebe's detection narrated—is a reaction to his own impotence. Although she has not yet achieved her ultimate goal of becoming Barley's wife, Charlotte is clearly the one in control of their relationship as she departs the narrative plotting how she might further harass this man she loves.

An abundance of critical work has been done on female detectives in the detective and crime fiction of the late 19th century through the present day, and scholars have acknowledged that the roots of these genres lie in the sensation fiction of the mid-Victorian period. Braddon and Wood create subtle precursors for the professional female detective, women who use their position within and knowledge about the domestic space to make discoveries to solve crimes. Companions are not professional spies or detectives, but they are participants in the professional world. It is this double status which allows Phoebe and Charlotte their privileged relationship to the sensation narratives themselves. Using their placement within the family circle to their advantage, these companions do all the narrative work of the detective figure: they interview other characters, find and collect evidence, and present their cases to others outside the family circle. However, the companion has no need for most of the techniques upon which the male detective characters in the Victorian novel must rely. As intimate observers of and participants in the domestic scene, Phoebe and Charlotte need only manipulate their

position as companions to attain private knowledge and distribute it publicly, remaining undetected themselves until their work is done. Yet, Braddon and Wood simultaneously betray their anxieties regarding the professional woman and the ways in which her work can represent a significant threat to the sacred privacy and stability of hearth and home. At the conclusion of these two novels, we may view Phoebe and Charlotte as empowered, liberated women, but we might also view the companions' ultimate fates as an ejection from the domestic space—the authors' way of ensuring they do no further harm.

In "Locked Rooms: Detective Fiction, Narrative Theory, and Self-Reflexivity," S.E. Sweeney notes that detective fiction elucidates the relationship between author and reader: "The genre dramatizes the interdependent relationship between writer and reader at each of the narrative levels. [...] At the same time, the relationship between criminal and detective, mediated by the crime which one commits and the other resolves, suggests the relationship in any fiction between writer and reader, mediated by the text" (8). Braddon's and Wood's companion-detectives not only serve the reader but mirror the reader's own work as well. Like Rosa, whose *ficelle*-like role as an agent of the narrative in *David Copperfield* assists both Dickens and the reader, the companions in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Anne Hereford* are, in some sense, companions to the reader. In his own sensation novels of the 1870s, Wilkie Collins represents the parallels between the mistress-companion and the writer-reader relationships more explicitly. As I will show in the next chapter, Collins saw the mistress-companion dynamic as a means for exploring the relationship among writer, text, and reader as well as a model for working through his own anxieties regarding the reception of his work.

CHAPTER III

WILKIE COLLINS'S COMPANION NOVELS: NARRATIVE RANK, READERSYMPATHY, AND THE NOVEL AS COMPANION

In "Madame Pratolungo presents Herself," the opening chapter of Wilkie Collins's *Poor Miss Finch* (1872), Pratolungo begins: "You are here invited to read the story of an Event which occurred in an out-of-the-way corner of England, some years since. The persons principally concerned in the Event are:—a blind girl; two (twin) brothers; a skilled surgeon; and a curious foreign woman. I am the curious foreign woman. And I take it on myself—for reasons which will presently appear—to tell the story" (5). With this, Pratolungo establishes herself in a position of power over the narrative itself—including her list of those "principally concerned"—and also over the reader. Pratolungo extends a formal invitation to her readers, suggesting that access to her account requires her express permission and emerges out of her generous willingness to communicate it. And why not? The fact that the narrative is set in an "out-of-the-way" time and place, and was sometimes subtitled "A Domestic Story," indicates it is a private tale—but one that Pratolungo has nevertheless "take[n]" upon herself to share. "The story" is not her own, but that of her mistress Lucilla Finch, the "blind girl" and the "Poor Miss Finch" of the title. Madame Pratolungo is Lucilla's companion, and her mistress's blindness is, presumably, the most literal among the "reasons" Pratolungo must tell the story herself. But we must not assume that Lucilla wants her story told either in this way or at all. As Collins stated in his November 1872 dedication letter to Mrs. Elliot, he considered Lucilla to be the "central personage of my story" (3). Collins

could have chosen to structure his novel with Lucilla as narrator, either having her "verbally" relay her experiences directly to the reader or by having her dictate her autobiography to someone like her companion, Pratolungo. Instead, Collins grants the companion, a definitively dependent but ideally sympathetic figure, the authority to narrate her mistress's story.

By the early 1870s, when Collins was working on *Poor Miss Finch* and *The New Magdalen*, two novels written almost simultaneously and both featuring prominent companion characters, he was the inheritor of decades of authors' representations of the companion in literature: from Burney and Austen to Dickens, Thackeray, Braddon, and others. However, unlike his predecessors, who interrogated manipulations of sympathy among their characters, Collins takes the next step. Collins extends the companion's sphere of influence beyond the pages of these two novels, allowing his companions to manipulate not only their fellow characters but even the readers themselves.

In *Poor Miss Finch* and *The New Magdalen*, Collins analogizes the disruptive status of the companion in society with the figure's ability to unsettle the very expectations of narrative itself. Collins's companions use their positions to ensure their well-being within the plots of these novels and also to transcend their narrative status or "rank." In *The One vs. the Many*, Alex Woloch argues, "each individual [character] portrait has a radically contingent position within the story as a whole; our sense of the human figure (*as* implied person) is inseparable from the space that he or she occupies within the narrative totality" (13). If each character has a "position" within the story, then those positions must vary in order of importance in and to the narrative. For Woloch, characters exist in various degrees of centrality and minorness, often "jost[ling]"

against one another for the "limited space" in the narrative (13). The hierarchical arrangement of characters, the character "rank" I am formulating here, is also based on how central or peripheral a character is;[1] however, other considerations such as the reader's level of investment in a character and the perceived measure of the author/narrator's approval (i.e. protagonist and antagonist) of that character play a role as well. In *Poor Miss Finch*, Madame Pratolungo's assertion of herself as narrator of her mistress's story jars with her social position as Lucilla's dependent, humble companion. Narratively, if this is Lucilla's story, we could expect Madame Pratolungo to be a somewhat minor, constrained character, similar to Rosa Dartle. However, by granting his companion the mantle of narrator, Collins allows Pratolungo to circumvent her low social status and her would-be minor narrative status simultaneously. Madame Pratolungo is invested not only with the agency to tell the story, but also with the authority required to manipulate the reader's sympathies for other characters—her mistress in particular—and for herself.

In *The New Magdalen*, Collins experiments with a more subtle, yet more thorough representation of the companion's transgressive ascension through the social system of the plot as well as the narrative hierarchy. When Mercy Merrick, a former prostitute, steals the genteel, orphaned Grace Roseberry's identity and goes on to fulfill Grace's

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[1] Woloch's series of questions are useful as a way of determining a character's minorness, but also his or her importance in the narrative's hierarchy along the lines I am suggesting: "What is the purpose or significance of a […] character? How much access are we given to a certain character's thoughts, and how does the partial enactment of this perspective or point of view fit into the narrative as a whole? […] How often, at what point, and for what duration does a character appear in the text? […] How are her appearances positioned in relation to other characters and to the thematic and structural totality of the narrative? Why does a particular character suddenly disappear from the narrative or abruptly begin to gain more narrative attention?" (14).

rightful position as Lady Janet Roy's companion, she takes more than Grace's job. Through Collins's representation of Mercy as both poignantly worthy of sympathy and also particularly adept at enacting genuine sympathy herself, Mercy is characterized as the ideal companion—an exemplar of sympathetic power. Because of this, Mercy not only appropriates Grace's identity and position as companion, she also usurps Grace's narrative status as heroine of the novel. This forces Grace into Mercy's own "character-space" as antagonist, a narrative role which, ultimately, Grace has no choice but to accept and eventually fulfills with gusto, proving herself the anti-companion in her definitive incapacity for sympathy. Throughout the novel, Collins uses an amalgamation of his third person omniscient narrator's perspective, the two women's actions and dialogue, and his other characters' responses to each woman to assert for the reader a "correct," albeit unconventional and unexpected, sympathetic response to both Mercy and Grace. Collins shapes his narrative to manipulate the reader into sympathizing with the fallen woman who does horrible things in stealing another's identity. At the same time, however, he wants us to despise the ingénue who is, at least initially, innocent of any immoral deeds. In *The New Magdalen*, the companion position—as a role culturally coded with expectations of ideal sympathy—becomes the measure against which the two potential heroines' are judged: the character who can best fulfill that position becomes the rightful heroine. Collins privileges the characters' capacity for sympathy above all other considerations; those who are most capable of sympathy themselves should be sympathized with. By reversing both the reader's social and narrative expectations for Mercy and Grace, Collins achieves a narrative which proposes to test not only its characters' sympathetic powers but its readers' as well.

Thus, in what we may term his “companion novels” (in both senses of the word) of 1872 and 1873, Collins employs his companions to explore the possibilities for the manipulation of reader sympathy.[2] As narrator, Madame Pratolungo acts as an arbiter of sympathy, prescribing and directing the reader’s engagement with the array of characters in *Poor Miss Finch*, while in *The New Magdalen*, Mercy—through her characterization as the superior companion—comes to serve as a touchstone for gauging the reader’s own sympathetic prowess. Collins’s choice of the companion as a means for achieving this work further demonstrates the cultural and literary significance of the figure as a vexed site of sympathy. As this project shows, Victorians viewed the mistress-companion relationship as one defined in large part by sympathy, whether genuine and/or manipulative, and thus representations of her could, and did, allow authors to explore sympathy as a mode of relating in interpersonal relationships—or even relationships between text and reader. In fact, what emerges in Collins’s work is an analogous relationship between mistress and companion, text and reader.

Authors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were invested in eliciting emotional responses such as sympathy in their readership; in turn, contemporary

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[2] *Poor Miss Finch* and *The New Magdalen* are among Collins’s lesser known novels. Collins scholars have repeatedly castigated the later novels, interrogating why they were unpopular both critically and with the public. Some continue to see a degeneration late in his career, while others attempt to rehabilitate the later novels. Jenny Bourne Taylor articulates the several potential reasons for the perceived decline in Collins’s work: “The loss of the steadying hand of Charles Dickens in 1870 has been one explanation of his decline alongside the continuing influence of Charles Reade, whose minutely researched polemical novels and plays addressed topical issues such as prison reform. Collins’s failing health, his growing dependence on laudanum and a host of other medications to relieve the agonizing pain of ocular gout and rheumatic illness, together with the demands of two families and his theatrical activities have added to this picture, as literary influence, bodily and mental fragility, a complicated personal and professional life, and a more explicit ideological stance have blended into an overarching narrative that has dominated readings of his later work” (79).

audiences came to texts with a set of expectations similar to those that characterized the mistress-companion relationship. Readers expected to be entertained, to lose themselves for awhile in the company of a good story with an engaging cast of characters, and to be emotionally invested in and moved by the text. Even the definitive economic component of the mistress-companion model is at work here: to attain these "services," rendered by writer and text, the reader had to purchase them in the form of book volume or periodical issue. On the other hand, the companion's ambiguous social status, her ability to trouble boundaries of power and mastery in her relationship with her mistress, could also provide authors with a structure through which to work through their own anxieties regarding their ambivalent relationship to their readers. Collins's companion novels reveal yet another narrative function for the companion as well as provide insight into the writer/reader relationship in the Victorian period.

I. "Sweet companionship": The Victorian Reader, the Novel, and Sympathy

In *The Woman Reader: 1837-1914*, Kate Flint quotes an 1847 passage in *Fraser's Magazine* in which the author describes a reader's potential attachment to books:

> Book-love is a home-feeling—a sweet bond of family union—and a never-failing source of domestic enjoyment. It sheds a charm on the quiet fireside, unlocks the hidden sympathies of human hearts, beguiles the weary hours of sickness or solitude, and unites kindred spirits in a sweet companionship of sentiment and idea. It sheds a gentle and humanizing influence over its votaries, and woos even sorrow itself into a temporary forgetfulness. (11)

The relationship R.A. Willmott describes here is one inextricably tied to the domestic as well as to all the idyllic associations the Victorians invested in the private space of the

home. In addition, a book relieves boredom or pain, provides company, and exercises the sentiments—in short, it provides the same "sweet companionship" that a friend (or hired companion) would supply. Flint asserts that a reader finds a species of companionship not only in the text itself, but in other readers of that same text that form "a broader community" and adds that "Such a community may stretch far beyond the reader's immediate social world to incorporate other readers whom she may never meet in person, but with whom she shares horizons of expectations which have to a significant extent been built up through their common reading material" (42). Writers of the period no doubt recognized the service their art was providing as they witnessed the ever-burgeoning popularity, and profitability, of print culture.

Richard Altick, in his groundbreaking work on the "common reader" in nineteenth century, writes that, "Never before in English history had so many people read so much. In the middle class, the reading circle was the most familiar and beloved of domestic institutions; and as cheap printed matter became more accessible, hardly a family in Britain was without its little shelf of books and its sheaf of current periodicals" (5). As historians and literary critics have established, the nineteenth-century provided authors with a larger readership than ever before as well as new ways to reach that ever-expanding audience: "Industrialization, the growth of the lending library, popular reading clubs in Britain and America, as well as utilitarianism and opportunities for self-improvement promoted the spread of literacy, print culture, and secular literature" (Golden 18). These same conditions which facilitated the spread of literacy also led to readers' growing dependency on books, especially for members of the working classes: "The long hours and the monotony of work in factory and shop, the dismal surroundings

in which people were condemned to spend such leisure as they had, the regimentation of industrial society with its consequent crushing of individuality, made it imperative that the English millions should have some new way of escape and relaxation, some new and plentiful means of engaging their minds and imaginations. Books and periodicals were the obvious answer" (Altick 4).

Another reading population which emerged as a particularly strong and influential contingency in the Victorian period was women. Catherine Golden brings together previous scholarship on the woman reader when she offers a list of women's motivations for reading: "Women were actively seeking opportunities for higher learning and reading—turning to books not merely for escapism, but solace, fancy, laughter, inspiration, friendship, and self-fashioning" (21). This conceptualization of women's relationship to books is striking in its similarity to descriptions of female interpersonal relationships found in contemporary work as well as in present-day critical studies.[3] As Golden goes on to point out, Victorians themselves recognized the analogy between those needs a friend could fulfill and the services books provided: "Books, often read aloud in the sacrosanct family circle, were considered appropriate companions for the cultivated Victorian British and American female. In fact, the rhetoric of the period often likens books to 'companions,' 'people,' and even 'intimate friends' or 'best friends' (Golden 22).[4]

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[3] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Sharon Marcus, and others theorize Victorian women's relationship with one another as intimate bonds which provided emotional and physical outlets for women. For a more detailed account of the critical work on women's bonds and its relevance to the mistress-companion relationship, see Chapter Four.

[4] This positive conception of books did not, however, uniformly apply to novels, which were frequently considered dangerous and even poisonous not only, if most often, for women. Patrick Brantlinger articulates the ways in which "Scandal hovered around the

To what extent were authors contemplating their—and their works'—relationship to this vast and varied readership? Patrick Brantlinger argues that Victorian writers exhibited an awareness of their bond with readers and were active in cultivating it: "The familiar, albeit double, assumption about Victorian novelists' relationship with their readers claims both intimacy and mass-cultural success. This assumption has helped to explain the sense of respectable comfortableness expressed by Thackeray, Trollope, and Dickens, among others. The apparent intimacy between authors and readers stemmed partly from the practice of serial publication, partly from the moral 'selectedness' of Mudie's, partly from the pattern of reading aloud within family circles, and partly from the rhetoric of direct address adopted by novelists themselves" (13). But if authors were conscious of their relationship with their readers, they were also often intensely invested in how their work was received. In essays like "Reminiscences of a Story-teller" (1888) and "The Unknown Public" (1875), Wilkie Collins proved himself interested, and anxious, not only about those he was writing for, but also about how those readers understood his work. These concerns led to what Garrett Stewart has called the "relentless micromanagement of reaction in nineteenth-century narrative" (21).

Brantlinger asserts that it was "uncertainty about how actual readers would react to their novels" that "lead novelists so insistently to try to conscript, interpellate, or guide their imaginary 'dear readers' in the directions they wish them to go. Even when a given novel is hugely popular and widely reviewed, it is not possible to be sure that actual

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novel partly because it dealt with the private lives, including sexual behaviors and entanglements, of characters; partly because it seemed to many, novelists and critics alike, to represent the ultimate commercialization of literature; and partly because it was reading produced mainly for pleasure or amusement rather than self-improvement" (4).

readers are understanding it in the ways the author intended" (17).[5] Even though, as Stewart makes clear, "The fictional text can only strive—only contrive—to model and so mandate, without ever being able to monitor, your response," strive it did (19). Numerous scholars have addressed the ways nineteenth-century narratives sought to direct or "school" their readers. Adam Z. Newton views the narrator as the principal actor in this education: "in texts like *Tom Jones*, and later and with greater sophistication, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Middlemarch*, narrators schooled their readership in the correct evaluation of and response to character and moral situation" (9). Often, one of the primary responses these authors were trying to elicit was sympathy, a point which Nancy Roberts emphasizes in her book *Schools of Sympathy* when she writes that the novel "has been instrumental in creating our sense of ourselves as subjects, and one of its projects seems to be instruction in feeling in general, and sympathy in particular" (10). Mary Ellen Doyle agrees, writing that the function of an author's rhetoric (for Doyle, specifically George Eliot's) is to "reinforce the pattern of the novel by controlling both the kind and amount of sympathy accorded to the characters. 'Kind' involves such

[5] Since the nineteenth century, many have theorized the author or text's relationship to the reader. Specifically, the reader-response school of criticism of the 1970s through the 1990s established a rich array of methods for conceptualizing the reader. Elizabeth Freund compiles an often referenced list of the various models proposed by the eminent scholars in the field: "the mock reader (Gibson), the implied reader (Booth, Iser), the model reader (Eco), the super-reader (Riffaterre), the inscribed or encoded reader (Brooke-Rose), the narratee (Prince), the ideal reader (Culler), the literant (Holland), the actual reader (Jauss), the informed reader or the interpretive community (Fish)—and we might add the virtual reader and the real reader (Prince), the resisting reader (Fetterley), the actual, authorial and narrative audience (Rabinowitz), the embedded reader (Chambers), the Lacanian reader (Felman), the female reader (Schweickart, Flint), the gay or lesbian reader (Koestenbaum), and even the mind reader (Royle)" (quoted in Bennett 3). Also see Stanley J. Coen's book *Between Author and Reader* for an overview of psychoanalytic theories on the author-reader relationship.

interests as practical concerns for a character's welfare or sympathy for his personal traits" (6).[6]

If books could serve as companions in the Victorian period, friends that could allow readers to practice sentiments such as sympathy as well as train them in it, their chief point of access, as Newton suggests, was the narrator. Stewart asserts that "isolated Victorian subjects want their story told, however indirectly, as a story *told*. They want the image of a narrator—and thus of an auditor or reader. In this sense, the vicariousness of the novel does not stop at the level of narrative […] The underlying—at times overbearing—psychic surrogacy of the Victorian novel has as much to do, in other words, with narration as with narrated story" (31). As the reader's chief informant or interlocutor, it is the narrator who makes a text more like an actual companion; it is the narrator who has the greatest potential—because the most direct access—to become the reader's "friend." In *Poor Miss Finch*, Collins makes this connection explicit by choosing an actual paid female companion as his narrator. Madame Pratolungo comes to serve, in alternatively implicit and explicit ways, as no less the reader's companion than her mistress's within the text.

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[6] As Flint points out, "the woman reader was expected, according to the terms of the contemporary psychological and physiological tenets which stressed her innate capacity for sympathy, to find it far easier than a man would to identify with characters and incidents from her reading material" (38). Women also may have been more predisposed to turn to books as companions. However, this is not to say that 1.) men could or did not turn to books to fulfill the same needs of companionship nor 2.) that men were not also susceptible to the sympathetic directives of the texts they read.

II. "I take it on myself […] to tell the story": Madame Pratolungo as Companion Narrator

Although companion characters litter the pages of the Victorian novel, very few novelists employ the companion as narrator in their work. But Collins's Madame Pratolungo does have two famous Victorian predecessors: Dickens's Esther Summerson with her partial narration in *Bleak House* (1852-53) and Charlotte Brontë's Lucy Snowe—in her various stints as official and unofficial companion—in *Villette* (1853).[7] Both of these earlier companion narrators provide provenance for the kind of manipulation of 1) narrative control and 2) reader sympathy which Collins will employ in *Poor Miss Finch*. These well-known companion narrators, together with Collins's Madame Pratolungo, gave Victorian readers first-hand perspective into the companion occupation. Each provides insight into the circumstances which led to a nineteenth-century woman's decision to become a companion, illuminates the difficulties in negotiating the various, often contradictory, duties of the role, and provides commentary on the intensive intimacy and sympathy involved in the mistress-companion relationship. Dickens's and Collins's companion narrators are particularly interesting in this respect. Countless contemporary texts, across genre, provided accounts of the governess's life from a first person point of view; however, very few of these works were written by men. In fact, many of the women writers who ventriloquized the perspective of the governess through their narrators had the personal experience of serving as governesses themselves. Charlotte and Anne Brontë are prime examples of this phenomenon. It seems significant,

[7] As we saw in Chapter Two, Ellen Wood's *Anne Hereford* is also a lesser known precursor of Collins's use of the companion as narrator.

then, that these two premier male authors of their day should choose the *companion* as a means of narrating their stories.

Even more striking is Dickens's and Collins's choice to try to imagine—thus placing themselves in the position of, thereby sympathizing with—the specific point of view of the companion as a cultural figure by making their companions narrators. As Anne Robinson Taylor writes in *Male Novelists and Their Female Voices: Literary Masquerades*, "To create for the reader a world issuing from the mind of 'I' necessitates adopting the voice, manners, clothing, and feelings of such a person" (3). Perhaps their decision arose out of both men's proven interest in the figure, but perhaps it also emerged from their shared view that the mistress-companion dynamic could serve as a useful surrogate for their own anxieties concerning reception and mastery of their work. By choosing a companion as narrator in *Bleak House* and *Poor Miss Finch*, Dickens and Collins literalize the similarities between the expectations, services, manipulations, and *power struggles* of the mistress-companion and author/text/reader connections.

By using their companion characters as narrators, Brontë, Dickens, and Collins invest the companion with a degree of power in the narrative incongruous to that of her prescribed social role in the plot, creating a striking tension between the story and discourse of their novels.[8] Although these companions are dependent upon their

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[8] Woloch makes the connection between social and narratological hierarchies: "In the paradigmatic character structure of the realist novel, any character *can* be a protagonist, but only one character is: just as increasing political equality, and a maturing logic of human rights, develop amid acute economic and social stratification" (31). The hierarchy of a character's importance in a narrative usually resembles their placement in a novel's social hierarchy and often these are indicative of one another. Further, as Alison A. Case writes, "Narrative authority necessarily retains an intimate link with social authority" (13). This is the case within a narrative itself and, to some extent, it extends beyond a text's pages to the reader in that a narrator's agency gives a character power over other

mistresses within the story, expected to be humble, submissive, and above all, sympathetic, as narrators Esther, Lucy, and Madame Pratolungo are able to control the reader's perceptions of themselves and their mistresses.[9] Even more salient, their agency as narrators allows them to manage the reader's sympathies however they choose. Thus, while the companion is subservient to her mistress within the story, she in turn masters her mistress, and to some extent, the reader, on the level of discourse through her control of the way the plot is presented.

Madame Pratolungo's self-representation is consistently favorable; she clearly believes, and is determined to convince the reader, that she is an impressive woman, the perfect companion, and an adept, generous narrator. When she first arrives in Dimchurch to assume the position of Lucilla Finch's companion, Madame Pratolungo asserts, "It is my woman's business to produce the best impression of myself that I can" among the people there (10). As Collins makes clear in the title to his first chapter, Madame Pratolungo has also provided herself with the means to "present Herself" to the reader in the same way. Thus, Collins enfranchises a figure who should be dependent upon others—humble and largely voiceless—and grants her the ability to assert her independence, strength, and sense of self. As Pratolungo addresses herself to the reader once more, pledging to "make myself known to you as briefly as I can," we learn that she is a Frenchwoman, a "Socialist," and an "ultra-liberal" supporter of the Republic who disdains the wealthy (22). Before the death of her "glorious husband," she travelled

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characters as well as over the reader. So, if a given narrator is low in the social hierarchy in a given story, their very status as narrator helps to circumvent this.

[9] In this sense, another literary precursor of Collins's companion narrator is Nelly Dean in *Wuthering Heights*. Brontë's frame narrator circumvents her subservient, dependent position as domestic servant by relating her employers' story.

throughout the "Southern New World," supporting revolutions. Pratolungo has the agency to tell the reader her history, and as she establishes herself as a champion of the people against tyranny, the circumvention of her dependent position once she takes up residence in England as a companion is in keeping with her political beliefs.

Pratolungo refers to her active, vigorous past throughout the narrative to assert that she is by far the most capable, resourceful individual among the characters. Constantly remarking upon the weakness or helplessness of those around her, Pratolungo maintains that, "Thanks to my adventurous past life, I have got the habit of deciding quickly in serious emergencies of all sorts" (63). Pratolungo represents herself as the hero(ine)—the only one capable of setting things to rights when they (often) go awry. When Pratolungo first meets her new mistress, for example, she relates Lucilla's precarious position in detail: "I had found Lucilla a solitary being—helplessly dependent in her blindness on others—and, in that sad condition, without a mother, without a sister, without a friend even in whose sympathies she could take refuge, in whose advice she could trust. I had produced a first favorable impression on her; I had won her liking at once, as she had won mine" (28). From the beginning, Pratolungo represents herself as her mistress's savior: the one who can and will protect her, care for her, and love her.

The plot of the novel itself illustrates just how desperately Lucilla needs this benevolent guardian angel.[10] In *Poor Miss Finch*, the blind Lucilla becomes interested in

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[10] Among the short list of critics who have written on *Poor Miss Finch*, several have debated this point of Lucilla's helplessness. Martha Stoddard Holmes, for example, argues that Collins breaks the mold in his representation of a disabled woman—granting her spirit, autonomy, and the ability to marry and bear children, while Kate Flint asserts Madame Pratolungo is "in her independent-mindedness, presented as a far more compelling character than Lucilla, whose blindness, ultimately, becomes an inseparable part of her near-caricatured role as a type of female dependency" (162). The majority of

the mysterious Oscar Dubourg shortly after Madame Pratolungo begins her work as her companion. After falling in love with Oscar and nursing him through a brutal attack on his person and property, Lucilla is "kept in the dark" when her beloved must take nitrate of silver to control his epileptic attacks, a remedy that turns his skin a uniform shade of blue.[11] Out of fear of the blind girl's aversion to dark colors, Oscar decides to keep his transformation from his fiancée. When Oscar's identical twin brother Nugent comes to Dimchurch, bringing with him a German optician who temporarily cures Lucilla's blindness, Oscar runs away in fear and disgrace while Nugent falsely assumes his brother's identity, tricking Lucilla out of his own obsession with his brother's lover. As Nugent separates and estranges Lucilla from all who love her through a series of lies, it is up to none other than Pratolungo to save the day. It is she who first revives Oscar when he is robbed and attacked, she who finally saves Lucilla from Nugent's clutches toward the end of the novel, and she who ultimately reveals the long-kept secret of the brothers' switch and Oscar's blueness to Lucilla. But the reader is just as dependent on the companion narrator, without whom the reader would have no entrée into these dramatic incidents of plot. In this way, Collins hints at the parallel relationship between mistress and companion and narrator and reader. Just as Pratolungo's mistress (and other

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critics have been interested in Collins's portrayal of blindness, in large part because several of his novels (*The Dead Secret*, *Hide and Seek*) feature disabled characters. Samuel Lyndon Gladden points out that in Collins's novels, the physically or mentally disabled are uniformly "pampered, coddled, and worried over, reduced to mere recipients of seemingly benevolent actions that devolve into the very conditions through which they are disempowered" (469). Margaret Callander seems to agree, writing of *Poor Miss Finch* that "No-one is really prepared to allow […] Lucilla to emerge as a fully independent human being; [she remains]doubly vulnerable and doubly deceived" (34).

[11] According to Nuell Pharr Davis (quoted in Gladden), "Charles Dickens suffered the same affliction that marks Oscar Dubourg: his flesh turned blue, a side effect of the silver nitrate treatments he had taken for a skin disorder (225)" (473).

characters) must rely on her within the story, so too must the reader in order to access that same narrative.

In *Poor Miss Finch*, the characteristic ambiguity of the companion's relationship with her mistress translates into a similar ambiguity in the companion narrator's relationship to the reader. Collins constructs Pratolungo's engagement with her reader such that it serves as an exemplar of the ways in which the mistress-companion dynamic parallels the text's relation to its audience: as narrator, Pratolungo uses the mistress-companion dynamic as a model for relating with the reader, engaging her audience in a relationship in which she herself is alternatively both companion and mistress. For example, Collins's companion narrator often presents her act of narration as a form of service; just as a companion reads to and otherwise amuses her mistress, so also does Pratolungo for the reader. Madame Pratolungo explicitly refers to herself at one point as the reader's "humble servant" (107). She also repeatedly calls attention to her efforts to aid and please her reader. Certainly it is Pratolungo's position as companion within the plot that makes possible her ability to narrate her story at all—to have the opportunity to be companion-like with her readership. In addition to the confidences invested in her by her mistress, her role as chaperone allows her to do the kind of privileged observation necessary for a narrator.

One scene in particular establishes the connection between Pratolungo's companion duties and her ability to narrate. As Pratolungo positions herself to watch her mistress with Oscar early in the novel, when he is still the mysterious newcomer, she remarks, "I declare I wished myself one of the party! But no. I had my duty to do as a respectable woman. My duty was to steal a little nearer, and see if any familiarities were

passing between these two merry young people. […] I stood behind the blind and peeped in. Duty! Oh, dear me, painful but necessary duty!" (30-31). Whereas Braddon and Wood's companions reveled and profited in their spying and eavesdropping, her final sentence here indicates that, for Pratolungo, it is an unsavory aspect of her position. She ironically refers to herself as a "respectable woman" in that, for one in her occupation, her "duty" is to spy. However, the companion *narrator* is of course pulling double "duty" here: she must make herself aware of what is passing between Lucilla and Oscar in order to fulfill her duty to her mistress, but also to fulfill her narratorial duty so that she may report to the reader; she must witness their exchange in order to narrate it.

Paradoxically, the companion narrator often positions herself in a way akin to the role of mistress to her reader as well. She invites the reader into her confidence, revealing her own secrets as well as those of others (her mistress's, in particular) in relating the narrative. Pratolungo establishes such intimacies with her reader through statements like "Between you and me…" (60). This latter formulation—the companion narrator positioning herself analogously as the reader's mistress—highlights how any companion narrator's roles within and without the plot conflict with one another. If the companion is the receptacle for her mistress's explicit and implicit confidences—which should then, of course, ideally be kept private—and the reader is the recipient of the companion's "confidences" (i.e. her account of information and events), then the companion narrator is constantly betraying her mistress and the expectations of her occupation. Madame Pratolungo asserts that she is not telling her own story but that of her mistress, and thus she repeatedly divulges her mistress's secrets to the reader as a matter of course. But confiding in her readers as a mistress confides in her companion is

not the only way in which the companion narrator assumes the mistress-like role in her connection to her readership. Pratolungo is also at times quite imperious, emphasizing the reader's dependence upon her and directing the reader's reception of the narratives she imparts—especially with regards to the reader's sympathetic investment in herself and in Lucilla. Indeed, like any narrator, Madame Pratolungo has a great deal of power over the reader, but her dependent position as a companion within the plot leads her to assert her primacy—over mistress and reader alike—more vigorously than most Victorian narrators.

The proximity of Pratolungo's narration to the position of mistress versus companion to her reader is a measure of agency and power, and rather than oscillate between these dual postures, Pratolungo blurs the lines between them. The companion figure's distinctive mobility enables Collins to probe the relationship among author, text, and reader. The companion can move freely amongst categories: she can act as both observer and the observed; she can exist within the action of the story and comment from outside of it; and, as narrator, she can assume a stance of aggressive mastery and/or submissive service. The extent of Pratolungo's control over the reader, and her obsession with that authority, reflects Collins's own anxieties regarding the reception of his work. As a novel which attempts to marry sentimental and sensation traditions, *Poor Miss Finch* is doubly dependent on the reactions of its readers. Collins's use of the companion as narrator allows him to address the fluid, interdependent, ambiguous relation among author, text, and reader, a dynamic which is, as Collins shows, just as fraught with power struggles as the mistress-companion relationship.

i. Madame Pratolungo's Narrative Power Plays

Pratolungo's unusual degree of power in her relationship with her blind mistress arises not only out of the companion's authority as narrator, but also out of the simple fact that she can see and her mistress cannot. As she introduces Lucilla Finch, Pratolungo is bound to the tradition of narrative conventions she has made herself a part of: as narrator, Pratolungo must use her eyes to describe her characters for the reader. However, I read her emphasis on vision in her initial description of her mistress, and throughout the novel, as a subtle power play in which the companion constantly reasserts her advantage in a relationship in which she would customarily be subservient. Pratolungo begins the account of her meeting Lucilla with "When my eyes first rested on her" and goes on to describe her in purely visual terms. As she remarks upon "The fair broad forehead; the peculiar fullness of the flesh between the eyebrow and eyelid; the delicate outline of the lower face, […] the color of the complexion and hair," what the reader receives is a more or less standard introduction to a new character in Victorian fiction. However, Pratolungo takes her emphasis on her ability to see one step further by aligning it with the reader's vision: "I was irresistibly reminded of the gem of that superb collection—the matchless Virgin of Raphael, called 'The Madonna di San Sisto'" (13). Only someone who can see could mark this resemblance and gain any information from it. Pratolungo privileges and align herself with the reader against Lucilla in her description of her mistress, but she also marks her narrative power over her. Pratolungo has in effect taken possession of her mistress's physical person by portraying Lucilla textually in a way she can neither do herself nor even understand.

In the chapters that follow, Pratolungo continues her subtle references to her own powers of vision. Most notable in this regard are the string of sequential chapter titles pertaining to the introduction of Oscar Dubourg: "Twilight View of the Man," "Candlelight View of the Man," and "Daylight View of the Man." Lucilla is intensely interested in this newcomer to Dimchurch, but she must rely on the eyes of those around her—particularly the eyes of Pratolungo—to describe him to her. In the same way, the reader must rely on the companion narrator to portray Oscar. Pratolungo's chapter titles highlight her ability to serve both mistress and reader in this capacity; both are dependent upon *her*, and she flaunts her capability by generously offering each of her captive audiences several "views" of Oscar.[12]

Nowhere does Pratolungo assert her power as narrator, over Lucilla and reader alike, as strongly as in the chapters dedicated to her mistress's journal late in the novel. In chapter forty-two, and for the three succeeding chapters, Pratolungo appears to turn the narrative over to Lucilla. The companion has had to leave her mistress and return to Paris to tend to her Papa on his death-bed. By this point, Lucilla has gained (temporary) use of her eyes, has learned to write,[13] and is keeping a journal, but she is still under the

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[12] In her chapter "Disability and Difference" in the *Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, Kate Flint points out that "it often appears as though contact with those whose physical senses are in some way deficient infects the prose of individual narrators, making them hyperconscious of their own sensory powers." She continues, "this foregrounding of a narrator's alertness to the part played by the senses reinforces the degree to which connections are made between the reader's imagination and the sensory information which is stored in their own memory, and on which they will draw when responding to the text" (157).

[13] Lucilla is capable of writing during her blindness as well, but it is represented as an alternative mode of written communication in that it takes a very long time, is nearly illegible, and can only be accomplished by Lucilla's slowly tracing her letters with both hands and feeling along the page.

impression that Nugent is Oscar while the true Oscar remains abroad. Like any respectable narrator, Pratolungo describes her wish to tell her mistress's story in the most thorough, effective manner:

> I had planned at first to make use of [the journal], so as to continue the course of my narrative without check; still writing in my own person—as I have written thus far; and I propose to write again, at the time when I reappear on the scene. But on thinking it over once more, and after reading the Journal again, it strikes me as the wiser proceeding to let Lucilla tell the story of her life at Ramsgate, herself: adding notes of my own occasionally, where they appear to be required. Variety, freshness, and reality—I believe I shall secure them all three by following this plan. (247)

Pratolungo seems as though she is stepping back, allowing her mistress to speak for herself and relate own her own story now that she is more capable of doing so. However, the narrator asserts her authority by first reminding the reader that it is she, "in my own person," who has been sharing this story with the reader. She is only now deigning to "let" Lucilla contribute because she herself judges it to be the "wiser proceeding"— one that will increase the overall style of her work. The companion is clear that she will take the narrative back as soon as she returns to the main "scene" of the action, and her promise to add "notes" where they are "required" betrays her opinion that, unlike hers, Lucilla's narrative cannot stand on its own.

The journal is, after all, only a substitute for the companion herself; it fulfills the same purpose as a receptacle for Lucilla's confidences, and Lucilla is explicit on this point: "Now that I have lost Madame Pratolungo, I have no friend with whom I can talk over my little secrets. […] My one confidential friend is my Journal—I can only talk about myself to myself, in these pages" (252). Lucilla recognizes the one-sidedness of this inanimate companion stand-in and frequently bemoans the fact that it cannot talk

back with words of comfort or advice. But the more crucial distinction between Journal and companion lies in Pratolungo's role as narrator: Pratolungo's dual roles of companion and narrator make her an untrustworthy confidant; she must share her mistress's secrets with the reader throughout her narrative. Referring to a particularly confessional entry in her diary, Lucilla writes, "It is dreadful to own it; but my book locks up, and my book can be trusted with the truth" (252). The Journal would appear the safer, more private site for Lucilla's innermost reflections, but as we see in this series of chapters, Lucilla is wrong; even the diary is not beyond Pratolungo's realm of control. It may be "lock[ed] up," but once Pratolungo gets her hands on it, it too becomes fair game as she exploits the Journal to supplement her narrative. In this passage, Collins marks the analogy between mistress-companion and text-reader most clearly. He shows his readers the way in which a book can stand in for a friend and confidante. The interchangeability of Journal and companion in *Poor Miss Finch* establishes how texts themselves can provide comfort, entertainment, and catharsis. Pratolungo's persistent engagement with Lucilla's written text also further emphasizes the likeness between the two figures of book and companion.

Pratolungo intrudes quite frequently upon her mistress's narrative by way of parenthetical asides which criticize her mistress's style, provide her own commentary on Lucilla's writing or experiences, or fill in gaps that are outside Lucilla's frame of knowledge.[14] Acting more like an overzealous editor than a narrator, Pratolungo inserts

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[14] This technique of inserting an alternative narrative that is then interrupted by a more powerful figure in the novel seems to be a favorite of Collins's. We see it in both *The Moonstone* and in *The Woman in White*. Here, however, rather than an assertion of gendered authority and agency—we have a woman interrupting another woman; a companion asserting power over her mistress.

her first “Note” before the reader can get more than seven sentences into the transcription of Lucilla’s journal. With regard to Lucilla’s opening comments about the pride she feels over her new handwriting skills, the companion writes, “She is easily satisfied, poor dear. Her improved handwriting is sadly crooked. […] This is not to reflect on Lucilla—but to excuse myself, if I make mistakes in transcribing the Journal. Now let her go on.—P” (248). Pratolungo’s tone is clearly patronizing and, by claiming she is not denigrating Lucilla’s writing but speaking to her own work, Pratolungo effectively reminds the reader that Lucilla may have written these “crooked” words, but it is still Pratolungo’s narrative—she is still in control. Her remark that she might not be able to transcribe the Journal faithfully suggests she may make changes to it of her own accord. To conclude, the companion once again condescends to “let” her mistress go on, phrasing it as if it was the reader who interrupted her and not the companion.

Pratolungo also intervenes when she does not agree with Lucilla’s opinions. After her mistress has described her aunt in one passage of the Journal, Pratolungo begins her Note with, “I really must break in here. Her aunt’s ‘grand manner’ makes me sick. It is nothing (between ourselves) but a hook-nose and a stiff pair of stays” (253). Just as she has so freely asserted her opinion of the various members of her dramatis personae in her larger narrative, Pratolungo cannot resist adding her point of view here, despite the fact that Lucilla’s portrayal is more relevant. Her confidential nod, “between ourselves,” invites the reader’s complicity in Pratolungo’s evaluation of the aunt, subtly realigning the audience with Pratolungo over Lucilla.

Some of Pratolungo’s notes serve simultaneously to comfort herself by reasserting her narrative authority while also catering to the reader to ensure the quality of the story.

At one point, Pratolungo establishes the connection between these two techniques by beginning a Note with “I must intrude myself again. I shall burst with indignation while I am copying the Journal, if I don’t relieve my mind at certain places in it” and ending it with “Will she end in understanding the warning before it is too late? My friend, this note is intended to relieve my mind—not yours. All you have to do is read on. Here is the Journal. I won’t stand another moment in your way” (254-5). Pratolungo betrays her discomfort in giving over her narrative in this way—even though the reader notes that she is a consistent presence all the same. Here she uses this presence to toy with the reader, to add an element of suspense as if the Journal is moving too slowly, not building properly, and so needs her assistance. She urges the reader to keep reading, as if assuming the reader may be becoming bored or uninterested—a fate she never envisions as a possible response to her own writing.

Later, Pratolungo presents herself as doing the reader a great favor when Lucilla refers to a particular letter sent earlier in the story. As she often does in her asides, the companion refers the reader back to one of her own previous chapters where the letter originally appeared, implying that Lucilla’s writing must be placed in the context of Pratolungo’s larger work in order to be understood. This time, however, she also states, “I will save you the trouble of looking back—I know how you hate trouble!—by transcribing literally what I find here before me in the Journal. The original letter is pasted on the page: I will copy it from the page for the second time. Am I not good to you? What author by profession would do as much for you as this? I am afraid I am praising myself! Let Lucilla proceed. —P.” (268-9). Lucilla has pasted the actual letter into the Journal in the appropriate place, however, rather than give her mistress credit for

this, Pratolungo claims the favor as her own. Furthermore, whenever Lucilla poses a rhetorical question to herself, the companion immediately interjects, “It is for me to answer that question” (261). Clearly, Pratolungo considers herself the friend and guide of her reader—the *reader’s* companion—there to enhance this other narrative, answer questions, and clarify. Her emphasis on her narrative generosity and thoughtfulness read as a bid for the reader’s admiration and, more important, loyalty. It is as if the companion imagines her reader may be becoming too comfortable with Lucilla’s version and must be reminded that it is Pratolungo who is the reader’s better and more capable friend. In these chapters, Collins makes the analogy between mistress-companion and text-reader most explicit through Pratolungo’s emphasis on the nature of her bond with the reader. Furthermore, the power struggle between Lucilla and the companion narrator in these chapters, as Pratolungo relentlessly strives to master her mistress’s text and retain control over the reader’s response, reflects Collins’s own often-voiced anxieties concerning the reception of his novels.

In her final notes on Lucilla’s Journal, Pratolungo provides information that Lucilla herself could not know in order to further the story. She writes:

> Thus far, no doubt, her strange and touching position has been plainly revealed to you. But can I feel quite so sure that you understand how seriously she has been affected by the anxiety, disappointment, and suspense which have combined together to torture her at this critical interval in her life? I doubt it, for the sufficient reason that you have only had her Journal to enlighten you, and that her Journal shows she does not understand it herself. As things are, it seems to be time for me to step on the stage. (277-8)

Here, Pratolungo makes her most overt argument for her own narrative superiority; Lucilla’s perspective is limited while hers, as the quintessential companion—both inside and outside of the action—is not. Shortly after this point, the stress in her life, coupled

with the strain on her eyes due to her insistence on writing, leave Lucilla blind once more. Pratolungo returns to the narrative "stage" with the following transition: "Lucilla's Journal has told you all that Lucilla can tell. Permit me to reappear in these pages" (286). The irony, of course, is that she has never left.

ii. Madame Pratolungo's Manipulation of Reader Sympathy

Pratolungo's most pervasive assertion of narrative authority lies in her active attempts to manipulate reader sympathy for herself and for her mistress. Pratolungo's investment in which characters the reader sympathizes with, and how this shapes the overall reader response to the narrative itself, is indicative of Collins's desire to control how readers understood his novel. This joint focus of narrator and author serves as a commentary on the cultural importance of the reading public. If the novel's dual purpose is to provide amusement and company, as well as "school" the reader in sympathy, then the narrator's role—and the reader's reaction to that narrator—is central. Just as Pratolungo as narrator must garner the reader's approval and investment, so must the text itself in order to be successful.

Every time she feels her actions could be called into question by the reader, Pratolungo works to address and counteract this impression in order to guarantee that she represents herself in the best possible light and maintains the reader's approval. Pratolungo uses her ability as narrator to address the reader and explain away all her little mistakes and lapses in sympathy at numerous moments throughout the narrative. But it is her three most significant failures—her repeated betrayal of her mistress in not exposing Oscar's blueness or revealing Nugent's impersonation of Oscar, and her inability to

recognize Nugent's dangerous motivations early enough to stop him—that Pratolungo must defend over the course of her narrative in order to retain the reader's sympathy.

Sometimes, Pratolungo blames her very occupation as companion. Despite her consistent self-characterization as a strong and independent woman, when it serves her aims, Pratolungo depicts herself as woefully constrained by the expectations of her position. In defense of her decision to allow Oscar to delay revealing his newly blue complexion to Lucilla, Pratolungo refers the reader to her inability to meddle in her mistress's and Oscar's affairs: "I determined not to interfere. It was bad enough to remain passive, and to let her be kept in the dark. Actively, I was resolved to take no part in deceiving her" (104). The companion narrator plays with passive and active here: she proposes that she cannot "interfere" but, at the same time, deplores her "passive" involvement in the scheme. However, Pratolungo also takes refuge in whatever passivity her role as companion forces up on her; she cannot be accused of "actively" taking part in lying to her mistress. What she can and does do repeatedly throughout her narrative is assert her personal disgust with Oscar for continuing to keep Lucilla ignorant of his change in skin color. In this way, Pratolungo ensures that the reader disapproves of the deception, viewing it and its instigator, Oscar, in a negative light, while simultaneously working to ensure that she herself is represented positively. In the companion narrator's self-representation, she is not only to be approved of, but also pitied in her helplessness to rectify the situation. But, helplessness and passivity are not the way Pratolungo wants to present herself for long. Eventually, she assures her reader: "If Oscar did succeed in keeping the truth concealed from her, I was positively resolved, come what might of it, to enlighten her before they were married, with my own lips. What! after pledging myself

to keep the secret? Yes. Perish the promise which makes me false to a person whom I love! I despise such promises from the bottom of my heart" (105). Pratolungo once again asserts herself as the hero of the day—"come what may," she will transcend the constraints of her submissive, dependent role and come to her mistress's rescue. Just in case any reader might blame her for breaking a promise, Pratolungo reminds the reader that, although she made that promise out of generous pity for Oscar, her greater loyalty and sympathies lie with her mistress. If the reader should disagree, Pratolungo implicitly suggests, it is the reader who is in the wrong, not her.

In another scene, she blames the all-encompassing attention she must dedicate to her mistress as an excuse for her failure to recognize Nugent's selfish love for Lucilla and preempt his consequent manipulation of her. Pratolungo asserts she could not have interpreted Nugent's behavior correctly because she was too busy fulfilling her companion role to perfection: "Would any other person, in my place, have seen which way these signs pointed? I doubt it, if that person's mind had been absorbed, as mine was, in watching Lucilla day by day. Even if I had been a suspicious woman by nature—which, thank God, I am not—my distrust must have lain dormant, in the all-subduing atmosphere of suspense hanging heavily on me morning, noon, and night in the darkened room" (182). While again taking refuge in her companion occupation by asserting that Lucilla had her whole attention at the time—as she should—Pratolungo also implicitly suggests that if her companion duties often allow her to present a more thorough narrative, we see in this moment that they may also hinder it.[15]

[15] Pratolungo is characterized by a focus on blame. She constantly worries she will be held responsible for her various actions or inactions in the story she tells, and it is this fear which leads her to interrupt her narrative with direct address to the reader. Collins

But Pratolungo's various moments of direct address, in which she implicates the reader in her own decisions and actions, are the companion narrator's most effective strategy for ensuring the reader's allegiance. For instance, when Oscar first turns blue, Pratolungo is conflicted over whether or not she should warn him of Lucilla's aversion to dark colors. She decides against it; however, as if she needs to convince her reader that she is justified in failing to warn Oscar of Lucilla's "horror," she adds:

> Ought I to have warned him here of Lucilla's inveterate prejudice, and of the difficulty there might be in reconciling her to the change in him when she heard of it? I dare say I ought, I daresay I was to blame in shrinking from inflicting new anxieties and new distresses on a man who had already suffered so much. The simple truth is—I could not do it. Would you have done it? Ah, if you would, I hope I may never come in contact with you. What a horrid wretch you must be! (91)

Clearly, Pratolungo feels it her duty, perhaps both in the moment and from the superior knowledge of her retrospective narrator's position, to inform Oscar of Lucilla's "inveterate prejudice" here. Her failure to do so results in this blatantly defensive attack on the *reader's* character. By once again posing questions to the reader, and then

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also utilizes his companion narrator to articulate some of the paradoxes in the companion occupation itself. Madame Pratolungo is troubled, for example, by the contradictions between her dependent status and her duty to chaperone. In particular, Pratolungo is concerned with the way in which her subservient status jars with her obligations as chaperone. At one point, Pratolungo worries over Lucilla's audacious interest in their new neighbor: "She was her own mistress. She was perfectly free to take her next walk to Browndown alone! And to place herself, for all I knew to the contrary, at the mercy of a dishonourable and designing man. What was I? Only her companion. I had no right to interfere—and yet, if anything happened, I should be blamed" (28). Here, Pratolungo grants the reader immediate access into one of the cruxes of the occupation: she is responsible for her mistress, but invested with very little power to interfere or object to her mistress's wishes. As her companion, it is part of Pratolungo's job description to protect Lucilla and her reputation, but, as the companion narrator is able to point out, this is difficult in her dependent position. She cannot tell her mistress what to do, yet if Lucilla should get into trouble, it is the companion who will most likely be "blamed." It is interesting, then, that Pratolungo should capitalize on her own fears regarding blame in order to *prevent* herself from being blamed by using her very role as companion as an excuse for any shortcomings or misbehavior she might exhibit.

assuming the stance of righteous indignation in reaction to any potential contradictory response, Pratolungo asserts her power as narrator to manipulate the reader into agreeing with her, into condoning her questionable decision not to tell Oscar. She has this authority because, as Stewart writes, "The trope of the invoked 'dear reader' fabricates an entirely one-sided conversation; however dear or gently predisposed, the reader can never talk back" (13).

In another direct address to the reader, in which Pratolungo again tries to excuse herself for not having recognized Nugent's motives, the companion narrator makes the distinction between her retrospective narration and her position as character within the story as it unfolded:

> What was the obvious conclusion which a person with my experience ought to have drawn from all this? I know well enough what it was, now. On my oath as an honest woman, I failed to see it at the time. We are not always (suffer me to remind you) consistent with ourselves. […] Account for it as you may—for a much longer time than it suits my self-esteem to reckon up, I suspected nothing and discovered nothing. I noted his behavior in Lucilla's presence as odd behavior and unaccountable behavior—and that was all. (120)

By castigating rather than defending herself as before, Pratolungo achieves the same effect: she manipulates the reader into sympathizing with her and her actions (or lack thereof, in this case). By referring to the damage to her "self-esteem" this admission causes, she again establishes a level of intimacy with the reader that recalls that of mistress and companion; although it is painful for her to relate her failures, she will dwell on them just the same, confiding her shame to the reader to elicit pity and forgiveness for her lack of foresight. But, yet again, the reader is also implicated by her argument that "*we*" cannot always interpret the motives of others. In this moment, she implies that had the reader been in her position, he or she could not have behaved any better.

Although I read Pratolungo's manipulative self-representation and many narrative power moves as clear assertions of her own ascendancy, I do not interpret her strategies as malicious or ungenerous. Part of the impetus for her work in aligning *herself* with the reader, gaining the reader's sympathy and emphasizing her authority, is to help ensure that the reader sympathizes with *Lucilla*. As Lucilla's paid companion, Pratolungo is expected to provide her mistress with sympathy and protection, and the latter includes protecting her character or reputation through chaperoning. Through her status as narrator, Pratolungo is able to take these duties a step further by eliciting the reader's sympathy and controlling the reader's responses to her mistress. As Doyle writes, "In a thousand ways the story-telling personality projects his attitudes toward the fictional people and this influences the attitudes of the reader" (12). The reader's friend and guide, Pratolungo can direct the reader's perceptions and emotional investments in her characters. Martha Stoddard Holmes suggests Madame Pratolungo is the "novel's proxy" for Collins's sympathetic view of Lucilla, and indeed, Pratolungo immediately establishes Lucilla as a figure worthy of sympathy. Even before the two meet, Pratolungo models the proper response to her mistress for the reader, a response that is coded by nothing more than her pitiable circumstances: "Young—lonely—blind. I had a sudden inspiration. I felt I should love her" (7). Once she is secured as Lucilla's companion, Pratolungo strives to ensure the reader views Lucilla in the same light by repeatedly constructing tableaux of great pathos in which Lucilla is the central figure. In one such scene, Pratolungo writes, "Ah, how lovely she looked in her pretty night-dress, on her knees at the bed-side—the innocent, afflicted creature—saying her prayers! […] When I had left her for the night, I could hardly have felt more tenderly interested in her

if she had been really a child of my own" (23). Here, the companion narrator not only paints a convincing picture of one who is worthy of love and sympathy, she also, again, expresses her own feelings for Lucilla as a subtle hint as to how the reader should respond to her "innocent, afflicted" mistress.

But Pratolungo does more than simply model the appropriate response to Lucilla; just as she so often addresses her audience with regard to her own worthiness of sympathy, Pratolungo implicates the reader in her descriptions of Lucilla. The companion narrator uses each of the major moments in her mistress's life to attain the reader's sympathy for Lucilla. For example, when Lucilla first learns that Oscar is suffering from epileptic attacks, she is inconsolable. Pratolungo reports her lamentation and her pathetic appearance: "'Sister! My heart is heavy. My life to come never looked so dark to my blind eyes as it looks now.' A tear dropped from those poor sightless eyes on my cheek. […] Before I could answer, she hurried away to hide herself in her room. The sweet girl! How you would have pitied her—how you would have loved her!" (79). After importing another staple of the sentimental tradition—two women's tears intermingling—to achieve the dramatic effect she desires, Pratolungo assigns the reader a reaction to this scene, simultaneously working to foreclose any other, contradictory response.

In another scene, Pratolungo withholds any description of Lucilla but still attempts to condition the reader's response. The companion narrator suggests that Lucilla's reaction to the attack on Oscar is more than either she as writer or her reader can bear; as if determined to spare them both, Pratolungo writes, "I really cannot summon courage to describe what passed between my blind Lucilla and me when I returned to our

pretty sitting-room. She made me cry at the time; and she would make me (and perhaps you) cry again now, if I wrote the little melancholy story of what this tender young creature suffered when I told her my miserable news. I won't write it; I am dead against tears" (68). First, Pratolungo reminds the reader of her own power—it is the narrator's prerogative to describe a given scene or not. Pratolungo then translates this authority as justification for her attempt to direct the reader's emotional reaction to Lucilla: she creates a more dramatic scene by withholding the details, and then attempts to force her readers to be sympathetic without giving them the opportunity to decide for themselves by reading the depiction of the scene. In Pratolungo's work as a manager of reader sympathy, we see the companion narrator's two roles align. If the companion's primary duty is to provide sympathy for her mistress, Pratolungo extends the fulfillment of that responsibility beyond herself and even beyond the pages of her narrative by soliciting the reader's sympathy for Lucilla as well. If the narrator's duty is to be a friend to the reader, and if part of that responsibility is to educate her audience in the proper sympathetic response, then Pratolungo also fulfills those obligations through her narratorial direction of reader sympathy. This palimpsest of power and sympathy allows Collins's novel to represent the analogous relationship between mistress and companion and text and reader.

III. "The truth itself turns liar, and takes *her* side": *The New Magdalen* and Reader Sympathy

While novels can fulfill needs analogous to those the companion satisfies for her mistress, Collins's *The New Magdalen* is also like an imperious mistress, demanding and attempting to control reader sympathy. In *Dear Reader*, Stewart writes that "a text might

encode—might teasingly encipher—its own reading" (11). In *The New Magdalen*, a text which Matthew Arnold deemed his favorite sensation novel, this is certainly the case (Watt 114). As Nicholas Rance points out, *The New Magdalen* was Collins's "first thesis novel," and its "single target, [was] the mercilessness of society to fallen women" (150). Collins sought to combat the stigma against fallen women—prostitutes in particular—by advocating that society respond to these figures with Christian virtues such as mercy and sympathy. Through Mercy Merrick, Collins sets out to illustrate that each of these women is not a statistic, but a person, and one who may be superior in her moral qualities to those who scorn her. In addition to extolling Mercy's inherent goodness, Collins uses the figure of Grace Roseberry to assert that those who appear "pure" and rely on their own sense of self-righteousness may be the true villains.[16]

The New Magdalen is, as Nancy Roberts writes of the novel in general, "a sort of school of sympathy, a place in which emotions are coached and disciplined, marshaled and pointed in the right direction. Readers see sympathy displayed through the performance of certain key characters who show us how we, in turn, might perform it. […] The novels, then, as sites of instruction, come to serve as social agents doing social work" (10). In *The New Magdalen*, Collins creates a "school of sympathy" for his characters and his readers alike by using the companion position as a vehicle both to promote proper sympathy and to exemplify it. For Collins, the character that best fulfills

[16] George Watt writes that by the 1870s, Collins "was sufficiently interested in fallen women to devote three major novels to their cause. There is every reason to suspect that his private life was, in part, responsible for the change. He created and supported at least two women who would have been seen by a certain section of middle-class society as fallen" (97). Watt also goes on to point out that in "each of the three novels on fallen women," *The New Magdalen*, *The Fallen Leaves*, and *Man and Wife*, "Collins juxtaposes the penitent fallen woman with the conventionally virtuous one. He makes the comparison such that the natural loyalty of the reader moves to the fallen woman" (104).

the role of companion is the one who embodies genuine sympathy *and* the one that is most deserving of it. And if, as Roberts also writes, "Reading is the performance through which we get a chance to rehearse such feelings, try different roles, play out various emotional responses," then Collins's second of his "companion novels" once again suggests the parallel between the mistress-companion relationship and the author-text-reader dynamic (10). The same negotiations and exchanges—perhaps even educations—of power, intimacy, and sympathy at work in the mistress-companion dynamic are also, for Collins, ever present among author, text, and reader.

The opening series of chapters, constituting the "First Scene" of the novel, throws the two potential heroines together by accident, and by setting up their respective histories—one a beautiful, genteel lady and the other a dignified but lowly, fallen woman—simultaneously seems to hint at each character's would-be role in the narrative. But these early passages also establish Mercy and Grace's individual capacities for sympathy. The story opens in the midst of the French-German war in 1870. The French ambulance, in which Mercy Merrick is working as a nurse, rescues Grace Roseberry when she is attacked by the Germans while en route to England. When the two women are placed together in a room, Grace proceeds to tell her new acquaintance her sad history and future prospects. A "friendless" orphan, Grace is traveling back to England where an associate of her father's, a "lady" she herself has never met, has agreed to receive her as "her companion and reader" (18). Grace tells her story unsolicited and is clearly seeking Mercy's sympathy when she asks, "'Mine is a sad story, is it not?'" Although she has tended to all of Grace's needs with gentleness and generosity, Mercy refuses to oblige this particular plea for sympathy as she enigmatically tells Grace there are many worse

off than she. When Mercy will neither take Grace's hand, extended in friendship, nor share her own history, Grace finally becomes exasperated: "'I have placed confidence in you, […] It is ungenerous to lay me under an obligation, and then to shut me out of your confidence in return'" (19). Initially, Mercy appears cold while Grace asserts herself as willing to be sympathetic, if only given the opportunity. As if trapped by this code of reciprocal sympathy Grace has articulated—the narrator describes Mercy's "confidential interview" as "forced upon her" by Grace—Mercy agrees to tell her story, but not before warning Grace to keep her distance.

Having agreed to confide in Grace, Mercy no longer holds back but immediately reveals she was one of the "unhappy fellow-creatures (the starving outcasts of the population) whom Want has driven to Sin" (21). After selling matches on the street as a child and failing to support herself with a needle and thread, she was forced into prostitution and ultimately served time in both a prison and a Refuge. Despite her efforts to transcend her past, working as a domestic servant for a number of employers, Mercy laments: "'I am accustomed to stand in the pillory of my own past life. […] You see me here in a place of trust—patiently, humbly, doing all the good I can. It doesn't matter! Here, or elsewhere, what I *am* can never alter what I *was*. For three years past all that a sincerely penitent woman can do I have done. It doesn't matter! Once let my past story be known, and the shadow of it covers me; the kindest people shrink'" (22). Mercy's past is likely to produce a type of horror in her audience, here both Grace and the reader, as it has even in the "kindest people" she has encountered throughout her life, but her struggles, repentance, and noble actions since her days as a prostitute should—she herself implies—elicit the sympathy of others. Collins careful construction of Mercy's language

in her confession implicates both Grace and the reader, as if challenging them to see Mercy as she *is* and not as she "*was*." Her speech also establishes for the reader the motives that will later drive her decision to steal Grace's identity.

As Mercy asks Grace, "'Do you still wish to be my friend? Do you still insist on sitting close by and taking my hand?,'" it becomes clear that Mercy's earlier guarded behavior was motivated not by a lack of sympathy but by a selfless effort to protect Grace from an intimacy she would not desire once she knew Mercy's history. The narrator quickly proves Mercy's intuition correct as he begins his examination of Grace's capacity for sympathy: "Would a word of sympathy come to comfort her from the other woman's lips? No! Miss Roseberry was shocked. Miss Roseberry was confused" (22). As Grace "draws back" from Mercy, the fallen woman is less surprised by her change in demeanor than the narrator and even asserts that any sympathy between them is impossible because, as she tells Grace, "A lady in your position would not understand the trials and struggles that I have passed through" (23). Although Grace refuses to show any compassion for her, Mercy seems to sympathize with Grace's discomfort by mitigating her awkward lack of response with an explanation. The narrator refuses to excuse Grace's lack of consideration so easily, however; his assessment of her behavior is much more blunt and unforgiving: "the utter absence of any fellow-feeling with her on Grace's side expressed itself unconsciously in the plainest terms" (25). Despite the fact, the narrator is quick to remind us, that Mercy has "rescued and sheltered her," Grace proves herself incapable of sympathizing with her and so evokes the narrator's intense disapproval. Grace expects sympathy from others but proves that she is unable to reciprocate. Her capacity for sympathy is conditional and thus flawed; when Grace draws Mercy out, she does so

expecting the only story she could sympathize with: one similar to her own. Under Grace's cold reaction and empty, cliché offers of assistance, Mercy simply "lift[s] her noble head" and returns to her nursing duties. The narrator seems determined to convince us that Mercy's story—and even more pertinent, her "noble" behavior in the face of persecution—should elicit more sympathy, not less.

The women are interrupted when a German shell bursts through the roof of the cottage and, as if some fateful punishment, strikes Grace down. When the French Surgeon declares Grace dead, Mercy realizes, "*She might be Grace Roseberry if she dared*" (37). In the chapter entitled "The Temptation," Collins depicts Mercy's thoughtful examination of this "daring project" in great detail and from all angles; she makes no rash decisions. The emphasis in this chapter is on the great change this impersonation could effect in Mercy's life as well as her requirement that her actions should bring no real harm to anyone else. Collins frames for the reader Mercy's desperate motivations: "What a prospect it was! A new identity, which she might own anywhere! A new name, which was beyond reproach!" and what a difference this would be from her own experience living under "the shadow of the old disgrace surrounding her as with a pestilence, isolating her among other women, branding her." By painstakingly articulating the stakes, the radically different life Mercy stands to gain, the narrator works to ensure the reader can sympathize with the "temptation" Mercy is struggling under. But it is her willingness to set her own desires aside and consider the interests of others that most qualifies Mercy as a figure worthy of the reader's sympathy. Vowing to do honor to Grace's name and fulfill her position as Lady Janet Roy's companion to the utmost perfection, Mercy determines no harm could come to either

Grace or Lady Janet. Mercy's careful consideration of the plan, especially its effects on others, proves she is no simple, immoral adventuress, and Collins presents Mercy's reasoning in such a way that the reader can hardly disagree with her.

A series of circumstances also serve to propel an as yet undetermined Mercy "on the downward way she was going" (42). When the German surgeon traveling with the soldiers examines Grace's body and identifies her as Mercy Merrick (Grace is wearing Mercy's marked clothes while her own dry from the rain in another room), the true Mercy finds her way to impersonation much easier: "*His* lips had said it—not hers! *He* had given her the name" (45).[17] This and other coincidences lead to Mercy's final assumption of Grace's identity and simultaneously alleviates some of the blame the reader might assign to Mercy: she has been driven by fate and circumstances into her crime, just as she was driven into prostitution so many years before.[18]

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[17] This plot of twinned figures who steal one another's identities, also seen in *Armadale* and *The Woman in White*, appears to have been a favorite of Collins's. *The New Magdalen* also repeats the plot device wherein this impersonation is effected by one character's donning of the other's marked clothing.

[18] Collins also tempers the reader's potential disapproval of Mercy's tentative plans by juxtaposing her plotting with a description of her nursing work with the wounded soldiers. Mercy is both the embodiment of her name as well as an exemplar of the Victorian feminine ideal as she tends to the fallen men: "From one straw bed to another she passed with comforting words that gave them hope, with skilled and tender hands that soothed their pain. They kissed the hem of her black dress, they called her their guardian angel, as the beautiful creature moved among them, and bend over their hard pillows her gentle, compassionate face" (35). Far from depicting Mercy as characterized by her fallenness, the narrator concentrates instead on her angelic sentiments and behavior. Even when, after the German soldiers have stormed the cottage, her work proves a threat to her opportunity to steal Grace's identity, she chooses her obligations to these men over her own chance at a new life: "The generous instincts of the woman instantly prevailed over every personal consideration imposed on her by the position which she had assumed (42). Ultimately, the invading Germans prevent Mercy from remaining with her patients.

When we next encounter Mercy in the novel's "Second Scene," she has been established at Mablethorpe House in her position as Lady Janet Roy's companion—under the name of Grace Roseberry—for four months. She has been more than successful in her impersonation, living "respected, distinguished, and beloved, in the position which she had usurped" (56). In fact, Mercy has fulfilled the expectations of her companion role with such sincerity and skill that her mistress tells her, "'I do believe I could hardly be fonder of you if you were my own daughter'" and repeatedly refers to Mercy as "her adopted daughter" (63). With the true Grace absent and presumed dead, but more significantly through her exemplary behavior, Mercy has emerged as the heroine of the novel. As Woloch writes, "the space of a particular character emerges vis-à-vis the other characters who crowd him out or potentially revolve around him" (18). Mercy has become the center of the narrative's focus, and her assumption of this narrative role is reinforced by familiar novelistic conventions: she is not only beautiful, graceful, and the perfect enactor of sympathy, she has also become the center of the novel's only courtship plot. Mercy has fallen in love with and become engaged to Horace Holmcroft, the same man who escorted her under her false name from the French frontlines and who is also, incidentally, a close family connection of Lady Janet's through marriage.

Despite the apparent security of her position or the love she receives from everyone around her, we learn that Mercy is consumed with "secret remorse." Her own love and gratitude for her mistress and fiancé weigh heavily upon her conscience. With regards to her relationship with Horace, for example, we learn that "Mercy had been mad enough to listen to him, and to love him. But Mercy was not vile enough to marry him under her false character, and in her false name" (58). By representing Mercy as a

"delicate and beautiful creature pin[ing] under the slow torment of constant self-reproach," Collins again prevents his reader from judging the companion too harshly. She cannot enjoy the life she has stolen because her conscience and sympathy for others is so strong. In fact, it is her very consideration for others which prevents her from alleviating her own pain by revealing her true identity to her mistress and fiancé: "No! it was not the fear of confession itself, or the fear of the consequences which must follow it, that still held her silent. The horror that daunted her was the horror of owning to Horace and to Lady Janet that she had cheated them out of their love" (139). While her deeds might be criminal, Mercy is portrayed in the tradition of the fallen woman with a "heart of gold;" her conscience, shame, and genuine care for the well-being of others allow her to sustain an, albeit tenuous, hold on her position as the novel's protagonist. The intensity of her remorse—and her consequent refusal to allow herself to be truly happy in her otherwise perfect situation—makes her sympathetic to the reader.

Mercy also benefits from the sympathy of Julian Gray, Lady Janet's nephew and a Christian preacher who represents Christ-like mercy and forgiveness. Julian's responses to Mercy serve as a model for the reader's interpretation of Mercy. Thinking he is speaking of Mercy's "friend," Julian exemplifies true sympathy and frames for the reader how Mercy's transgressions should be viewed even more explicitly than the narrator can:

> Tempted and friendless, self-abandoned to the evil impulse of the moment, this woman may have committed herself headlong to the act which she now vainly repents. She may long to make atonement, and may not know how to begin. All her energies may be crushed under the despair and horror of herself, out of which the truest repentance grows. Is such a woman as this all wicked, all vile? I deny it! She may have a noble nature; and she may show it nobly yet. Give her the opportunity she needs, and our poor fallen fellow-creature may take her place again among the best of us—honored, blameless, happy, once more! (150)

As George Watt writes, “in most didactic fiction one character speaks for the author more than others. In this case the spokesman for Collins is Gray, who articulates Collins’s appeal for pure Christian concern” (108). Here, Collins indeed uses Julian to provide his most explicit characterization of Mercy; this is how he desires his reader to conceptualize his unlikely heroine. Mercy herself is inspired by this merciful portrayal of her and, caught up in his sermon, she confesses to Julian.

Julian also functions to throw the true Grace Roseberry’s *lack* of sympathy into greater relief. Before he ever meets Mercy, Julian is entrusted with the care of a mysterious woman who, after being revived on the French frontlines, has survived a life-saving operation at the hands of a German surgeon and spent four delirious months in a hospital. When she regains consciousness, the woman asserts that her name is Grace and, because she claims she holds Lady Janet Roy under an obligation, Julian brings her to his Aunt. When Julian relays Grace’s claims to his aunt and Horace, neither of them believe her and both are immediately determined to despise her for threatening their beloved Mercy/Grace in this way. Before Grace Roseberry ever literally reenters the narrative, the party at Mablethorpe House regard her as a “vindictive” (89, 90) “adventuress or madwoman” (93).

From street urchin, prostitute, servant and nurse, Mercy is now (posing as) a respectable lady, and one who lives and dresses well and who has all that her heart might desire through the generosity of her loving mistress. When Grace presents herself, it is clear that, while Mercy has ascended to Grace’s social sphere, Grace has been reduced to Mercy’s class. Grace appears before Lady Janet, Horace, and Julian as a “woman dressed in plain and poor black garments” (98). Her trials have had an adverse effect on

her physical appearance, especially her face, and the narrator remarks that "suffering—sullen, silent, self-contained suffering—had marred [her] beauty. Attention and even curiosity it might still rouse. Admiration or interest it could excite no longer" (98).[19] While Grace is incapable of attracting any "interest," both Horace and Julian are in love with Mercy. Julian reflects just paragraphs later about the way in which, "though he had only once seen Mercy," "the beautiful creature […] had interested him at his first sight of her" (104). This is yet another way in which Mercy usurps Grace—while she has an excess of lovers due to the position (in plot and narrative structure) she has stolen, Grace has none. But Grace not only fails to elicit veneration and concern, she also repels pity or sympathy. Collins is explicit with regards to Lady Janet, Horace, and Julian's lack of sympathy with Grace but he is less forthcoming concerning their reasons. Instead, the narrator explains that "there was something either in the woman herself, or in the sudden and stealthy manner of her appearance in the room, which froze, as if with the touch of an invisible cold hand, the sympathies of all three" (98). Whereas Lady Janet tells Mercy upon first meeting her that her appearance is her recommendation—"your face is your introduction, my dear"— Grace's person has the opposite effect (55). The irony we are meant to note in this moment, however, is that it is Mercy and not Grace who has entered Mablethorpe House in a "sudden and stealthy manner."

Mercy has robbed Grace of her rightful place as Lady Janet's companion and her fellow characters' sympathy. In taking Grace's place, Mercy has stolen more than just Grace's position at Mablethorpe; she has altered Grace's position within the character-

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[19] Here, Collins establishes a backward comparison with Mercy, whom the narrator has repeatedly reminded us is beautiful and captivating—her "inner beauty" shining through—despite her lifetime of hardship.

system. Woloch and Wayne Booth have asserted that the actions of one character affect the positions of other characters in a narrative: "narrative progress always entails a series of choices: each moment magnifies some characters while turning away from—and thus diminishing or stinting—others" (Woloch 12). As Booth points out, the most significant effect of these "choices" is often found in the reader's reaction: "The novelist who chooses to tell this story cannot at the same time tell that story; in centering our interest, sympathy, or affection on one character, he inevitably excludes from our interest, sympathy, or affection some other character" (78-9). In response to Grace, "Lady Janet felt suddenly repelled, without knowing why. Julian and Horace felt suddenly repelled, without knowing why" (99). To the other characters, the would-be protagonist has become the villainess, and the fallen woman has risen to the status of ingenuous, marriage-eligible lady due to her consummate fulfillment of the companion position—in other words, due to her perfect sympathy. But, it is Grace's *un*gracious behavior that substantiates the other characters' initial adverse reaction to her. Lady Janet, Horace, and Julian may view Grace as the imposter, but it is her immediate and clearly displayed vindictive, cruel nature—coupled with her unladylike rudeness and forcefulness—that lead even the ever sympathetic Julian to scold: "You have made an enemy of everyone in this room" (108).

In the chapter "The Evil Genius," Mercy and Grace come face to face. After her discussion with Julian, Mercy is prepared to restore Grace to her rightful place. But Collins immediately establishes Mercy, not Grace, in the sympathetic position. Although it is Mercy who has wronged Grace, the companion is "penitent" and "eager" to make amends. In contrast, Grace is imperious, unforgiving, and cruel "with her hard,

threatening face" (164). This characterization continues throughout the scene as Collins depicts Mercy as a "martyr" (166). While Mercy's "grand head bent in graceful submission; gentle, patient, beautiful," Grace verbally attacks her with "all the littleness of heart and mind which had first shown itself in Grace at the meeting in the cottage." This woman, originally positioned as the seeming, and by convention rightful, heroine of the novel, "looked like a being of a lower sphere" and even describes herself as such, all the while laying the full blame on Mercy: "I am obliged to hang about the grounds, and fly from the sight of servants, and hide like a thief, and wait like a beggar" (165). In this scene, Grace's behavior proves that she is better fitted for such a life than she would have been for the role of genteel, sympathetic companion. Although she blames Mercy for the low things she has had to do, the reader understands that it is Grace's own nature which has driven her.

Grace's heartlessness culminates in her maniacal claim: "'Oh! It will be almost worth all I have gone through to see you with a policeman's hand on your arm, and the mob pointing at you and mocking you on your way to jail!'" (167). With this, Grace's "evil genius" becomes too much for Mercy and she begs Grace: "'Don't! Don't turn me against you!'" (167). Then, reminiscent of Kate's indictment of Mrs. Wititterly in *Nicholas Nickleby*, Mercy entreats her to "'Have some compassion on me! [...] Badly as I have behaved to you, I am still a woman like yourself'" (167). Like Kate, Mercy applies to their common gender as evidence of her right to expect some degree of sympathy from Grace. Mercy's demand also establishes her right in the eyes of the reader as it simultaneously serves as yet another indicator of Grace's bad character. Mercy, as the exemplar of sympathy in the novel, tries to instruct Grace in sympathy in

this moment just as Collins is working to school the reader. However, when Grace fails her education, refusing to acknowledge even this desperate claim to common human decency and even more important, Mercy's application to their womanhood, she finally destroys Mercy's good intentions. The narrator, with a poignant dismay, states, "In the guardian angel's absence the evil genius had done its evil work. The better nature which Julian Gray had brought to life sank, poisoned by the vile venom of a womanly spiteful tongue" (168). Here, it is Grace, not Mercy, who is blamed for the continuation of Mercy's sin. Collins exempts Mercy from responsibility: once again the original bad woman is given the right of protagonist, and Grace is not only the less admirable character but is described as despicable. Her lack of sympathy has firmly placed Grace in the role of antagonist. As Mercy represents her change of heart by repeatedly asking Grace, "Who are you?" and then answering for her: "'You are the madwoman from the German hospital who came here a week ago. I am not afraid of you this time. Sit down and rest yourself, Mercy Merrick" (169), Mercy asserts her power—granted her by the love she has won through her superior nature—by giving Grace her own socially sullied name and all the degradation unfairly associated with it. We are to understand that Grace is much more deserving of the infamy coded in Mercy's true identity in the eyes of society, and in this moment, Mercy herself seems to realize this for the first time. Collins's play with names in the novel of course acts to emphasize that while Mercy is worthy of both women's names, Grace is deserving of neither.[20]

[20] In this scene, Mercy reveals that the name she gave Grace at the beginning of the novel, "Mercy," is an alias. Collins no doubt has Mercy invent that name for herself as a call to action to Grace, but also to the reader. While Mercy's name is a command to the reader, Grace's name is a contradiction to her character, but one that Mercy embodies well.

When the women are joined by Lady Janet, Horace, and Julian, Mercy quickly changes her mind about confessing her true identity as she learns the party's intention to condemn Grace to an insane asylum. Grace's aggression and lack of feminine sentiment have pathologized her to the point that the company at Mablethorpe literally think her mad. But Mercy—true to her name as well as that of her adversary—is determined to save Grace from such a fate. Mercy's self-sacrifice in this scene is perhaps the most powerful of her exhibitions of unconditional sympathy because of the torment she has just suffered at Grace's hands. However, before Mercy can confess, her mistress realizes the companion's secret and, instead of expelling her from the house, begins to plot in order to protect her beloved "adopted daughter."

Lady Janet's pain at her discovery of her companion's true identity simultaneously illustrates the potential strength of the mistress-companion bond and supplies the reader with yet another model of sympathy and mercy. Lady Janet reflects: "'My idol may be shattered, but none of you shall know it. I stop the march of discovery; I extinguish the light of truth. I am deaf to your words; am blind to your proofs. At seventy years old, my idol is my life. It shall be my idol still'" (209). Single and childless throughout her long life, Lady Janet has never had anyone to love and be loved by in return—until Mercy. Mercy has proven herself the epitome of an ideal companion in her loyalty, tenderness, and sympathy; she has become like a daughter to Lady Janet and her service has spoken too strongly in her favor for her mistress to have any care for her true name and past. As if in answer to Mercy's plea at the beginning of the novel that people view her as she is and not as she "was," Lady Janet sees Mercy for what she is and

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Merrick was the last name of the famous "Elephant Man," Joseph Merrick—a mid-century Victorian figure of both horror and sympathy.

believes this makes her worthy of not only protection, but also worship. The conspicuous refrain of "idol" in Lady Janet's lament emphasizes Mercy's facility in the role of companion, but also hints at the mutual dependence that can arise in the mistress-companion relationship. In this scene, Lady Janet's desperation portrays her as just as emotionally dependent on her hired friend as Mercy is physically dependent on her.

Hiding a miniature photograph of Mercy in her bosom, Lady Janet prepares herself for a parley with Grace, the first step in her plan to suppress Mercy's confession and retain her as companion. Throughout this scene, Grace most definitively proves herself the antithesis of what a companion should be, i.e. the opposite of what Mercy is. Grace's consistent failure in deference to Lady Janet—she takes a seat before the mistress of the house and without being invited, she speaks out of turn and with no mark of respect or humility—leads Lady Janet to realize for herself what a disaster it would have been for her if the true Grace had come instead of the false one. As she pretends to ignore the imperious girl before her, Lady Janet wonders "how long (with such a temper as she had revealed) would Grace have remained in the service of her protectress? She would probably have been dismissed in a few weeks, with a year's salary to compensate her, and with a recommendation to some suitable employment" (216). In *The New Magdalen*, the companion position is a measure of sympathy. Here, Collins makes explicit what he has alluded to all along: Grace is no companion. All that the ideal companion represents in terms of the Victorian conceptions of gentility and femininity the fallen woman exhibits, while the "lady" cannot. In terms of the paradigm of sympathy Collins establishes in his novel, this moment serves as his most pointed condemnation of Grace. When the narrator describes Grace's predicament: "Without

witnesses, without means, without so much as a refuge—thanks to her own coarse cruelties of language and conduct—in the sympathies of others, the sense of her isolation and helplessness was almost maddening," he makes it clear that this incapacity for sympathy, more so than Mercy's actions, has placed Grace in the position she is in (215).

If Lady Janet refuses to "recognize" Grace, even though she knows the truth, Grace has no choice but to accept the "Hush-money" Lady Janet stoops to offer her in order to protect Mercy (212, 215). Rather than refuse this offer, as "a woman of finer sensibilities would have instantly," Grace's "hard and narrow mind impelled her" to use it as a means of "last base vengeance" on Lady Janet and Mercy by getting as much money from the mistress of Mablethorpe as possible (215). Grace determines to "put [her]self up to auction" for Lady Janet's highest bid (217). In doing so, Grace brings the switch Mercy initiated full circle as she prostitutes herself for money; but Grace's crime is worse as she does so willingly in stark contrast to Mercy's unwilling/unknowing fall—kidnapped and brought to a whorehouse where she was held against her will. Collins emphasizes this final reversal in the two women's positions when Lady Janet comments that "the very sight of Grace Roseberry sickened her" and "'the very air of the room is tainted by her!,'" which recalls Mercy's lament of the "pestilence" that follows her due to her fallen status earlier in the narrative (219). Having received her five hundred pounds, Grace departs, leaving Mercy to continue on as Lady Janet's companion unchallenged.

In spite of her mistress's commands to continue under her assumed identity, which Julian frames for Mercy and for the reader as yet another temptation to be overcome in Mercy's path to righteousness, Mercy confronts Horace with her true name

and narrates her own history.[21] In the chapter "Magdalen's Apprenticeship," Julian again acts as the model of sympathy, this time for the reader and for Horace. After directing Horace, "'Respect her, Horace—and hear her. […] Grant her justice, if you can grant no more,'" Julian lends Mercy encouragement: "'tell him what your life has been. Tell him how you were tried and tempted, with no friend near to speak the words which might have saved you. And then, […] let him judge you—if he can!'" (242-3). When Mercy has concluded her history, Julian sets the example of the correct, sympathetic response: "'Own the priceless value of a woman who can speak the truth. Her heartfelt repentance is a joy in heaven. Shall it not plead for her on earth? Honor her, if you are a Christian! Feel for her, if you are a man!'" (258). Horace, in turn, represents the wrong reaction. His response is a warning to the reader against a lack of sympathy as he coldly refuses to take Mercy's hand in forgiveness and leaves the room. Julian's—and we are to presume, Collins's—disapproval and "pity" thus lie with Horace and not Mercy, who is now "a beautiful, purified soul" (259).

Horace's lack of sympathy condemns him to an association with Grace Roseberry. Both characters have undergone their own school of sympathy under the guidance of Mercy and Julian, and both have failed. In an epilogue, Collins reveals the ultimate fates of his dramatis personae through the judgmental, hate-and pretention-filled correspondence of Grace and Horace. It is through their letters that we learn Lady Janet

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[21] Mercy realizes her duty to Horace as her fiancé supersedes her obligations to her mistress. The narrator remarks that "her betrothed husband had the foremost right to her confession. Her horror at owning to either of them that she had cheated them out of their love had hitherto placed Horace and Lady Janet on the same level. She now saw for the first time that there was no comparison between the claims which they respectively had on her. She owned an allegiance to Horace to which Lady Janet could assert to right. Cost her what it might to avow the truth to him with her own lips, the cruel sacrifice must be made" (194).

and Mercy reconcile and remain close as ever despite Mercy's decision to leave her post as companion to work in the refuge with at-risk children. We also discover that, after refusing him several times out of concern for his reputation and well-being, Mercy has agreed to marry Julian Gray. As a kind of joke, Collins reveals that Grace has been hired as companion to a rich lady in Canada and, as he hints that Grace and Horace will eventually marry, Collins leaves no doubt in the minds of his readers of his belief that they deserve one another just as much as Julian and Mercy do.

The New Magdalen ends, paradoxically, on a note of both despair and hope. Lady Janet, convinced that she can effect some acceptance for her beloved Mercy and nephew Julian in high society, throws a ball in honor of their marriage. Despite Lady Janet's confidence in her influence and in the power of example, those who attend leave their unwed daughters at home; the ball is a failure. These final scenes serve as Collins's indictment of English Society for its lack of sympathy. As Watt writes, "the Epilogue proves that Collins knew his reform novel would not change society. Society is too nebulous, too unyielding, too morally inbred (117). But if Collins cannot change the world, he has striven to at least change the minds of a few of its constituents: his readers. By using the companion position as both a model and a measure of sympathy, Collins attempts to school his readers in sympathy. Julian and Mercy's decision to leave England behind is fitting; their superior capacity for sympathy makes them aliens in their homeland as much as the reasons they themselves deserve the sympathy of others do, a point which Collins highlights when he has Julian ironically describe them as "two more […] social failures produced by England" (294). As they embark for the "New World," Collins's unlikely but deserving heroine and hero are filled with hope, but Collins's

perspective is less clear. This ending, which seems, if cautious, then also hopeful that someday a "New World" of generous, unconditional sympathy will emerge can be read as either earnest or ironic.

IV. Contemporary Reactions to Collins's "Schools of Sympathy"

In both *Poor Miss Finch* and *The New Magdalen*, Collins uses his companion characters to direct his reader's sympathetic responses: first, through the at once mistress and companion-like narration of Madame Pratolungo, and second, more implicitly through making the companion position the measure by which we learn who can perform and who can deserve sympathy. But how did his contemporaries receive his work? Was Collins's project successful in his own time? Norman Page's *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage* provides a taste of the mixed reactions Collins's novels provoked. An anonymous critic in the *Canadian Monthly & National Review* found *Poor Miss Finch* was "touchingly told" (200), while an unsigned reviewer in the *Spectator* states of several Collins novels—*The New Magdalen* among them—they "enlighten humanity in regard to certain moral problems of deep and momentous import, and hold up to nature a mirror which educates the soul even more than it diverts the understanding" (208-9). But most of the reviews represented in the *Critical Heritage* reveal a frustrated, antagonistic response to Collins's "schools of sympathy." In an article for the *Fortnightly Review*, Algernon Swinburne writes that "*The New Magdalen* is merely feeble, false, and silly in its sentimental cleverness. […] Mr. Collins, if only by overstating his case, destroys any pathos or plausibility that might otherwise be fancied or be found in it" (261). Andrew Lang and Edmund Yates, in the *Contemporary Review* and *Temple Bar* respectively,

agree that Collins fails to persuade that his “New Magdalen” is worthy of the sympathy he attempts to elicit; both find that Mercy is more sympathetic due to her beauty—and Grace disadvantaged for her lack thereof—and conclude that “As a didactic writer, Mr. Collins injured his art somewhat, and probably did little to […] make the world more charitable to such a sinner as his New Magdalen” (Lang 267). Similar attitudes color critical responses to Collins’s other novels as critics debated his status: “Is Mr. Collins, in fact as he declares himself to be in purpose, a moral reformer, or is he merely an ingenious story-teller?” (Anonymous 208-9). Some “confess to a sympathy with Mr. Wilkie Collins’ disposition to find something which is admirable, or at least lovable, in even the black sheep of the community” (Quilter 245); others complained, “Mr. Collins is a clever, and for a time is sure to be a popular, writer; and the moral tone of his books is, therefore, the more to be lamented (Anonymous 144).

In his book on *Narrative Ethics*, Newton argues that “narrative situations create an immediacy and force, framing relations of provocation, call, and response that bind narrator and listener, author and character, or reader and text” (Newton 13). In this chapter I have suggested, along with many others, that Victorian authors were intensely aware of their reciprocal relationship to the ever-expanding readership, and that they understood the ways in which their novels acted to provide both companionship and sentimental instruction. Wilkie Collins attempted to make these connections between friend/companion and text/reader more explicit by using paid female companions as loci of sympathy in which his readers could invest themselves as well as learn and practice sympathy. The mistress-companion model, a dynamic also characterized by struggles for power and mastery, further serves as vehicle through which writers like Collins are able

to work through their anxieties concerning readers' reception of their work. The reviews mentioned above—albeit only a tiny selection of the readership and representative of only one "type" of reader (the professional critic)—show that Collins's project was not a universal success, but he no doubt never expected it to be. What Collins's two "companion novels" do accomplish, however, is to reveal the way in which the companion's vexed relationship to sympathy can be manipulated not only within the structure of a narrative, but throughout and external to it as well.

CHAPTER IV

"NOBODY CAN ENTER INTO ANOTHER'S NATURE TRULY": RECIPROCITY, HOMOEROTICISM, AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS IN *DESPERATE REMEDIES* AND *THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE*

In Thomas Hardy's *Desperate Remedies* (1871), companion Cytherea Graye and her mistress Miss Aldclyffe take a walk along a lake on the Knapwater estate. As the two women stop, "side by side, mentally imbibing the scene," they see two swans swimming toward them. When Cytherea notes, "'They seem to come to us without any will of their own—quite involuntarily—don't they?,'" Miss Aldclyffe meaningfully replies, "'Yes, but if you look narrowly you can see their hips just beneath the water, working with the greatest energy'" (219). Cytherea asserts she would rather not view the birds in this less romantic way. Just as the relationship between mistress and companion often pretends to be one of sympathetic friendship, rather than an employment relationship mired in capitalistic concerns of power and money, Cytherea prefers to think of the swans as gliding in easy harmony with one another. Little does she know that her mistress's description of the birds also figuratively applies to their relationship. For, unbeknownst to the companion, her mistress has begun "working with the greatest energy" against her; beneath the smooth, sympathetic surface of their relationship, Miss Aldclyffe is plotting to destroy Cytherea's current romantic relationship and force her dependent employee to marry her own son. Like Victorian ladies gliding about in their crinoline gowns, the striking image of the two swans here—feminine creatures with their beauty and grace that only seem to swim along in effortless synchronization—allows Hardy to articulate

the dangers of the employment relationship when even culturally idealized relationships between women are subject to the debasing influences of capitalism.

The mistress-companion dynamic is fundamentally different from other Victorian employment relationships, which are generally located in the public realm outside the home. The companion occupation is situated in the domestic space; it is by definition a relationship between genteel women of similar or equal social status in which one is "master" and the other "servant"; and it is unique in that it tries to replicate friendship structures while simultaneously attempting to efface the existence of any economic component. Hardy was writing at a time when employer-employee relations were more socially, and legislatively, defined than ever before. The Industrial Revolution led Victorians to reconsider a relationship which was quickly becoming as central to the culture as the family. In fact, many proponents of improving relations between employer and employee argued that the association should more closely resemble familial dynamics.

As traditional codes of paternalism gave way to increasing State involvement in the governance of the workplace, laws were put in place to ensure that working conditions and hours were regulated and that workers' basic needs were met. However, these statutes could become somewhat blurred when applied to genteel employment within the home such as that of the governess or companion. Due to their lower class status and thus greater affinity with factory workers, even domestic servants received more defined protection from the law. Neither servant nor her employer's equal, the companion's relationship to her mistress existed outside of workplace law: the private, genteel, domestic nature of the position, coupled with the fact that this was an intimate,

yet economic, relationship between two women, meant that formal employment regulations were not in place, or were neither broad nor specific enough, to protect the companion from whatever mistreatment or manipulation her mistress might devise. Victorian mistresses knew they were responsible for providing adequate room and board for their companions—but what of their more intangible responsibilities? To what degree—if any—were these women accountable to their companions for providing the same consideration, protection, and sympathy their employees were expected to afford them?

Late in the nineteenth century, Hardy represents the vulnerability of the companion against those, more powerful in status and wealth, who would take advantage of her. In *Desperate Remedies* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), the companion figures dutifully perform their obligations—obligations defined particularly in Hardy as sympathy for their mistresses—while their employers manipulate and abuse their position. This chapter will reverse the paradigm of previous chapters by examining texts in which the mistress, not the companion, uses her position to take advantage of the complexity of the mistress-companion relationship. Hardy's sustained examination of what an employment relationship between two *women* can reveal, and his own reversal of the literary tradition before him which focused on depicting the companion as the self-serving, manipulative figure, enables him to deconstruct employment relations in the Victorian period. Situated near the end of the century, Hardy exhibits a unique awareness concerning his companion characters and what they reveal about his culture's concerns and anxieties; in fact, Hardy uses the mistress-companion relationship to ask many of the same questions posed by this project. Hardy directly confronts that which his

predecessors only hint at. While Thackeray, Dickens, Braddon, Wood, and Collins explored the possibilities for darker, manipulative forms of sympathy within the mistress-companion dyad, Hardy tries to explain why. Deploying the mistress-companion dynamic as a model for employment relations in general, Hardy's novels suggest that genuine, altruistic sympathy is impossible within any employment relationship because of the economic concerns that intrude, causing a disruption of obligation and reciprocity.

Hardy depicts the lack of reciprocity, particularly the lack of mutual sympathy, in the mistress-companion relationship as the central cause of the companion's distinctive social vulnerability. The companion represents a fertile site for Hardy's inquiry into employment relations because she was not only dependent on her mistress for her physical needs and protection but also had to rely on her employer for less measurable support, such as her mental and emotional welfare. The intimacy of the relationship—the fact that the women were perpetually together, magnified by the expectations of emotional availability and sympathy on the part of the companion—caused the companion to be vulnerable in a more acute way than employees in other occupations because both parties were emotionally as well as materially invested in the work relationship. As Hardy shows, this intimate environment, wherein confidences are invited and sympathy is, ideally, in abundance, can result in a kind of transference in which the employment relationship becomes a site for working through past desires and pain. Both the mistress and the companion can become a lightning rod for the other's desire, rage, and anxiety. But this ego-driven manipulation of the employer-employee relation can interrupt and even preclude the reciprocation of sympathy and consideration, particularly when the mistress uses her companion in this way. In these two novels, then,

Hardy scrutinizes the dynamics of an employment relationship between two women in which libidinal energies interfere with the exchange of intangible responsibilities.

Hardy's novels reveal the paradoxical, double-edged implications of the public realm's intrusion into the domestic space the mistress-companion dynamic represents. Like Braddon and Wood before him, Hardy recognizes that public concerns like power and money are not distinct from but are present in and can interfere with relationships located within the domestic space. However, Hardy is even more interested in the problematic effects of the fact that these two spheres remain separate *enough* that public policies cannot govern or protect parties in an employment relationship situated in the home. The characteristic insularity of the mistress-companion relationship allows Hardy to engage with questions of human rights within the employer-employee association. Hardy perceives that once the employment relationship is added to the female bond, an idealized relationship in the Victorian period, havoc occurs within both the mistress-companion dyad and the narrative itself—desire and power supersede sympathy for these mistresses and the chaos that ensues generates the plot. Hardy's novels suggest that true sympathy and reciprocity are impossible in the employment relationship, even where one would most expect to find them: in a relationship between two women based in the domestic space.

I. Employer-Employee Relations in Victorian England

In *Protecting the Vulnerable: A Reanalysis of Our Social Responsibilities* (1985), Robert E. Goodin writes, "Vulnerability implies that there is some agent (actual or metaphorical) capable of exercising some effective choice […] over whether to cause or

to avert the threatened harm. The implication that an agent exists, in turn, implies that 'vulnerability' is essentially a relational notion" (112). Thus, Goodin asserts, "protecting the vulnerable (no matter how their vulnerability is interpreted) must be primarily a matter of protecting those people whose vital interests are particularly vulnerable to our actions and choices" (111). Within these parameters, the Victorian companion is, by nature of her dependent position, definitively "vulnerable" to her mistress. As we saw in Dickens's depiction of Mrs. Wititterly and Kate, the mistress's decisions and behavior can have a direct effect on the companion's well-being. In her lack of consideration, Mrs. Wititterly, for example, fails to uphold what Goodin refers to as the "First Principle of Individual Responsibility": "If *A*'s interests are vulnerable to *B*'s actions and choices, *B* has a special responsibility to protect *A*'s interests" (118). Goodin's "Second Principle" pluralizes the first by stating that this same rule of "special responsibility" applies to groups of individuals responsible to other groups of individuals; for example, the body of Victorian England's employers have certain ethical responsibilities to the great mass of Victorian workers.

The Master-Slave paradigm served as the model for nineteenth-century legislators and moralists interested in promoting the rights of the worker. In *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), John Stuart Mill writes that "the generality of labourers" in Victorian England are "practically as dependent on fixed rules and on the will of others, as they could be on any system short of slavery" (210). Workers are vulnerable to their employers for their livelihood and, by extension, for their basic human needs. As such, many felt that it was the duty of the fortunate and powerful to ensure that their vulnerable brethren, whether they be agricultural laborers, industrial workers, trade apprentices,

domestic servants, or otherwise, were protected. As Charles E. Baker, solicitor to the supreme court and author of several tracts pertaining to British law, noted in 1881, "Every advance of general civilization has been marked by an increasing tendency to regard the workman more and more as a man having the right to live and labour for himself and less and less as a mere instrument of toil for the use or pleasure of another" (2).

In 1824, George White, a clerk to the committee of Artisans and Machinery in the House of Commons, presaged the view of many Victorians when he wrote, "The making of good and salutary laws for the regulating of masters and servants is one of the greatest magnitude, as by these laws a national character and resources are necessarily formed" (13).[1] Workplace issues were at the forefront of legislative consciousness and these "salutary laws" represented a new kind of State-sponsored paternalism that would regulate employer-employee relations in statistically measurable ways. As such, these acts were focused primarily on protecting the material and physical rights of the employee. A series of Factory Acts meant to limit the number of hours worked by industrial laborers, particularly women and children, were passed in the early 1830s; these were followed by further legislation regulating mine and factory work throughout the 1840s and in 1850. During the second half of the century, the government increased

[1] In their discussions of employer-employee relations, Victorians generally used the somewhat outdated designations of "master" and "servant," although many were careful to define their terms. Baker, for example, writes that "When we in ordinary parlance speak of 'servants,' we generally mean domestic servants or menials; but legally, and throughout this little handbook, the word has a much wider signification. It includes tutors, governesses, and clerks, although a master would hardly like to address any of those persons as servants; […] Of course workmen, mechanics, artisans, operatives, miners, soldiers, sailors, and policemen are all servants—indeed, the term 'master and servant' might be almost changed into 'employers and employed,' for the two terms are now synonymous" (39).

supervision over issues as diverse as the rights of trade unions to laws regarding breach of contract and employers' liabilities. The Employers' Liability Act of 1880, as described by Walter Cook Spens in 1887, for instance, held that "the master is responsible in damage for all injuries arising from causes which he might have foreseen and obviated, such as defects in his machinery, neglect to avail himself of appropriate appliances for preventing danger, […] in short, all risks which can be said to arise from his rashness, carelessness, or neglect" (43). This Act, along with similar legislation like the various Coal Mine Acts (1842, 1850, 1872) referred to physical injury alone, however. Formal law did not regulate more immaterial dangers such as mental or emotional harm, or even harm to one's reputation, although these considerations were beginning to be addressed in this period.

Many Victorian writers also felt that, as barrister Almaric Rumsey put it 1892, "the rights of one are, so to speak, the duties of the other" (19). Therefore, essay after essay during the latter part of the nineteenth century delineates the various responsibilities of the employer to the employee. Baker, for example, lists and provides commentary on several "duties of the master": the master must "receive [the servant] into his service" if there has been an agreement between them (56), barring legitimate misconduct; "it is another duty of the master to retain the servant in his service during the whole time he has agreed to do so," or else provide adequate notice (57); the master must "pay the servant the wages agreed upon" (58) and, according to the Truck Acts, that wage "must be paid in current coin of the realm, payment in goods being illegal" (60).[2] Like

[2] The question of payment is especially pertinent to an examination of the ways in which the mistress-companion employment relationship often existed outside of workplace law. Although some companions were compensated with wages "paid in current coin of the

the laws and legislators these men often discussed, essayists often remained mute on how employers should handle the more intangible aspects of their employees' well-being. Some writers would include, almost as an afterthought, some brief remark on the master's obligations on this point; for instance, Baker does note that "It is right, and therefore it is a moral duty, that the master should look after the moral habits, cleanliness, and comfort of his servants" (65). Many others, however, make no mention as to how employers should treat their employees outside the bounds of a formal business relationship of orders issued and followed, work completed for wages paid. The problem, of course, was that there was no way to measure, and thus no means to regulate, the less concrete aspects of the employer-employee dynamic.

This is not to say that the core, strictly interpersonal aspect of the employer-employee relationship was wholly ignored. James A. Jaffe argues that industrial relations in the early to mid-nineteenth century often resembled a "gift economy" "premised upon reciprocal relations in which not only goods are transferred between parties but also obligations" (157). "Indeed," Jaffe writes, "it was exceedingly common to find trade unionists reiterating what must have appeared to be common-sense notions of fairness and reciprocity very often derived from Christian principles. Thus the injunctions to 'do unto others' and 'love thy neighbor' entailed the notion that a moral society was based upon work relationships that were both equitable and reciprocal" (10). Central to the

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realm"—Mrs. General, for example, receives four hundred pounds a year although this is an exorbitant salary for a companion—many represented in Victorian literature are remunerated in other, much less uniform ways and at the total discretion (or whim) of the mistress. In *Vanity Fair*, Miss Crawley pays Becky Sharp by giving her "a couple of new gowns, and an old necklace and shawl" (Thackeray 140). Other companions are not paid in money or goods and are instead simply allowed room and board in their employer's home. This is but one example of the way in which legislation like the Truck Acts cannot penetrate the private sphere to protect the companion's rights as an employee.

concept of reciprocity is the idea of mutual action; in a relational dynamic, when something is given by one party, that party is owed something in return. Claude Lévi-Strauss regards the notion of reciprocity as "the most immediate form of integrating the opposition between the self and others" and argues that "the agreed transfer of a valuable from one individual to another makes these individuals into partners, and adds a new quality to the valuable transferred" (84). This process is already present in the work relationship as wages and other forms of payment are given by the employer to the employee in exchange for labor or services performed. However, many agreed this should by no means be the extent of the reciprocity present between employers and their employees.

In *The Claims of Labour: An Essay on the Duties of the Employers to the Employed* (1845), Sir Arthur Help exclaims, "What an important relation is that of Master and Man! How it pervades the world" (7). Help refers to the employer's responsibility to the employee as a "sacred duty" and focuses most of his attention on ways to improve the interpersonal relationship between master and servant (17). He bemoans that "masters seem to have no apprehension of the feelings of those under them, no idea of any duties on their side beyond 'cash payment'" and argues that wages must be "accompanied by a manifest regard and sympathy" (31). Sympathy is, in fact, the linchpin of Help's position on employer-employee relations. He warns that an "imperfection of sympathy, which prevents an equal from becoming a friend, may easily make a superior into a despot" (52).[3] Here, Help insightfully addresses the crux of the

[3] Thomas Henry Baylis also advocates that the employer prove himself sympathetic with his servants in *The Rights, Duties, and Relations of Domestic Servants and their Masters and Mistresses* (1873). He asserts that employers "will do well to endeavour to work

challenge in employment relations: an imbalance in power. Granting particular attention to employees who work within the homes of their masters, such as domestic servants, governesses, and companions, Help urges that these employees be treated as one of the family; for "think what it must be to share one's home with one's oppressor" (29).

At the heart of Sir Arthur Help's philosophy on employer-employee relationships is the concept of reciprocity: "It is not to be supposed that any relation in life is one-sided, that kindness is to be met with indifference, or that loyalty to those who lead us is not a duty of the highest order" (71). Help and others believed that there must be an equal exchange of respect, trust, and sympathy between masters and their servants, in every industry. Beyond their wages, employers owed their employees consideration and compassion; in addition to their labour, employees owed their masters diligence and loyalty. In the mistress-companion relationship, reciprocity was of the utmost importance because of the intimacy of the relationship and the fact that it was a bond between two women located in the domestic sphere.

For Hardy, the normative codes of reciprocity that often characterize a close bond between two women in Victorian literature and culture are corrupted when the power dynamics inherent in the employment relationship are introduced. The relationships between Miss Aldclyffe and Cytherea in *Desperate Remedies* and Lucetta and Elizabeth Jane in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* are rife with an intimacy and eroticism that, although

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upon the good feelings and to win the regard and esteem of their servants, and to promote feelings of mutual confidence and sympathy by letting their servants see that they take a lively interest in their welfare and happiness, and that they do not look upon them as mere servants, who are here to-day and gone tomorrow, but as a part of their family for whom they are responsible; and that they duly appreciate a zealous and faithful discharge of their duties" (33).

culturally considered natural and salutary in such a female connection, become problematic once the employment affiliation is superimposed upon them. The "Master-Servant" dynamic creates a critical inequality of power in the relationship, investing the mistress with supremacy and leaving the companion dependent and vulnerable. In Hardy's work, when this occurs, eroticism—like sympathy here and in other novels discussed in this dissertation—becomes an instrument of dominance, not something to be mutually shared and enjoyed. As Hegel points out, this inequality is inevitable: "Equality is nothing but an abstraction – it is the formal thought of life, of the first level, and this thought is purely ideal and without reality. In reality, [...] where there is a plurality of individuals, there is a relation between them, and this relation is lordship and bondage. Lordship and bondage is immediately the very concept of the plurality relation" (*System of Ethical Life)*.

However, as Hegel also makes clear, there does exist a complex interdependency in the employment dynamic. Hegel theorizes the master-servant relationship as a mutually dependent and inextricable system—a system wherein power never moves smoothly in one direction. Because the servant produces the object of the master's desire and is therefore, for the master, "the object which embodies the truth of his certainty of himself," the master "really finds that something has come about quite different from an independent consciousness. It is not an independent, but rather a dependent consciousness that he has achieved" (*The Phenomenology 192)*. This paradigm manifests in the mistress-companion dynamic as well. The mistress not only needs the companion to empower her by allowing her to define herself as mistress, she also experiences an intense *emotional* dependence on her employee. She relies on her companion as the

producer of the intimacy and sympathy she desires, and, in *Desperate Remedies* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, she relies on the companion as a means to work out her troubled past through transference. The companion is thus likewise empowered by the employment relationship; however, her mistress's reciprocal reliance paradoxically contributes to her vulnerability: in these novels, it is the mistresses' dependence on their companions that catalyzes their abusive treatment of them. For Hardy, the companion's vulnerability arises out of the diffuse, unbounded eroticism in the mistress-companion relationship, caused by the vexed power dynamics of the employer-employee dynamic. The result in a disruption of the idealized reciprocity Victorians identified with the female bond—a disruption that must be sorted out through the narrative structure.[4]

II. "Dependence upon the whims of a strange woman": Sympathy & Homoerotic Desire

Unlike the many self-serving, manipulative companions throughout this study, Hardy's companions are ingenuous, authentically sympathetic young women who seek to fulfill their duties to the best of their abilities. When Cytherea Graye places her advertisement in *Desperate Remedies*, for example, she imagines "A thriving family, who had always sadly needed her" (23). Cytherea does not seek a position which she may manipulate; instead, she visualizes a place where she will be able to do some good for her employer. Indeed, Hardy consistently emphasizes the sympathetic skills of both his companion characters, and Cytherea's and Elizabeth Jane's powers of compassion serve

[4] Hegel recognized the dangers capitalistic concerns of power and money posed to ethical responsibilities such as reciprocity between individuals. In *System of Ethical Life*, he writes that "The mass of wealth, the pure universal, the absence of wisdom, is the heart of the matter. The absolute bond of the people, namely ethical principle, has vanished, and the people is dissolved."

to throw their mistresses' irresponsible lack of reciprocal sympathy into greater relief. Early in their relationships, however, before the mistresses' sense of self-conscious power in the Master-Servant dyad takes full hold, the mistresses and companions enjoy a genuine sympathetic harmony with one another. For Hardy, there is also an inherent eroticism which exists in both of these female relationships, and it is anchored to, and even synonymous with, the shared sympathy between them. In both novels, this intimacy arises out of a likeness or preexisting bond between the women and results in a species of transference similar to that theorized by Sigmund Freud in the analyst/analysand relationship. Likeness, sympathy, and desire are inextricably bound together in Hardy's depiction of these mistress-companion relationships, and it is with this link that the superimposition of the employment affiliation interferes as transference compromises the reciprocity Victorians attributed to idealized female bonds.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Lillian Faderman, and Sharon Marcus have established that an intense emotional and physical intimacy not only characterized women's relationships in the nineteenth century but was socially accepted as well.[5] Marcus, whose book *Between Women* (2007) examines feminine friendship, homoeroticism, and female marriage in the Victorian period, argues that "An ideal [female] friendship was defined by altruism, generosity, mutual indebtedness, and a perfect balance of power. In a capitalist society deeply ambivalent about competition, female friendship offered a vision

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[5] Lillian Faderman's work establishes that these erotic bonds between women were not born in the Victorian era, but stretch back throughout the 18th and 17th centuries—even to the Renaissance. "These romantic friendships," Faderman writes, "were love relationships in every sense except perhaps the genital, […] thus they might kiss, fondle each other, sleep together, utter expressions of overwhelming love and promises of eternal faithfulness, and yet see their passions as nothing more than effusions of the spirit" (16).

of perfect reciprocity for those who could afford not to worry about daily survival" (4). In the Victorian construction Marcus describes, the ideal bond of female friendship is in large part defined not only by sympathy, but by a reciprocity that is made possible by the "perfect balance of power." This equality in women's relationships with one another rarely existed in reality, but the cultural impulse to construct this ideal betrays Victorian anxieties regarding the cutthroat nature of the competitive, capitalistic public sphere. Victorians, so concerned with propriety and social morality, needed this transcendent model; they needed to believe that the feminine and the domestic were havens from the travails of a capitalistic public realm in which power and money often disrupted ethical responsibilities in interpersonal relations.

Marcus maintains that Victorian "mainstream femininity was not secretly lesbian, but openly homoerotic" (2-3). In Victorian England, "women's erotic fantasies about women were at the heart of normative institutions and discourses, even for those who made a religion of the family, marriage, and sexual difference" (13). Victorians acknowledged the homoeroticism involved in women's relationships with one another and viewed it as a natural "component of respectable womanhood." In fact, "a woman's erotic interest in other women" was considered "compatible with her roles as wife and mother" (112-13). Smith-Rosenberg emphasizes that these female bonds were important outlets for women whose lives were governed by restrictive gender codes and oppressive power dynamics in their relationships with men: "While closeness, freedom of emotional expression, and uninhibited physical contact characterized women's relationships with each other, the opposite was frequently true of male-female relationships. One could thus

argue that within such a world of female support, intimacy, and ritual it was only to be expected that adult women would turn trustingly and lovingly to each other" (28).[6]

In the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, beginning with Richardson's portrait of the intimate, eroticized friendship between Clarissa Harlowe and Anna Howe, the female bond is represented time and again, and as these critics point out, it is often portrayed as a buttress to the traditional courtship plot.[7] However, as Hardy's novels show, when the bond of female friendship is translated into an employment relationship in which the intimacy and sympathy between women is artificial and disrupted by unequal power dymanics—bought and yet intended to mimic "natural" female friendship—reciprocity is threatened and eroticism becomes problematic.

i. *Desperate Remedies*

In *Desperate Remedies*, the relationship between mistress and companion is eroticized from their first meeting, and the sympathy that quickly develops between them serves to strengthen the erotic charge of the relationship. Cytherea Graye advertises for a position as a governess or companion after the untimely death of her father leaves her and her brother Owen orphaned. However, when after several advertisements Cytherea has still not found a place and her lover, Edward Springrove, begins to act mysteriously after

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[6] Smith-Rosenberg's description of what friendship could offer a woman also serves as an apt explanation for why women desired companions. If a Victorian lady could not find adequate friendship with a fellow female, or was not satisfied with those she had, she could purchase this same kind of intimacy and, as a mistress, also have more control over it.

[7] For more on the relationship of female bonds to the heterosexual courtship plot in Victorian narrative, see especially Tess Cosslett's work in *Woman to Woman: Female Friendship in Victorian Fiction* as well as Marcus's *Between Women*.

professing his love for her, Cytherea grows "desperate" and reduces herself to advertising as a lady's maid. It is Miss Aldclyffe who responds to this new advertisement, and when Cytherea Aldclyffe and Cytherea Graye meet for the first time, each is immediately "struck with her companion's appearance" (57). Although Miss Aldclyffe initially refuses to hire Cytherea as her lady's maid due to her youth and inexperience, she quickly changes her mind when she witnesses Cytherea's graceful movement—"one of her masterpieces"—as she leaves the room. As Miss Aldclyffe contemplates, "It is almost worth while to be bored with instructing her in order to have a creature who could glide round my luxurious indolent body in that manner, and look at me in that way—I warrant how light her fingers are upon one's head and neck," she envisions herself and Cytherea in an erotic tableaux that she is ultimately unwilling to forgo (59). The prospective mistress scrutinizes and objectifies Cytherea, as if she were purchasing a painting rather than hiring an attendant. Later, the mistress will admit to Cytherea that she hired her "all because of […] the shape of her face and body" (76).[8]

On her first night as lady's maid at Miss Aldclyffe's Knapwater House, Cytherea's sympathetic prowess is on full display, and it is this sympathy that enables the two women to learn of their common name and history. This discovery serves both to establish an intense, reciprocal sympathy between them as well as to strengthen the initial eroticism of their connection.   When Cytherea notices a locket on her mistress's breast, Miss Aldclyffe first attempts to hide it but eventually broaches the subject: "'Few of my

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[8] This striking scene is a perfect illustration of the type of eroticism between women described by Marcus. She asserts that "Women took note of other women's attractions not only as models to emulate but as pleasurable objects to consume. Women who felt physically attracted to other women were not seen as less feminine because of the attentions they lavished on other women's bodies, but more so" (61).

maids discover that I wear it always. I generally keep it a secret—not that it matters much. But I was careless with you, and seemed to want to tell you. You win me to make confidences'" (74). Miss Aldclyffe senses something in her new maid which encourages her to a level of intimacy she usually does not allow. She cannot yet understand Cytherea's sympathetic power and knows only that she is helpless against it.

When Miss Aldclyffe shows Cytherea the portrait inside her locket, the maid recognizes her father in the picture and the women discover their shared history: Cytherea's father, Ambrose Graye, and Cytherea Aldclyffe had once been very much in love, but they were separated by Miss Aldclyffe's secret past and never saw one another again; Ambrose went on to marry another woman whom he did not love and named his only daughter after his lost love. Consumed by the pain of discovering the identity of her lady's maid, and frustrated with herself for sharing her story, Miss Aldclyffe begins to scold Cytherea and, unwilling to allow herself to be thus mistreated, Cytherea fires back and quits her position, announcing that she will leave the next morning.[9] However, despite her bitterness in response to the abuse she has just suffered from her new mistress, the narrator informs us that Cytherea—"marvell[ing]" at the unexpected link between them—cannot help but sympathize with Miss Aldclyffe: she "directly checked her weakness by sympathizing reflections on the hidden troubles which must have thronged the past years of the solitary lady, to keep her, though so rich and courted, in a mood so repellent and gloomy as that in which Cytherea found her" (80). Their shared

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[9] Miss Aldclyffe has had a great deal of lady's maids. The coachman tells Cytherea that "she has had seven lady's-maids this past twelve month," explaining that "she never dismisses them—they go themselves." As a mistress, she is known for her "very quick temper; she flies in a passion with them for nothing at all" (64).

name and love for Cytherea's late father create a bond between the women which Cytherea cannot deny.

For Miss Aldclyffe, this commonality which breeds sympathy also heightens—or is expressed through—desire. Later that same night, Miss Aldclyffe comes to Cytherea's room in order to lie in bed with her. In response to her now former mistress's addressing her by her first name and calling her "darling," Cytherea admits her because "It was now mistress and maid no longer; woman and woman only. Yes, she must let her come in, poor thing" (82). Cytherea's decision to invite Miss Aldclyffe into her room and bed is motivated by sympathy—"poor thing"—but also by something more. Her contemplation here is important to Hardy's conceptualization of the female bond and how it is degraded by the employment relationship. Because she has quit her position and vowed to leave the next morning, Cytherea *believes* that she and Miss Aldclyffe are now "woman and woman *only*" as no employment dynamic interferes with their ability to be equal and intimate with one another.

As soon as Cytherea invites Miss Aldclyffe to remain, her imperious mistress of just a few hours before crawls into bed with Cytherea and "freed herself from the last remnant of restraint. She flung her arms round the young girl, and pressed her gently to her heart" (82). Amidst aggressive kissing and fondling, Miss Aldclyffe emphasizes the likeness and resulting sympathy that fuel her desire: "'I can't help loving you—your name is the same as mine—isn't it strange? [...] Now, don't you think I must love you?'" (83). But the commonality she feels with this inmate in her home is not Miss Aldclyffe's only motivation; Cytherea's presence recalls all Miss Aldclyffe's past desire for and pain over losing Cytherea's father. Her sudden, passionate physical pursuit of Cytherea in this

scene suggests that Miss Aldclyffe works through her early loss by transferring her feelings for Ambrose onto his daughter. The mistress of Knapwater is lonely and jaded and also longs to be again what she sees in the "artless and innocent" girl beside her (84). However, when Miss Aldclyffe learns that Cytherea is not as chaste as she presumed, her tone alters dramatically. After discovering that Cytherea has been "kissed by a man," Miss Aldclyffe becomes "As jealous as any man could have been" and begs Cytherea to "'try to love me more than you love him—do. I love you better than any man can. Do, Cythie; don't let any man stand between us. Oh, I can't bear that!'" (86). Miss Aldclyffe's unexpected but vehement possessiveness here further suggests that she is transferring repressed experiences and emotions from the past onto Cytherea. Having lost the father, Miss Aldclyffe wants the daughter all to herself. After all, it was a man who "st[oo]d between" Miss Aldclyffe and Ambrose long ago, ending their relationship.[10]

In *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, Freud describes the way in which psychoanalytic patients are "not satisfied with regarding the analyst in the light of reality as a helper and advisor who, moreover, is remunerated for the trouble he takes […] on the contrary, the patient sees in his analyst the return—the reincarnation—of some important

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[10] We later learn that the young Miss Aldclyffe had to abandon her relationship with Ambrose because she had a previous affair with a cousin which resulted in the birth of her only child, Aeneas Manston. Miss Aldclyffe is both clearly jaded toward men as well as poignantly disappointed to learn that Cytherea's heart is not free: "I thought I had at last found an artless woman who had not been sullied by a man's lips, and who had not practiced or been practiced upon by the arts which ruin all the truth and sweetness and goodness in us. […] You are as bad as I—we are all alike; and I –an old fool—have been sipping at your mouth as if it were honey, because I fancied no wasting lover knew the spot. But a minute ago, and you seemed to me like a fresh spring meadow—now you seem a dusty highway" (86). The knowledge that Cytherea's lips have been "sullied" tempers her desire, but also ignites a jealous competitiveness that will eventually invigorate her manipulation of Edward Springrove.

figure out of his childhood or past, and consequently transfers on to him feelings and reactions that undoubtedly applied to this model" (66). Similarly, Miss Aldclyffe is not content to interact with Cytherea as merely her hired attendant; instead, she uses her as a means for working out her own repressed desires and pain. This "transference-love" is made possible in large part because of the sympathy Cytherea supplies. In "On Beginning the Treatment," Freud asserts that sympathy is a necessary precondition of transference when he states that any "standpoint" taken by the analyst other than "one of sympathetic understanding" will interfere or forfeit the opportunity for transference to form (375). But the mistress-companion relationship mirrors the scene of psychoanalytic treatment in other striking ways as well. Like the analyst/analysand dynamic, the relationship between mistress and companion is one in which the parties are "alone a great deal" and the companion, like the analyst, serves as a person with whom the mistress "discusses intimate matters" (Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 381). The mistress-companion dynamic thus offers fertile ground for transference to develop. The relationship between an analyst and analysand, like that of companion and mistress, is also an employment liaison in which the physician is hired to assist the patient in sorting out his psychological issues. But where the similarities end, the dangers for the companion arise: in the mistress-companion relationship, the companion is utterly dependent on her mistress and not in the privileged position of the authoritative, professional male physician. While the psychoanalyst has a degree of control over the transference scene, the companion is at the mercy of her mistress's violent loving or hostile transference and whatever manipulative behavior that transference instigates. Furthermore, while transference is a necessary part of the cure for Freud, there is no

sense in Hardy that the companion's role is a cure for her mistress's past traumas; in fact, it is the transference that causes the mistress to engage in activities that are abusive to the companion as well as, ultimately, harmful to herself.

Eventually, Miss Aldclyffe appears to accept Cytherea's attachment to Edward and alters her approach somewhat when she asks Cytherea to remain at Knapwater as her companion, vowing, "'I will be exactly as a mother to you'" (89). As if attempting to bind herself to Cytherea forever, as she was unable to accomplish with Ambrose, she asks, "'Now will your promise to live with me always, and always be taken care of, and never deserted?'" and then concludes, "'Put your hair round your mamma's neck and give me one good long kiss, and I won't talk any more in that way about your lover'" (89). Here, Miss Aldclyffe translates her relation to Cytherea from that of lover to that of mother, also an eroticized dynamic. As T.R. Wright points out in *Hardy and the Erotic*, "Much is made of the emphasis on Miss Aldclyffe's motherliness, as if this precluded erotic attraction. […] But in Freudian terms it is precisely to the pre-oedipal stage of erotic attraction to the mother to which lesbianism reverts" (39-40). But Miss Aldclyffe's desire to fulfill the role of Cytherea's mother also suggests she is bound up in a fantasy in which her relationship with Ambrose was consummated, with Cytherea as the product of their union. Her new maternal approach, coupled as it is with the another offer of employment, appears to represent a more acceptable form of employer-employee relationship that models itself on older forms of paternalism in the workplace. Miss Aldclyffe's proposal of maternalism suggests she will uphold her obligations of reciprocity in the newly formed mistress-companion association—and, for a time, she does. However, this move also sets up her later manipulations when she will perform the

role of matchmaking mother, selfishly destroying Cytherea's relationship with Edward and strong-arming her companion into marrying her son as the fulfillment of her own displaced desires.[11]

The bedroom scene, this supposed return to the pure interaction between two equal women, unhindered by the power dynamics intrinsic to the employment relationship, is only illusory. Although Cytherea believes the pair are "woman and woman only," it quickly becomes clear to her that Miss Aldclyffe, as the socially superior mistress of the estate in which she lies, is in full control. Miss Aldclyffe's power position in the episode allows her to temporarily *pose* as Cytherea's equal just as it simultaneously gives her license to take the physical liberties with Cytherea that she does; in turn, Cytherea's eventual realization that she remains the vulnerable dependent in this situation leads her to resist Miss Aldclyffe's erotic advances. Albeit still sympathetic to her mistress's needs, Cytherea is distraught by Miss Aldclyffe's behavior and loyal in her heart to Edward: Cytherea "wished Miss Aldclyffe would go to her own room, and leave

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[11] There has been much critical debate regarding this bedroom scene. For example, Richard H. Taylor argues that "It is not clear whether Hardy realized that he was portraying an apparently Lesbian attachment; on the whole it seems likely that he did not understand the full implications of his narrative" (15), while A. Aziz Bulaila asserts that "one cannot but suspect that Hardy's exploration of the lesbian scenes is consciously done" (66). For Pamela Jekel, "This is too complex a human state to be simply described (and thus set aside) as lesbianism. The whole passage echoes with suggestions of maternalism, nostalgia for Aldclyffe's lost love, her poignant yearning for her own youth, her loneliness" (34). Rosemarie Morgan and Joe Fisher discuss contemporary reactions—or rather, the lack thereof—to the sensual scene. Morgan suggests that the eroticism in the bedroom episode "the women could do with impunity since no male features in these embraces to give them sexual definition. Regarded as the emotional release of maternal or filial wells of feeling they were entirely innocuous; not a single reviewer discerned sensuality or erotic passion" (6). Fisher notes that, had "Tinsley (not a notably fastidious publisher; only Newby and Reynolds had worse reputations), the critics and the circulating librarians," realized the potential meaning behind the scene, "Hardy would have risked prosecution and suppression under the Obscene Publications Act" (26-7).

her and her treasured dreams alone. This vehement imperious affection was in one sense soothing, but yet it was not of the kind that Cytherea's instincts desired. Though it was generous, it seemed somewhat too rank, sensuous, and capricious for endurance" (86). Cytherea seems to sense here that Miss Aldclyffe's desirous behavior is not simply a product of Miss Aldclyffe's affection for herself but, as in transference, "this readiness toward emotion originated elsewhere" (Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 382).

The kind of relationship Miss Aldclyffe is offering Cytherea is against her "instincts" not because she rejects same sex affection but because she and Miss Aldclyffe are not equals; the eroticism is forced upon her by a woman who has power over her. It is not the ideal, "naturally" forming emotional and physical intimacy that develops in the bond between two equal women. Nevertheless, Cytherea does achieve some degree of control in their relationship—a control based in her mistress's dependence upon her for this psychological/emotional work she is performing. Freud writes that transference "invests the physician with authority and is converted into faith for his communications and conceptions" (*A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 385). Cytherea is empowered by her analogous position to the analyst, and the Hegelian interdependence within the work relationship allows Cytherea to ultimately refuse Miss Aldclyffe's erotic advances and assert her love for Edward. Cytherea can offer this mistress her sympathy, but she is unwilling to reciprocate the erotic desire Miss Aldclyffe offers her. This foreclosure of Miss Aldclyffe's libidinal energies, however, will force Cytherea's mistress to reroute her desires later in the novel and to her companion's detriment.

Ultimately, Cytherea accepts the position of companion, thereby reestablishing the formal employment relation between herself and Miss Aldclyffe. Hardy describes the way in which "The bright penetrating light of morning made a vast difference in the elder lady's behavior to her dependent; the day, which had restored Cytherea's judgment, had effected the same for Miss Aldclyffe." The freedom that comes with the darkness and intimacy of night is analogous to that of the natural female bond, unfettered by labels of mistress and servant, which Miss Aldclyffe attempted to act out the previous night. But now that Cytherea is, once again, definitively "the dependent," the narrator remarks that "Few would have supposed that the calm lady sitting aristocratically at the toilet table, seeming scarcely conscious of Cytherea's presence in the room, even when greeting her, was the passionate creature who had asked for kisses a few hours before" (93). The positions of mistress and companion alter the relationship between Miss Aldclyffe and Cytherea, and although the reciprocal sympathy between them will continue to exist for some time—initially, the women "get more and more into one groove" once Cytherea is promoted to companion—it will ultimately be perverted as the mistress's interrupted desire must now be rerouted. Although Miss Aldclyffe's desire for Cytherea will be, for the most part, obscured for the remainder of the novel, Hardy is careful to establish that it remains as an undercurrent in the relationship. In the same way, this eroticism exists as an undercurrent in the Knapwater household; as the narrator remarks, "It was perceived by the servants of the House, that some secret bond of connexion existed between Miss Aldclyffe and her companion. But they were woman and woman, not woman and man, the facts were ethereal and refined, and so they could not be worked up into a taking story. Whether, as critics dispute, a supernatural machinery be necessary to an epic or

no, a carnal plot is decidedly necessary to a scandal" (117). In keeping with the work of Marcus and others, erotic energy between two women is not enough to create a scandal, but Hardy's aside makes it clear that the homoerotic charge in the mistress's relationship with her companion is, and remains, apparent to the other inhabitants at Knapwater even after it is no longer the focus of the narrative.

ii. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

Fifteen years later, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy establishes a similar mistress-companion dynamic when Lucetta Templeman hires Elizabeth Jane as her companion. In this novel, however, the unwieldy desire produced by the employment relationship moves in the opposite direction: from companion to mistress. Struggling under the harsh treatment of Michael Henchard, the man she believes is her father, Elizabeth Jane is desperate to find a new home. When she meets a mysterious woman (Lucetta) in the Casterbridge graveyard, Elizabeth Jane is instantly captivated by the physical—and, she assumes, emotional—likeness between them. Elizabeth Jane wonders at the way in which "The personage was in mourning like herself, was about her age and size, and might have been her wraith or double, but for the fact that it was a lady much more beautifully dressed than she" (204-5). Elizabeth Jane feels an instantaneous connection with this stranger and, again, for Hardy the basis of likeness breeds both sympathy and erotic desire. Elizabeth Jane's "eyes were arrested by the artistic perfection of the lady's appearance. […] It was a revelation to Elizabeth that human beings could reach this stage of external development—she had never suspected it. She felt all the freshness and grace to be stolen from herself on the instant by the

neighborhood of such a stranger." Despite the loss Elizabeth Jane feels in her own person at the sight of this woman, she is not "envious;" instead, "she allowed herself the pleasure of feeling fascinated. […] She returned homeward, musing on what she had seen, as she might have mused on a rainbow or the Northern Lights, a rare butterfly or a cameo" (205). Hardy depicts Elizabeth Jane as captivated as a lover would be at the first sight of his beloved.

In *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, and elsewhere throughout his body of work, Freud notes that, as a rule, the patient's transference most often places the analyst in the role of father or mother. Elizabeth Jane goes to the cemetery to visit her mother's grave and finds a woman there who not only physically resembles herself (and therefore, we might imagine, her mother as well) but one who also appears to be in the same emotional state ("in mourning"). Elizabeth Jane's awe, "pleasure," and the uplifted state she experiences as she departs suggest that Hardy's heroine has transferred her desires and pain for her late mother onto this "wraith." In Lucetta, Elizabeth Jane sees not only a "double" for herself—for her own longing—but also a dazzling reincarnation of her mother. The future companion's erotic investment in Lucetta is intense from the very beginning, and later, when distressed under Henchard's ill-treatment, the only way Elizabeth Jane can endure it is to envision the lady from the graveyard and hope to see her again, just as a child might seek her mother for comfort.

When Elizabeth Jane returns to the churchyard the following day in the hopes of meeting the anonymous, mesmerizing woman again—for where else should she seek the figure of her maternal desire—she is not disappointed. This time the lady confronts her and the narrator informs us that "Elizabeth looked up at her as if inquiring to herself

whether there should be confidence. The lady's manner was so desirous, so anxious, that the girl decided there should be confidence" (207). Elizabeth Jane's immediate sympathy with and for this stranger leads her to confide her troubles to the lady, who in turn introduces herself as Lucetta Templeman and invites Elizabeth Jane to come live with her as companion. Lucetta, too, betrays some need for company and compassion when she admits, "'My house is so hollow and dismal that I want some living thing there'" (214-15). From this point, Elizabeth Jane becomes consumed by her interest in Lucetta: "her mind dwelt upon nothing else but the stranger." Unable to wait until the day she is scheduled to assume her companion position, Elizabeth Jane goes, "almost with a lover's feeling," to High Place Hall to enjoy "standing under the opposite archway merely to think that the charming lady was inside the confronting walls, and to wonder what she was doing. Her admiration for the architecture of that front was entirely on account of the inmate it screened" (210-11). Elizabeth Jane's fantasizing about her future mistress here foreshadows the narrative work the combination of her sympathy and desire for Lucetta will later allow her to accomplish.

Hardy's depiction of Elizabeth Jane's first day as companion to Lucetta resembles his portrayal of Miss Aldclyffe and Cytherea's early relationship. Lucetta takes her companion into her confidence immediately as she confesses, "I have only been mistress of a large house and a fortune for a little while" and then goes on to reveal her common, poor background (222). As the mistress continues sharing her history, she inadvertently goes too far; the narrator remarks, "Lucetta's tongue had for a moment outrun her discretion. She had arrived at Casterbridge as a Bath lady, and there were obvious reasons why Jersey should drop out of her life. But Elizabeth had tempted her to make

free, and a deliberately formed resolve had been broken" (223). Like Miss Aldclyffe, Lucetta cannot seem to help herself. Her intense need to unburden herself, coupled with Elizabeth Jane's powerfully sympathetic presence, lead her to "make free" with her deepest secrets within an hour of her new companion's arrival. Just as Cytherea "win[s]" Miss Aldclyffe, so too has Elizabeth Jane "tempted" Lucetta. As with Cytherea, Hardy is careful to establish that Elizabeth Jane's intentions are genuine; the narrator ensures the reader that Lucetta's secrets "could not, however, have been broken in safer company. Lucetta's words went no further" (223). As in *Desperate Remedies*, Hardy portrays the mistress-companion relationship as a sympathetic, confidential environment in which needs and desires—even those originating in past experiences—can be worked through.

Once Elizabeth Jane is officially installed in the mistress-companion relationship, Hardy abandons his direct treatment of her desire for Lucetta; however, through the narrator's frequent insinuations, such as Elizabeth Jane's approaching her mistress's reclining body with "obvious pleasure," we understand that Elizabeth Jane does not lose any of her admiration or desire for her mistress. Like Miss Aldclyffe's desire in *Desperate Remedies*, Elizabeth Jane's desire remains hidden, yet active, beneath the surface of the narrative action. In both novels, homoeroticism in the mistress-companion dynamic, activated by likeness and sympathy and fueled by transference, becomes a sub-text that must be dealt with both through the characters' actions and, especially in the case of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, through the narrative structure itself. For Hardy, Miss Aldclyffe's desire for her companion and Elizabeth Jane's desire for her mistress are simultaneously created and problematized by the employer/employee relationship. In each novel, this desire must be translated into a heterosexual liaison that is either

orchestrated (Miss Aldclyffe) or condoned (Elizabeth Jane) by the character whose homoeroticism cannot exist in the unequal power dynamics established by the employment relationship.

III. "'Tis a conspiracy": Rerouting Homoerotic Desire into Heterosexual Marriage

Erotic and employment relationships are both complex sites of exchange in which power dynamics play an integral role. In the Victorian heterosexual relationship, particularly in marriage, there are definitive inequalities in power based on cultural conceptions of gender which can lead to the hindrance of reciprocity. The economic is also an important consideration in relations between men and women, especially between husband and wife, as the various debates over women's right to property in the period exemplify. But, Victorians felt the bond between two women should ideally be, and generally considered it to be, free of the fetters of more masculine, public concerns like power and money. However, as Hardy reveals in *Desperate Remedies* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, when the employment affiliation imposes upon what is otherwise a naturally-formed female friendship, the relationship begins to echo the problematic power dynamics of the heterosexual marriage as the sympathetic/erotic and employment economies interfere with one another, destroying reciprocity and thereby intensifying the vulnerability of the companion/employee.

In *Desperate Remedies*, the mistress's mobile libidinal desires for her companion, her companion's late father, and her son Aeneas Manston lead her to use her position to destroy Cytherea's previously established courtship plot with Edward Springrove and to create a new one. Displacing any substantial regard for her companion's feelings, Miss

Aldclyffe's homoerotic desire for her companion—borne of her thwarted, repressed desire for Ambrose—and her incestuous desire for her son drive her to devise a scheme that will satiate her needs by producing a marriage between Manston and Cytherea. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Lucetta uses the authority of her position as mistress to steal Donald Farfrae from Elizabeth Jane, who then accepts this match as a substitute for her own desire for her mistress. In both novels, the eroticism rooted in the mistress-companion dyad is detoured into a heterosexual marriage that represents a surrogate for the unruly desire. Just as marriage appears parallel to the mistress-companion employment relationship—in that both represent dynamics in which the reciprocity of sympathy and consideration is necessary to the well-being of both parties and yet definitive inequalities in power hinder that reciprocity—marriage also becomes a substitute for it.[12]

i. *Desperate Remedies*

In *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Freud describes the erratic nature of transference:

[12] Throughout both novels Hardy repeatedly draws parallels between the employment/economic realm and marriage. As Jane Thomas notes, "Because of Springrove's secret engagement to Adelaide Hinton, Cytherea is forced to seek empowerment through employment rather than marriage. However, even at this level her only option remains one of genteel domestic labour—the achievement of the means of subsistence (and substantiation) by servicing the desires of someone more powerful than herself" (60). When Cytherea receives Miss Aldclyffe's initial response to her ad, the letter from her future mistress arrives simultaneously with a love letter from Edward—as Cytherea contemplates them both together, Hardy emphasizes the similarity between the roles of companion and wife. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy consistently juxtaposes the marketplace and details of specific employer-employee relationships with discussions of marriage.

> In the first place there is the development of an affectionate inclination, clearly revealing the signs of its origin in sexual desire which becomes so strong as to awaken an inner resistance against it. Secondly, there are the hostile instead of tender impulses. The hostile feelings generally appear later than the affectionate impulses or succeed them. When they occur simultaneously they exemplify the ambivalence of emotions which exist in most of the intimate relations between all persons. The hostile feelings connote an emotional attachment just as do the affectionate impulses, just as defiance signifies dependence as well as does obedience, although the activities they call out are opposed. (383)

The ambivalence Freud describes is apparent in Miss Aldclyffe's vexed relationship with Cytherea as well. While the transference of her emotions for Ambrose onto Cytherea causes Miss Aldclyffe to experience an intense desire for her companion, it also produces hostile action in the mistress as she must find some way of dealing with the return of her repressed passion and pain. As Freud notes, transference can cause a patient to neglect his or her responsibilities: "When this leaning attains a certain intensity, all interest for the actual situation of the treatment is lost, together with every sense of the responsibility which was assumed by undertaking it" (*General Introduction* 251-2). Distracted and consumed by the reemergence of her own troubled passions, Miss Aldclyffe disregards her responsibilities as employer—her ethical obligation to provide her employee with reciprocal protection, consideration, and sympathy. Miss Aldclyffe is instead driven to manage her companion as a pawn for satisfying her own libidinal drives.

Miss Aldclyffe's power in the employment dynamic invests her with the means to manipulate her dependent, helpless employee in this way. As Freud notes, painful past experiences are played out again in transference: "they are repeated, under pressure of compulsion" and "each fresh repetition seems to strengthen the mastery they are in search of" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 23, 42). In her campaign to marry Cytherea to Manston, Miss Aldclyffe, like Freud's famous patient Dora, crafts a "new edition or

facsimile of the tendencies and phantasies which are aroused and made conscious" through transference; for Miss Aldclyffe, as for Dora and so many other psychoanalytic patients, "a whole series of psychological experiences are revived, not as belonging to the past, but as applying to the person of the physician [or, in this case, the companion] at the present moment" (106). Through her compulsion to repeat and revise her own past with Ambrose through Cytherea and Manston, Miss Aldclyffe seeks mastery and closure over her own past.

Hardy establishes Miss Aldclyffe as a "scheme[r]," but initially one who, although she acts out of an unquenchable urge to transfer her erotic investments in both her companion and her son into a union between them, does not wish to destroy the girl she loves so much. Miss Aldclyffe does not need to convince Manston, who none of the other characters know is her son, to consider Cytherea as a second wife after the alleged death of his first; instead, he approaches her. Despite Miss Aldclyffe's assertion that she supports her son in his suit, Manston imperiously implies that Miss Aldclyffe must interfere to ensure that Edward Springrove does not break off his betrothal with Adelaide Hinton to marry Cytherea. Shocked by his manner, Miss Aldclyffe replies, "'That is your affair, not mine. Though my wish has been to see her *your* wife, I can't do anything dishonourable to bring about such a result'" (195). In this moment, Miss Aldclyffe reveals, both to her son and to the reader, that in bringing Manston to Knapwater as her steward she planned for him to marry her beloved companion, but she is as yet unwilling to achieve her object by any "dishonourable" means. When Manston describes his plan to make Cytherea his own—he wants Miss Aldclyffe to use her position as the employer of Edward Springrove's father to ensure that Edward marries Adelaide and then use her

status as Cytherea's mistress to convince her to accept his own proposal—Miss Aldclyffe objects more firmly: "'I won't do it— 'Tis a conspiracy'" (196). The mistress's sympathy for Cytherea's feelings is still a strong influence over her, even in the face of her own desires. As Manston implies that he will reveal the secret of his parentage to the community, disgracing his mother, Miss Aldclyffe laments, "'How can you turn upon me so when I schemed to get you here—schemed that you might win her till I found you were married. O, how can you! O!...O!'" (195). Here, and throughout the rest of the novel, Miss Aldclyffe reiterates that the marriage in question was her own idea originally. She wants control over the matter and so stakes her prior claim in repeated efforts to convince Manston to follow her lead.

When Manston changes his approach, telling his mother, "I don't threaten now, I implore," Miss Aldclyffe is unable to deny her son any longer; she agrees to blackmail the Springroves by hinting that they will be liable to her for the damages (loss of property) caused by the fire at the inn that allegedly killed Manston's first wife unless Edward upholds his engagement to Adelaide. Hardy thus provides two other motives for the manipulative, exploitative path Miss Aldclyffe is about to embark upon in effecting a marriage between her son and Cytherea. The mistress must negotiate not only her own erotic desires, but also a maternal loyalty to her son as well as her own self-preservation in the face of Manston's threats.[13] Miss Aldclyffe is trapped between her obligations to Cytherea as an employer, her obligations to Manston as a mother, and her instinct to protect herself. These conflicting commitments work to efface the motivation that lies at

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[13] Gayla R. Steel argues that Manston's "tyranny" "mitigates his mother's evil tendencies in the reader's mind" (24), just as Jekel points out that Miss Aldclyffe "retains far more authorial approval than does Aeneas Manston, though both characters help to bring about the doom of the heroine" (32).

the root of her scheme in the narrative: her intense but frustrated desire for Cytherea/Ambrose.[14]

In her confrontation with Edward, Miss Aldclyffe uses her intimate relationship with Cytherea as leverage to trick him. When she asserts, "I know Miss Graye particularly well, and her state of mind with regard to this matter," Miss Aldclyffe capitalizes on the social understanding that confidences are characteristic of the mistress-companion dynamic (205). She maintains that she knows Cytherea's mind and thus can attest that her companion no longer has feelings for Edward but has transferred her affections to Manston. As proof, Miss Aldclyffe shows Edward a letter Cytherea had written to Manston in her dismay after discovering Edward's betrothal to Adelaide. Her scheme is successful; as Edward considers the letter, he thinks, "Miss Aldclyffe had shown herself desperately concerned in the whole matter [. . .] Taken in connection with her apparent interest in, if not love for, Cytherea, her eagerness, too, could only be accounted for on the ground that Cytherea indeed loved the steward" (211). Ignorant of the true connection between Miss Aldclyffe and Manston, Edward cannot see beyond the strong attachment he knows exists between the mistress and her companion. In this scene, Miss Aldclyffe successfully manipulates the mistress-companion relationship

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[14] Lawrence O. Jones also recognizes that the "substitute gratification" Miss Aldclyffe gains from her plans to marry Cytherea to Manston involves her feelings for her companion's father. Jones writes, "Because of a previous illicit affair with her cousin, she was socially ineligible to marry Ambrose Graye, the man she loved. The marriage of her illegitimate son to Graye's daughter becomes her [. . .] means of symbolically satisfying her love." Thus, Jones reads Miss Aldclyffe as "a victim of her own passions and the social system" (39).

itself—the cultural expectations that intimacy and sympathy exist there—to effect her malicious designs.[15]

Miss Aldclyffe's "next move" is to begin convincing Cytherea to consider Manston as a superior replacement for Edward. When her brother Owen falls ill, Cytherea is helpless to offer him any real support. Seeing an opportunity, Miss Aldclyffe takes advantage of Cytherea's dependence upon her: "Think how you might benefit your sick brother if you were Mrs. Manston. You will please me *very much* by giving him some encouragement. You understand me, dear? […] On your promising that you will accept him some time this year, I will take especial care of your brother. You are listening, Cytherea?" (225). Having already derailed Cytherea's relationship with Edward through blackmail, Miss Aldclyffe now uses the technique on the companion herself. Although her initial presentation of the ultimatum is somewhat subtle, the mistress repeatedly pauses to ensure that Cytherea understands her meaning. Unable to

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[15] Ian Ousby emphasizes that Miss Aldclyffe's actions in this scene go far beyond "the common enough situation in sensation novels, where dominating viragos" threaten "star-crossed lovers." Ousby asserts that in *Desperate Remedies*, "the episode becomes an essay on the abuse of power by Miss Aldclyffe and her kind; the gentry are presented not with skeptical detachment but with open disapproval" (221). He continues, "Hardy's narrative stresses that Knapwater is the administrative centre of the working community, and so creates a perspective that makes Miss Aldclyffe's grand passion seem mere social irresponsibility" (222). At the same time, Hardy is careful to show that Miss Aldclyffe has not wholly abandoned her sympathy for her companion. The narrator remarks that the "meanness" of her manipulation of Edward, and the consequences for Cytherea, "haunted her conscience to her dying hour" (205). As she watches her companion open the letter her lies provoked Edward to write—a letter that confirms his engagement to another woman and suggests the former lovers never see one another again—"The haughty mistress's soul sickened remorsefully within her, when she saw suddenly appear upon the speaking countenance of the young lady before her, a wan desolate look of agony" (216). Miss Aldclyffe is no Mrs. Wititterly; she is not insensitive to the effects of her cruel actions on her companion. Even so, she chooses her own fear and selfish plans over those of Cytherea and, regardless of her "remorse," the resulting doom for the companion is the same.

do anything for her brother on her own (Miss Aldclyffe could even withhold or delay payment of her allowance if she chose), Cytherea is now dependent on Miss Aldclyffe for her dying brother's needs as well as her own.

Cytherea's own lack of selfishness, her strong sympathy for her brother's suffering, weakens her resolve to refuse Manston's proposals. To accentuate the precarious state of her position, the narrator describes Cytherea's "desperate" alternatives in detail: "To combat the misfortune, there were two courses open: her becoming betrothed to Manston, or the sending Owen to the County Hospital" (228). "Thus terrified, driven into a corner, panting and fluttering about for some loophole of escape," Cytherea goes to Miss Aldclyffe for comfort and advice (228). But, the mistress betrays her companion again in this scene, terrifying her with horror stories about the gross malpractice characteristic of county hospitals. In spite of Cytherea's obvious distress, her mistress pressures her companion to accept her son's proposal—this time with more heartless manipulation than ever before: "'Why do you selfishly bar the clear, honourable, and only sisterly path which leads out of this difficulty? I cannot, on my conscience, countenance you: no, I cannot" (228). In a moment of despicable irony, Miss Aldclyffe accuses her companion of selfish and dishonorable obstinacy, twisting the situation to convince Cytherea it is she who is acting cruelly. In this "crisis," the companion "longed, till her soul seemed nigh to bursting, for her lost mother's return to earth, but for one minute, that she might have tender counsel to guide her through this, her great difficulty" (232). This moment recalls the bedroom scene in which Miss Aldclyffe promises to be like a "mamma" to Cytherea. This is the role the mistress should be enacting according to Victorian ideology and the role Hardy seems to believe

she would be enacting if it weren't for the disruption of the employment relationship and the way it degrades the female bond. Miss Aldclyffe's exploitation of her companion's dependency in these scenes represent a flagrant betrayal of her obligations as employer, and with no formal regulations far-reaching enough to protect her, Cytherea is totally at the mercy of her mistress's manipulative machinations.

Finally, "hemmed in and distressed," Cytherea resolves to marry Manston. If only for a moment, Hardy reminds the reader of Miss Aldclyffe's original and underlying motive for bringing the couple together when the narrator describes her preparations for the wedding: "Miss Aldclyffe had arranged that Cytherea should be married from Knapwater House, and not from her brother's lodgings at Creston, which was Cytherea's first idea. [. . .] The capricious old maid had latterly taken to the contemplation of the wedding with even greater warmth than had at first inspired her, and appeared determined to do everything in her power, consistent with dignity, to render the adjuncts of the ceremony pleasing and complete" (243). Mrs. Aldclyffe's determination to orchestrate the wedding preparations herself reflects her feelings of possession and desire for Cytherea (and her father) being actively transferred to Manston. Miss Aldclyffe insists that Cytherea be "given away" from her own home and according to her own plans. As to Cytherea, Hardy, like Dickens before him, emphasizes that it is her position as dependent employee that has caused all of her grief:

> "If I were rich," she thought, "I would give way to the luxury of being morbidly faithful to [Edward] for ever without his knowledge." But she considered; in the first place she was a homeless dependent; and what did practical wisdom tell her to do under such desperate circumstances? To provide herself with some place of refuge from poverty, and with means to aid her brother Owen. This was to be Mr. Manston's wife. She did not love him. But what was love without a home? Misery. What was a home without love? Alas,

not much; but still a kind of home (232).

Hardy's repetition of "home" in Cytherea's lament emphasizes the companion's defenseless position. Her mistress's home is not her own; employees within the domestic space have no home of their own, and the regulations of the public world cannot reach them. There is no escape; there are no resources or safeguards on which to depend. Cytherea's status as a companion lies at the root of her distress as it determines her assessment of her position as well as Miss Aldclyffe and Manston's perceptions of what can be done to her and why.[16]

Marrying Manston becomes more or less a direct order—one of the duties Cytherea's mistress expects her companion to obey. Hardy thus explores how the mistress-companion relationship tests the limits of slavery versus employment. Natural human rights are threatened as the boundaries of consent and reasonable expectation are blurred. Miss Aldclyffe asserts her control over her employee's body not once but twice. First, she forces her physical desires on Cytherea in the bedroom scene, but Cytherea, empowered by her mistress's transference and consequent dependence upon *her*, is eventually able to refuse those advances. However, when Miss Aldclyffe "corners" Cytherea into marrying her son, she not only manipulates her authority as "Master" but capitalizes on her companion's economic dependence as well. Hardy represents a mistress's ability to take control of her companion's body/name/identity, traversing any

[16] Interestingly, Hardy presents Manston's desire for Cytherea as also rooted in her position as companion, hinting that, were she not in such a dependent position, he would not have desired her so intently. For example, in one scene Manston considers Cytherea in terms of her status as companion: "A lady's dependent, a waif, a helpless thing entirely at the mercy of the world; yes, curse it; that is just why it is; that fact of her being so helpless against the blows of circumstances which renders her so deliciously sweet!" (150).

ethical boundary of consent. Because the employment relationship is situated within the domestic sphere and features two genteel women, there are no limits to the mistress's powers—no way to limit them. There is no recourse for the companion who is a dependent employee and who is also expected, by occupation, to be *sympathetic* to mistress's wishes. Here Miss Aldclyffe's commands exceed any social definition of reasonable expectation, and yet Cytherea has no alternative. Marrying Manston frees Cytherea from her obligations to her tyrannical mistress, but she is only moving from one position of subordination and dependence to another.

ii. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

In *Desperate Remedies*, Hardy reverses the tradition of the manipulative companion; the companion does not scheme within her relationship with her mistress to attain a husband and retire from the labor market; instead, her employer forces a husband upon her. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the development of transference in the mistress-companion dynamic also catalyzes a redirection of homoerotic desire into heterosexual marriage, but in Hardy's later novel it is the mistress who takes a husband. Elizabeth Jane's erotic investment in her mistress as a "new edition or facsimile" of her longing for her late mother in turn creates a kind of counter-transference in Lucetta, who becomes just as invested in their relationship as Elizabeth Jane. By pursuing Elizabeth Jane's suitor, Donald Farfrae, Lucetta reroutes this reciprocal desire and attachment—problematic because of the power dynamics in the employment relation—into another, more socially acceptable relationship just as fraught with inequalities in power:

marriage. Elizabeth Jane condones this surrogate and not only participates in it, but, along with Hardy, participates in authoring it as well.

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Lucetta's manipulation of Elizabeth Jane begins before the companion has even entered her home. Michael Henchard's former lover, Lucetta has come to Casterbridge to make herself available to Henchard now that his first wife, Susan, has died. When Lucetta meets Elizabeth Jane in the cemetery, she devises a plan which she thinks will draw Henchard closer to her. In a letter to Henchard, Lucetta writes: "You probably are aware of my arrangement with your daughter, and have doubtless laughed at the little—what shall I call it?—practical joke (in all affection) of my getting her to live with me." For this mistress, hiring her companion is a flirtatious "joke" between two lovers, a ploy to bring them together. As she continues, "Do you see, Michael, partly why I have done it?—why, to give you an excuse for coming here as if to visit *her*, and thus to form my acquaintance naturally," Lucetta is clear that she has already begun to use Elizabeth Jane as a pawn in her own game to obtain a husband (220).

In this same letter, Lucetta does remark what "a dear, good girl" Elizabeth Jane is. Despite her original intentions, Lucetta quickly becomes attached to her companion and the services she so dutifully supplies for her—company, attention, sympathy. When Lucetta learns, to her dismay, that Elizabeth-Jane's location "is, of all places, the one [Henchard] will avoid," the mistress's reaction to this revelation solidifies the reader's understanding of her true motives behind hiring her companion: "Lucetta looked blank, twitched up her lovely eyebrows and lips, and burst into hysterical sobs. Here was a disaster—her ingenious scheme completely stultified" (226). Lucetta momentarily

considers dismissing her companion, but she hesitates because, as she tells Elizabeth Jane, "'I like your company much!'" (226). Elizabeth Jane's adept fulfillment of the companion's function, no doubt made even more exceptional by the intense affection resulting from her transference, has quickly superseded Lucetta's initial intent in hiring her. The mistress cannot bear to part with her companion now. Instead, Lucetta decides to send Elizabeth Jane out on errands whenever Henchard is expected.

During Elizabeth Jane's absence, the man who visits Lucetta is not Henchard but Elizabeth Jane's own one-time suitor Donald Farfrae. Farfrae arrives at High Place to recommence his courtship of Henchard's daughter; when he meets Lucetta, he informs her, "I came and I inquired for Miss Henchard." Lucetta's attraction to her companion's love interest is both immediate and immediately manipulative, though perhaps not intentionally malign. As she tells her guest to take a seat as she is expecting her companion back "directly," the narrator informs us: "Now this was not strictly true; but that something about the young man—that hyperborean crispness, stridency, and charm, as of a well-braced musical instrument, […] made his unexpected presence here attractive to Lucetta." What the narrative does not make explicit, however, is the possibility that Lucetta instantly desires Farfrae because of his connection to Elizabeth Jane, but I suggest this also contributes to her reaction.[17]

The narrator continues his description of the scene with a hint of foreshadowing: "He hesitated, looked at the chair, thought there was no danger in it (though there was),

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[17] Hardy maintains a complex, often contradictory ambiguity regarding Lucetta's knowledge of her companion's past relationship with Farfrae throughout the novel. In this scene, for example, we see Farfrae announce that he has come to call on Elizabeth Jane, yet Hardy does not accuse Lucetta here or elsewhere of *consciously* stealing her employee's beau. I will take up this ambiguity in more detail later in this section.

and sat down" (229). In addition to the parenthetical aside, Hardy's language—the emphasis placed on Farfrae's consideration of the chair and the tone of finality in "and sat down"—indicates that this moment is a turning point in the relationships of the novel's four central characters: Lucetta, Elizabeth Jane, Farfrae, and Henchard. The new acquaintances' first meeting is full of significant, somewhat ominous, comments like these. Hardy interweaves Lucetta and Farfrae's dialogue with the narrator's dramatic assessment of the alternative plot they are presently setting in motion—a plot that will serve as a detour for the mistress's and companion's desires. When the narrator summarizes the pair's instant attraction with the simple statement, "Thus the two," he gestures to a sense of inevitability in this episode. Each is captivated by the other but, "Why was this? They could not have told" (235). In this novel, it is not so much the characters themselves that displace the problematic homoeroticism of the female employment bond, but some manifestation of fate that is actually the narrative structure itself. In other words, Farfrae does not become Lucetta's rather than Elizabeth Jane's suitor by any active scheming by the companion or the mistress. It is a displacement that simply occurs—"thus the two"—although Elizabeth Jane will later accept the new relationship, relocating her own desire for Lucetta (and Farfrae) onto their liaison.

As he exits, Farfrae's parting words to Lucetta are far more romantic than anything he has said to Elizabeth Jane: "look or not, I will see you in my thoughts" (235). In fact, the narrator reveals that, as Farfrae is ushered out of High-Place Hall, "it [had] entirely escaped him that he had called to see Elizabeth" (235). His meeting with Lucetta has set him on a new trajectory and Farfrae is unable even to remember the original narrative. Lucetta's heart, the narrator reveals, "longed for some ark into which

it could fly and be at rest. Rough or smooth she did not care so long as it was warm" (235). Hardy does not depict Lucetta's interest in Farfrae, then, as malicious jealousy or cruelty but as selfish loneliness coupled with her inability to take into account the feelings of another, Elizabeth Jane. Yet, when Elizabeth Jane returns home, "sweetly unconscious of the turn in the tide, Lucetta went up to her, and said quite sincerely—'I'm so glad you've come. You'll live with me a long time, won't you?'" (236). Hardy is again ambiguous as to the mistress's motives here; it is unclear if Lucetta's object in retaining her companion arises out of a newfound lack of concern regarding Henchard or her wish to keep Elizabeth Jane as an initial excuse for Farfrae's visits. Lucetta's original plotting to gain Henchard entrée into her house suggests the latter—her plan is the same, but the target has changed.

On the surface, Lucetta appears a cruel, manipulative mistress unable to reciprocate the sympathy and consideration her companion affords her. However, an alternative subtext that emerges in Lucetta's fervent desire for her companion to remain, even in the face of losing her lover to her mistress, is the possibility of a kind of counter-transference. Lucetta's own unconscious presumptions and fantasies in response to Elizabeth Jane's lead her to desire Farfrae as an affiliated substitute for the companion but also as a kind of replacement father figure for Elizabeth Jane. In this reading, Lucetta takes Farfrae as a more suitable erotic replacement for her companion, but in doing so, also acts to create an alternative family scene in which she may in fact serve as Elizabeth Jane's mother. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy's narrative structure tries to act as a kind of cure to the ills represented in *Desperate Remedies*. Using the power of her

mistress position, Lucetta attempts to fulfill her own transferential desires as well as those of her companion.

As Farfrae becomes a frequent visitor at High-Place, it does not take Elizabeth Jane long to detect the attraction between her mistress and her former suitor. When Farfrae comes, and treats Elizabeth Jane as if he does not know her, the narrator notes that "Susan Henchard's daughter bore up against the frosty ache of the treatment, as she had borne up under worse things, and contrived as soon as possible to get out of the inharmonious room without being missed" (246). Rather than mourn the loss of Farfrae, Elizabeth Jane concedes him to Lucetta without hesitation and even initially removes herself from the courtship scene to make room for the relationship to blossom. Hardy's use of the phrase "Susan Henchard's daughter" to represent Elizabeth Jane here also highlights the companion's transference and the subtle familial dynamic being established by the narrative here. Significantly, Elizabeth Jane begins to focus her attention even more intently on her mistress in these scenes: "The recounter with Farfrae and his bearing towards Lucetta had made the reflective Elizabeth more observant of her brilliant and amiable companion" (242). Rather than turn away from her mistress in hurt or envy, Elizabeth Jane becomes more fixated on Lucetta, suggesting that she views, and is willing to accept, the couple's relationship as a replacement for her own feelings for each of them.

The companion begins to read her mistress with the expert eyes of one who can fully sympathize with the other woman's emotions—having felt them, for the same man, herself. As in Eve Sedgwick's formulation of the male homosocial triangle, Lucetta's new interest in Farfrae solidifies the two women's relationship—and the reciprocal desire

between them—rather than hinder it. The narrator describes how, one morning, "when her eyes met Lucetta's as the latter was going out, she somehow knew that Miss Templeman was nourishing a hope of seeing the attractive Scotchman. The fact was printed large all over Lucetta's cheeks and eyes to anyone who could read her as Elizabeth-Jane was beginning to do" (242). Like Rosa Dartle before her, Elizabeth Jane adroitly reads and interprets her employer, temporarily assuming a narrator-like role as she depicts a scene which she does not literally witness in person. Elizabeth Jane's narrative intervention, however, arises out of her genuine sympathy with and desire for her mistress as well as her mistress's common desire for herself and for Farfrae, rather than from any malicious intent like Rosa's.

As she sits at home, waiting for her mistress's return:

> A seer's spirit took possession of Elizabeth, impelling her to sit down by the fire and divine events so surely from data already her own that they could be held as witnessed. She followed Lucetta thus mentally —saw her encounter Donald somewhere as if by chance—saw him wear his special look when meeting women, with an added intensity because this one was Lucetta. She depicted his impassioned manner; beheld the indecision of both between their loathness to separate and their desire not to be observed; depicted their shaking of hands; how they probably parted with frigidity in their general contour and movements, only in the smaller features showing the spark of passion, thus invisible to all but themselves. This discerning silent witch had not done thinking of these things when Lucetta came noiselessly behind her and made her start. It was all true as she had pictured—she could have sworn it. (243)

I read this scene as equally a product of Elizabeth Jane's sympathy with her mistress and her desire for both Lucetta and Farfrae. Like a "seer" or "witch," she role-plays the parts of both her former lover and the site of her current homoerotic longing as they commune elsewhere without her; her history with Farfrae and her present intimacy with Lucetta suggest that Elizabeth Jane imagines herself as a substitute for either one in this scene she

"mentally saw." Envisioning the exchange as if she were not only present but a part of the scene, Elizabeth Jane condones the burgeoning relationship as a suitable surrogate for her own investments in each figure. The companion's "depict[ion]" is not embittered but fascinated and full of a subdued "passion" that indicates her full participation in the interaction between the new couple. As in *Desperate Remedies*, the companion loses control of her own action in the narrative due to the desire-driven manipulations of her more powerful mistress; however, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Elizabeth Jane circumvents her dependent, powerless position within the narrative by becoming an active participant in the narration itself.

Shortly thereafter, when Henchard, Farfrae, Lucetta, and Elizabeth Jane are gathered for dinner at High Place Hall, Hardy uses biblical imagery to further elucidate the companion's relationship to the proxy liaison between Lucetta and Farfrae. The narrator describes how Henchard and Farfrae "sat stiffly side by side at the darkening table, like some Tuscan painting of the two disciples supping at Emmaus. Lucetta, forming the third and haloed figure, was opposite them; Elizabeth-Jane, being out of the game, and out of the group, could observe all from afar, like the evangelist who had to write it down" (254). In this scene, Hardy portrays the two men as disciples, basking in the "haloed" light of Lucetta as the eroticized Christ figure. Elizabeth Jane is "out of the group," yet only in the sense that she is the privileged observer, sympathetic to each of her subjects. Indeed, Hardy grants the companion the status of author here.[18] As the

[18] Several critics have argued that Elizabeth Jane serves as Hardy's representative in the novel. Pamela Jekel, for example, remarks, "Elizabeth-Jane comes closest to all the characters in the novel to having the clearest vision, to sharing her author's view of reality. Quiet and unobtrusive though she seems, Elizabeth-Jane represents a real pivotal point for all the characters, a sort of 'touchstone'" (131-2).

"evangelist," Elizabeth Jane is once again in an authoritative "depicting" role, figuratively orchestrating and recording the heterosexual dynamics of those she herself has intense erotic and/or sympathetic attachments to. Unlike Miss Aldclyffe's, Elizabeth Jane's transference-love does not turn hostile; instead, she resembles what Freud describes when he writes that "Some women understand how to sublimate the transference, how to modify it until it attains a kind of fitness for existence (*A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* 382). In substitution, Elizabeth Jane appears to find a "modif[ication]" that she is willing to accept as an outlet for her desires.

But what of Lucetta's responsibility as a mistress to reciprocate the sympathy and consideration Elizabeth Jane provides for her? Is the displacement of Elizabeth Jane's desires through Lucetta's marriage to Farfrae really beneficial to the companion, or like Cytherea, is it a situation she simply has no choice but to accept in her dependent position? After all, in stealing Farfrae, Lucetta not only robs Elizabeth Jane of the man she loves, she also appropriates her only chance of retiring from the labor market into marriage and motherhood. But throughout the novel, Hardy persists in effacing the reader's understanding of the extent to which Lucetta's actions are a betrayal of her companion; likewise, Lucetta's intentionality in her behavior is also ambiguous. In some moments, Hardy explicitly portrays the mistress as oblivious to the fact that she has stolen Elizabeth Jane's suitor, but these moments are undermined by several passages which imply Lucetta is aware that Farfrae once all but belonged to Elizabeth Jane and that she wants to include the companion in their relationship.

As early as Farfrae's second visit, Hardy hints that Lucetta knows she is betraying her companion. When Farfrae ignores Elizabeth Jane, focusing all of his attention on her

mistress, Lucetta's actions in the scene indicate that she is aware of this change and experiences some degree of remorse for it: "Lucetta had persisted in dragging [Elizabeth Jane] into the circle; but she had remained like an awkward third point which that circle would not touch" (246). Lucetta's "persist[ence]" simultaneously suggests that she wants to compensate for stealing Farfrae by including Elizabeth Jane but also that she clearly views her companion as an important part of this courtship. However, the companion cannot *literally* participate—she cannot be an explicit "third point" in a heterosexual coupling. While Elizabeth Jane's outsider status allows her the empowered stance of authorship already discussed, this passage also reads like a warning that Lucetta and Farfrae's relationship will not succeed as a suitable surrogate for the mistress and companion's complex libidinal investments. As if recognizing this possibility, although she proceeds in her relationship with Farfrae anyway, we learn that Lucetta "was very kind towards Elizabeth that day" (241).

Later in the novel the narrator will contradict the implications of Lucetta's actions in this and other scenes wherein she appears aware that she has betrayed and taken advantage of her power over Elizabeth Jane. After she and Farfrae are secretly married outside of Casterbridge, Lucetta tells her new husband that she must inform her companion of her new status, but it is unclear whether she is eager to share her good fortune with her trusted friend or nervous to reveal that Elizabeth Jane's fate with regards to herself and Farfrae has now been sealed: "'There is only one thing I have not done; and yet it is important. […] That is, broken the news of our marriage to my dear Elizabeth-Jane" (286). Whether or not she understands the consequences of her choices for her companion, Lucetta reasserts that she does not intend to let Elizabeth Jane go now

that she has married her former suitor. She asks Farfrae, “Donald, you don’t mind her living on with me just the same as before? She is so quiet and unassuming” (287). When Farfrae, obviously aware of his history with Henchard’s daughter, wonders if Elizabeth Jane would desire to stay on in the household, Lucetta does not hesitate: “I am sure she would like to. Besides, poor thing, she has no other home” (287). Again, Lucetta’s desire to include Elizabeth Jane in this new family scene she has constructed both for her self—and, I have argued, through counter-transference—for her companion as well indicates that she views her marriage to Farfrae as a kind of solidification or surrogate for her investments in Elizabeth Jane. Her confidence that Elizabeth Jane should desire to remain suggests Lucetta’s belief that her companion is indeed an intentional and amenable part of this heterosexual relationship. And yet, Hardy has Lucetta subtly reveal her power as mistress: Elizabeth Jane, she believes, has little choice, “she has no other home.” Like Cytherea before her, Elizabeth Jane appears, in her dependent position as companion, to have no option but to accept her mistress’s redirection of their desires and to participate in the familial scene Lucetta has created.[19] In this moment, Hardy seems to assert, although it is hardly believable, that Lucetta was and has remained unaware of her companion’s feelings for her new husband: “Farfrae looked at her and saw that she did not suspect the secret of her more reserved friend. He liked her all the better for her blindness” (287). Her new husband finds her oblivious self-absorption charming, but I would argue that, for Hardy, even if Lucetta is ignorant regarding the repercussions of her

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[19] Due to the similar power dynamics in the analyst/analysand dynamic, Freud emphasizes throughout his work that the physician must be wary of and avoid counter-transference as any action taken by the physician under the influence of counter-transference could only be taking advantage of the patient’s inevitable transference-love. (Observations on Transference-Love 379).

actions on her companion, her insensibility, echoing that of Dickens's Mrs. Wititterly, makes her guilty of a failure to uphold the reciprocity she owes Elizabeth Jane as her mistress.

When Lucetta does reveal her marriage to Elizabeth Jane, the companion is clearly taken aback although she manages to control her reaction: Elizabeth Jane "cork[s] up the turmoil of her feeling with grand control" (290). Her "turmoil" has many potential and contradictory causes: her lingering feelings for Farfrae, her passionate distaste for impropriety (the "proper" thing for Lucetta to have done would have been to marry Henchard), her loss of Lucetta, and perhaps, her disappointment at not having witnessed the marriage as a way of gratifying her displaced homoerotic and heterosexual desires. Ultimately, the consequence of the marriage is Elizabeth Jane's removal from her mistress's home: "Now the instant decision of Susan Henchard's daughter was to dwell in that house no more. Apart from her estimate of the propriety of Lucetta's conduct, Farfrae had been so nearly her avowed lover that she felt she could not abide there" (290). Unlike Lucetta, who cannot imagine the possibility of her companion's departure, Elizabeth Jane feels that, once this transfer of her desire has been accomplished by the narrative, she can no longer remain as Lucetta's companion. She must step aside, and step aside is exactly what Elizabeth Jane does. Although she leaves High Place Hall, she only moves as far as across the street, taking an apartment from which she can watch Lucetta and Farfrae from her window. Thus, just as in the "seer" scene in which she partakes in (and narratively creates) Lucetta and Farfrae's relationship from afar, Elizabeth Jane remains a, now passive, participant in the new marriage.

IV. Hardy's Desperate Remedies

In *Desperate Remedies* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy uses the mistress-companion relationship to show how even culturally idealized bonds between women are not free from the baser influences of the public sphere. Yet, Hardy also explores the problematic limits of this influence; by representing his mistresses' flagrant abuse of the power they possess over their dependent companions, Hardy's novels scrutinize employment relations in the period to reveal the employee's vulnerability when ethical codes of obligation and reciprocity are hindered by the economic considerations inherent in the employer-employee relationship. In particular, Hardy addresses employment relations—situated within the domestic space and between two women—that exist beyond the reach of government regulations and traditional codes of paternalism.

Ultimately, both of Hardy's mistresses die, and his companions are reunited with their original love interests. However, Hardy implies that the damage done by the late mistresses cannot be wholly undone—the "happy" denouements of Cytherea and Elizabeth Jane are tainted by what came before. In contrast, the relationships between the mistress-companion dyads are resolved by a reestablishment of intimacy and sympathy once transference has been worked through and the employment relationship has been removed. Hardy thus proves himself far more invested in the female bond than in the traditional novelistic marriage conclusion.

Following Cytherea's wedding to Manston, the former companion learns of her mistress's treachery and shortly thereafter Manston is found guilty of his first wife's

murder and commits suicide in prison.[20] When, after Manston's death, Cytherea receives a letter informing her that Miss Aldclyffe is ill and wishes to see her, Cytherea goes to her immediately and just as quickly shows that she still sympathizes with her former mistress, despite her betrayal (395). As Miss Aldclyffe exclaims, "'Cytherea—O Cytherea, can you forgive me!,'" Cytherea promises that she does forgive her, "Not in a hasty impulse that is revoked when coolness comes, but deliberately and sincerely" (396). Cytherea's forgiveness reinforces Hardy's representation of her as an ideal companion figure; her sympathy for this manipulative woman surmounts both the disruption and betrayal caused by the employment relationship. The two women embrace: "Tears streamed down from Miss Aldclyffe's eyes, and mingled with those of her young companion, who could not restrain hers for sympathy. Expressions of strong attachment, interrupted by emotion, burst again and again from the broken-spirited woman" (396). As their tears blend together in a manner that is at once highly sentimental as well as erotic, Hardy represents a moment of union between the two women. The power

[20] Immediately following Cytherea's marriage to Manston, Edward Springrove and Owen Graye begin to suspect that Manston's first wife is still alive. Eventually, the characters discover that Manston murdered his wife, and after suspicions arose surrounding her death, causing him to lose Cytherea, hired an imposter to pose as the first Mrs. Manston. During her ordeal concerning the fate of Manston's first wife, Cytherea learns that Miss Aldclyffe had no knowledge of her son's crimes and has been suffering greatly on her behalf. While living with her brother while the mystery of Manston's first wife is investigated, Cytherea tells Owen that Miss Aldclyffe " loves me now. Mrs. Morris is her letter said that Miss Aldclyffe prayed for me—yes, she heard her praying for me, and crying. Miss Aldclyffe did not mind an old friend like Mrs. Morris knowing it, either. Yet in opposition to this, notice her dead silence and inaction throughout this proceeding" (304). Likewise, when the local clergyman, Raunham, interviews the mistress of Knapwater on the Graye's behalf, he discovers that Cytherea, "was still beloved by this solitary woman. Miss Aldclyffe had made several private inquiries concerning her old companion, and there was ever a sadness in her tone when the young lady's name was mentioned, which showed that from whatever cause the elder Cytherea's renunciation of her favourite and namesake proceeded. It was not from indifference to her fate" (357).

dynamics between them have altered dramatically, perhaps even placing the ex-companion in a position superior to her former mistress in that Cytherea is the one responsible for forgiving and thereby agreeing to continue the relationship now that the employment dynamic has been removed. Miss Aldclyffe goes on to admit her true relationship to Manston and the fact that Cytherea's marriage to Manston "'was a sweet dream to me,'" begging her lost companion, "'Pity me—O Pity me! To die unloved is more than I can bear!'" (398). With the employment relation disbanded and neither a man nor the conventions of the novel to stand between them, Miss Aldclyffe appears to finally see Cytherea for who she is: a loyal and sympathetic friend, not a representative of her repressed desires for Ambrose.

In the final moments of Miss Aldclyffe's life, Hardy grants the mistress her wish as he depicts Miss Aldclyffe and Cytherea in supernatural communion. That night, Cytherea has a dream: "It was about four o'clock in the morning when Cytherea, though most probably dreaming, seemed to awake,—and instantly was transfixed by a sort of spell, that had in it more of awe than of affright. At the foot of her bed, looking her in the face with an expression of entreaty beyond the power of words to portray, was the form of Miss Aldclyffe—wan and distinct. No motion was perceptible in her; but longing—earnest longing—was written in every feature" (399). This moment echoes the original bedroom scene in which Cytherea balked against Miss Aldclyffe's advances; this time, as Cytherea speaks aloud, "'I would have remained with you,—why would you not allow me to!,'" it is clear that Cytherea is now an independent and willing participant in the intimate bond with her former mistress. Later that morning, Cytherea discovers that her mistress died at exactly ten minutes past four o'clock (398). Thus the women's

relationship culminates in a moment of reciprocal desire and emotional consummation.

Although the reunion between Elizabeth Jane and Lucetta is not as dramatic or intense as that of Miss Aldclyffe and Cytherea, it is worth noting that Elizabeth Jane also holds no grudge against her former mistress; instead, she rushes, full of sympathy for Lucetta's distress, to comfort her when she learns of the skimmington ride. As Elizabeth Jane tries to close the shutters at the windows to prevent Lucetta from witnessing the spectacle that depicts her relationship with Henchard at Jersey, Lucetta holds on to her former companion but insists on watching. As Lucetta (now pregnant) begins to lose control in her fear that Farfrae will now discover her secret past, Elizabeth Jane grows "frantic" as she bemoans that no one will stop the procession. As Elizabeth Jane holds Lucetta in her arms, her rival falls to the floor in seizures. Elizabeth Jane visits her constantly throughout her illness and mourns her intensely at her death.

In the final pages of *Desperate Remedies* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Cytherea and Elizabeth Jane marry the men they love. Cytherea and Edward marry and move to the late Miss Aldclyffe's Knapwater Estate, left to Cytherea in her will. The Hardyan chorus describes them as "beautiful to see" and the couple, according to the narrator's depiction and their dialogue, seem content. However, critics have pointed out that the scene on the lake that closes the novel—in which Cytherea and Edward row on the lake and try to reproduce their first kiss—reveals the irrevocable damage Miss Aldclyffe's scheming has done to their relationship. They have lost their innocence, and rather than work to create new memories, they can only struggle to recapture the passion they once had. They are bound in a static repetition of the past, unable to move forward with their relationship.

Not long after Lucetta's untimely death, Farfrae recommences his courtship of Elizabeth Jane. Although the pair are married and Elizabeth Jane "found herself in a latitude of calm weather, kindly and grateful in itself," the famous ending of the novel resembles that of *Desperate Remedies* in that Hardy emphasizes that things are not and never can be the same for the couple (410). The narrator remarks that Elizabeth Jane's "experience had been of a kind to teach her, rightly or wrongly, that the doubtful honor of a brief transit through a sorry world hardly called for effusiveness, even when the path was suddenly irradiated at some half-way point by daybeams rich as hers." Elizabeth Jane cannot fully enjoy her new status as "Mrs. Donald Farfrae;" her past relationship with Lucetta (and Henchard), and its outcomes, have taught her that "happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain" (411). Nevertheless, while the literal outcome of her marriage is a reunion with Farfrae, her new status also ultimately solidifies her relationship with Lucetta. These women, mistress and companion, have exchanged this man between them, and I read the fact that Elizabeth Jane is now the wife of Lucetta's former husband as her attempt to eternally bond herself not only to Farfrae but to Lucetta as well.

In *Desperate Remedies*, under the duress of her mistress's campaign to marry her to Manston, Cytherea bemoans: "Nobody can enter into another's nature truly, that's what is so grievous" (252). Cytherea asserts that true sympathy cannot exist and, throughout these two novels, Hardy suggests the same: in a world where economic concerns intrude—where even the sacred domestic realm and the idealized female bonds of friendship are not free from the capitalist trammels of the public world—sympathy and the ethical codes of reciprocity cannot thrive. Hardy's novels take the ideal of sympathy

and eroticism between female friends and show how the intrusion of the economic, employment dynamic in the private sphere causes an imbalance in erotic energy that results in a rupture of reciprocity which in turn produces an end to sympathy. The marriages, accomplished because of and through transference, attempt to solve this problem but fail to do so in a satisfying way. Hardy's exploration of what happens to the affective bond between women when the worldly matters of the employer-employee relation are imposed upon it ultimately has no resolution—just as the questions he raises about employment relations generally remain unanswered. The flimsy, patently unconvincing and problematic marriages that close these two novels are Hardy's "desperate remedy" to a problem for which he, and modernity, have no adequate answer.

CONCLUSION

In George Gissing's *The Odd Women*, the Madden sisters are "odd" in more than one sense: they are a part of the "half a million" single, "superfluous females" in England, but they are also the odd women out (41, 39). Alice, Virginia, and Monica Madden represent a dying species of Victorian womanhood and, lodged in this past, they are unable to move forward to experience the independence of the New Woman. At the end of the novel, Alice is a surrogate mother to her baby niece, Virginia is locked away in an institution for alcoholics, and Monica is dead after a disastrous marriage. Published in 1893 and set in the late 1880s, Gissing's novel juxtaposes two types of womanhood at the close of the nineteenth century. While the Madden sisters represent an enervated and dying breed, Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot represent the New Woman and a new future. For Gissing, the most tragic figure is the unemployed companion, Virginia, whom he situates as the most obsolete of all.

At the beginning of *The Odd Women*, the narrator introduces Virginia as "a lady past her twenties, and with a look of discouraged weariness on her thin face" (7). Formerly the long-term companion to a gentlewoman at a salary of twelve pounds, Virginia is set adrift and in search of a new position after the death of her employer. Her elder sister Alice is a governess and likewise seeking a new place. Although they crave to be freed from their dependent existence —Virginia tells her sister, "'Independent! Oh, Alice, what a blessed thing is independence! [...] oh! if one could work in a home of one's own'"— these women are so immured in their way of life that even the contemplation of "independence" seems a "subject hardly proper for discussion, or at

least dangerous" (16). But while Alice struggles to find work as a governess in a market that is becoming increasingly professionalized ("Certificates, and even degrees, are asked for on every hand"), Virginia's quest to continue as a companion is even more beset by difficulty: "'People seem to have still less need of *me*'" (15). If Virginia can no longer find work because women have "less need" for companions, then Gissing's New Woman characters suggest the reasons why.

During the fin de siècle, a pronounced increase in cultural attention to the "Woman Question" and the concomitant emergence of the New Woman opened up new options for both the affluent women who hired companions as well as for the educated, impoverished women who often served as companions. Socially and financially secure ladies were no longer bound to the domestic space but could move about the public sphere, shopping, attending women's clubs, and bicycling. With new opportunities like these for amusement and fulfillment, fewer women required an attendant who could entertain them in their homes by reading or playing to them. As society became increasingly accepting of women's participation in the marketplace as both consumers and producers, the need for a chaperone also decreased. With their wider sphere of activity, perhaps these women were even in less need of the sympathy a hired friend could provide; with new outlets through which to assert their will, fill their time, and pursue their interests, the modern woman need not rely on a companion to cosset her and indulge her every petulant whim.

For the genteel working woman, opportunities superior to the sycophantic, dependent occupations of companion or governess presented themselves. Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, women could be trained and find work in industries

that would allow them new degrees of independence and personal satisfaction. Gissing's Rhoda Nunn exemplifies both the kind of woman and the employment opportunities the rise of the New Woman inaugurated. Gissing emphasizes that, as a companion and thus a representative of the old order, "Virginia's thin, timid voice and weak manner were thrown into painful contrast by Miss Nunn's personality" (22). In "contrast" to his characterization of Virginia as a "miserable, lifeless object, [who] shook like one in an ague," Gissing's narrator describes Rhoda Nunn: "the countenance seemed masculine, its expression somewhat aggressive—eyes shrewdly observant and lips consciously impregnable. [...] Self-confidence, intellectual keenness, a bright humour, frank courage, were traits legible enough" (381, 22). Nunn has educated herself in "Shorthand, book-keeping, commercial correspondence" and "typewriting" and has worked as a "cashier in a large shop," in an "office at Bath," and as a "short-hand writer to the secretary of a company" (23). As a New Woman, Nunn is neither a companion nor in need of one.

Nunn and her partner, Mary Barfoot, run a school to train single women in the professional arts they themselves have mastered and also to educate them concerning "the Woman Question" (60). As Nunn states, "'We have no mission to prevent girls from marrying suitably—only to see that those who can't shall have a means of living with some satisfaction'" (56). Gissing's two New Women seek to "draw from the overstocked profession of teaching as many capable young women as [they] could lay hands on, and to fit them for certain of the pursuits nowadays thrown open to their sex. [They] held the conviction that whatever man could do, woman could do equally well" (60). However, Nunn and Barfoot realize the Maddens are a lost cause. While Virginia ponders how "it was the first time in her life that she had spoken with a woman daring enough to think

and act for herself," Rhoda, like Gissing, understands that in terms of the Madden sisters, it is "Impossible, perhaps, to inspire these worn and discouraged women with a particle of her own enterprise" (25-6).

Nunn makes Gissing's portrayal of Virginia and her sisters clear: "'Now could one have a better instance than this Madden family of the crime that middle-class parents commit when they allow their girls to go without rational training?'" Nunn and Barfoot agree that the Madden ladies, so entrenched in their ways, are beyond their ability to help—particularly, Virginia: "the elder ones will go on just keeping themselves alive; you can see that; [...] That poor, helpless foolish Virginia, alone there in her miserable lodging! How can we hope that any one will take her as a companion?'" (120). As this project has sought to show, the companion was always by definition a participant in the economic, public sphere, and in *The Odd Women*, she falls prey to the most basic of economic rules: supply and demand. With no hope of finding a new position in a world where there is little demand for her vocation, Virginia is obsolete. Yet, the former companion is left with no alternatives. Her occupation has disallowed any chance she might have had to retire from the labor market in marriage: "Virginia could scare hope that her faded prettiness, her health damaged by attendance upon an exacting invalid and in profitless study when she ought to have been sleeping, would attract any man in search of a wife" (12). Furthermore, her experiences as companion have ruined her for the new employment opportunities she might avail herself of: "she might have been an erudite woman; but the conditions were so far from favourable [...] It being subsequently her duty to read novels aloud for the lady whom she 'companioned,' new novels at the rate of a volume a day, she lost all power of giving her mind to anything but the feebler fiction"

(14). Thus, driven to alcoholism—"a slave to strong drink"— by her hard, desperate life, Virginia is described as "A feeble, purposeless hopeless woman; type of a whole class; living only to deteriorate" (385, 334). Indeed, Virginia is the "type of a whole class" of companions whose necessity has "deteriorated" by the end of the Victorian period. A symbol of the Victorian past, Virginia and her fellow companions are near extinction in society as well as in literature.

Virginia is among the last of the companion characters in the British novel, and even her work as a companion is only a memory when the narrative begins. While *The Odd Women* depicts the social changes that caused the companion occupation to become obsolete by the turn of the century, it also showcases how these cultural developments affected the novel. Authors could now represent women in fresh and more diverse ways. The New Woman's increased liberty from the domestic space and the array of unprecedented opportunities available to her meant that novelists could explore their female characters, their lives and their relationships, in different settings and to new ends. In turn, these societal and novelistic adjustments also brought with them a different set of concerns and anxieties to be worked through in literature.

Although the companion became outmoded by the rise of the New Woman in the late nineteenth century, perhaps the figure—at least as she was portrayed in the novel of the high Victorian period—helped this new type of woman to come into being. Throughout the mid-century Victorian novel, writers portrayed their companions, and sometimes their mistresses, as smart and skillful (albeit devious) women whose social and narratological maneuvering allowed them to strive for power and social mobility. As a figure who fought for independence and self-promotion throughout the story and

discourse of the novels discussed in this study, the companion provided a stepping stone to the new, modern woman who could move freely between spheres and assert her own will with impunity. The companion is a transitional figure. Definitively rooted in and symptomatic of the Victorian period, she is also in many ways a trail-blazer, a harbinger of what's to come.

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