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“She brings everything to a grindstone”: Sympathy and the Paid Female Companion’s Critical Work in *David Copperfield*

Lauren N. Hoffer

In David Copperfield, Charles Dickens employs Rosa Dartle, Mrs. Steerforth’s paid female companion, as an agent of his narrative. The companion in Victorian literature is an ambiguous figure whose status as a genteel insider and outsider within the domestic circle makes her a unique vehicle for the disclosure of important information the narrative cannot otherwise convey. Companions in the nineteenth century were hired to provide company, amusement, and, most important, a sympathetic ear for their mistresses’ confidences. But, as Dickens and other Victorian writers show, this purchased sympathy-for-hire can be corrupted and distorted to serve the companion’s own selfish aims. In David Copperfield, Rosa manipulates the sympathy she is expected to provide her mistress in order to expose and critique the Steerforth family’s true history and dysfunction. However, ultimately, Rosa cannot help but to reveal her own dysfunction as well. A precursor of Henry James’s ficelle, Rosa’s critical work represents an alternative narrative that David must contend with and absorb as the companion provides a specific form of domestic knowledge he himself cannot access. Through Rosa Dartle, Dickens explores a darker side to sympathy as well as the diverse narrative functions the companion’s distinctive position allows her to perform.

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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 supposed 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; ch. 20). 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.

Paid female companions such as Rosa Dartle 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 in the Victorian era. Like governesses, companions usually found employment by posting or answering advertisements or through familial connections; in fact, many ladies, when their financial situations required that they find some form of genteel labor, served as companions to members of their extended families. While governesses suffered from the tedium of long hours with often unruly, disrespectful young children, the companion role involved 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. But this is not to say that the companion's lot was necessarily easier than that of the governess. Although usually of equal 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. Forced to work for their self-preservation despite their social status, and victimized by their personal situations as well as the stigma associated with being single, these women often

suffered from the coarsening and demeaning effects of their sycophantic, dependent occupation.¹

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. The families of single and even married women often encouraged or compelled them to hire companions who in effect served to temper their independence while also protecting their chaste reputations. Thus, the occupation satisfied a cultural impulse to contain the mistress's autonomy as well. To fulfill these diverse and often contradictory requirements, 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. The companion could fulfill needs for attention, emotional connection, and control that these women were not able to obtain from their families or social circles. Employing a companion could permit a Victorian lady with enough disposable income the opportunity to *receive* sympathy, without the necessity of reciprocation. The companion's dependent position, then, magnified by the mistress's expectations of emotional availability and sympathy from her companion, left this figure vulnerable in a different, more acute way than employees in other occupations. Because this was an intimate relationship between two women, situated within the domestic sphere, neither the state's legislation on employer responsibility nor older codes of paternalism applied, and companions were at the mercy of whatever manipulation or mistreatment their mistresses might devise. Authors throughout Victorian fiction have considered how the power dynamics inherent in the employer-employee aspect of the mistress-companion relationship causes confusion in the female bond of reciprocity and obligation. Dickens, for example, portrays the ways in which a mistress can take advantage of the

sympathy her companion is required to provide, in turn endangering her companion, in his depiction of Kate Nickleby and Mrs. Witterly in *Nicholas Nickleby*. However, as several Victorian writers also prove, there are opportunities for manipulation 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, performed sympathy in that the potential for genuine sympathy is often already corrupt. Therefore, Victorian novelists could use the mistress-companion dynamic to explore a latent darker, destabilizing side to sympathy. The companions featured in many Victorian novels employ sympathy as an egocentric strategy for gaining transgressive power, social mobility, and even romantic attachments. William Makepeace Thackeray's Becky Sharp, for instance, epitomizes this paradigm of the self-serving companion who disingenuously exhibits the sympathy expected of her in order to manipulate her mistress and her mistress's family. While Kate Nickleby represents the model of ideal companion behavior, Dickens's other companions, Rosa Dartle in *David Copperfield*, Mrs. General in *Little Dorrit*, and even Esther Summerson in *Bleak House*, exploit their positions as companions to achieve their own goals. Through these companion characters, Dickens and other Victorian writers interrogate and deconstruct sympathy as a mode of human interaction while simultaneously experimenting with the opportunities this alternative form of sympathy allows for their narratives.

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. Rosa provides Dickens with an intricate mode of characterization, a subtle narrative method that reaches beyond what David as narrator can comfortably "tell." Rosa also functions as Dickens's arbiter, invoking judgment upon his characters' problematic attitudes and behaviors. In this way, the companion character models an act of criticism for Dickens's readers to emulate. She is an agent of the narrative.

In his 1908 preface to the New York edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James writes, "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” (45–46). 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” (366; ch. 29). Rosa acts as an almost extratextual 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 seemingly 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 seems to view 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 a minor character and 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 is an example of 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 theater, James defines the *ficelle* as “the reader’s friend,” an “enrolled, a direct, aid to lucidity” (47). This figure 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* also seems 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 this companion in *David Copperfield* is deeply ambivalent; Rosa seems to draw other characters, as well as the reader, toward her and repulse 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 his or her interactions with a variety of characters, reveal that which the narrator/hero cannot.² As a companion, Rosa's primary purpose is to act as a confidante 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 companion 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 James Steerforth. Her knowledge and power to convey that knowledge place her in direct narrative competition with David, but also, ultimately, work to assist him in telling his own story. Her intense bitterness in response to the suffering and betrayal she has experienced in the Steerforth home leads her to manipulate her position and the expectations of sympathy in an effort to avenge herself. Dickens creates for himself a narrative assistant who possesses both the access she needs to perform her function as well as a clear motivation that preserves what James called "consistency of form" (49).

I. Rosa Dartle's Critical Affect and Speech

Unlike David Copperfield, Rosa Dartle appears to have no "Personal History." During David's first sojourn at the Steerforth home, in chapter 20, 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 being orphaned 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; ch. 20). 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; ch. 56). 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 both Steerforth and David would like us to believe that she is little more than a nonentity 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 she 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 throughout the narrative leads her to an ever-increasing vocality and ascendancy, it becomes clear that Rosa’s apparent sympathy is a manipulative tool she employs 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.

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 and also 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 using 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 she 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; ch. 20). 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; ch. 29).

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; ch. 29)

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 seemingly 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 storytelling: observation. Pointing out that observation is central to David's narrative mode, Michael Greenstein 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 seem to coalesce as the protagonist struggles with the companion for narrative control.³ Rosa understands more than David can as she meets David's eyes and seems to look 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 role 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 "shrunk 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, storyteller 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; ch. 20).⁴ In response to David's questions concerning the mark, Steerforth again obscures the details of her past, focusing the narrative on himself rather than Rosa. We do not know what provoked Steerforth, only that it was no accident, as David at first 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; ch. 20). While this retelling all but erases Rosa from the incident, eliding any emotional reaction she 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 her attack, transforming herself from victim to subtle aggressor—just as she maneuvers within her dependent companion position to achieve the power of the 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; ch. 20). 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 subtle 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.⁵ Threatened by the competitive narrative she represents, he wonders “peevisly 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” (255; ch. 20). 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” (255; ch. 20). 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; ch. 20). In this scene, the companion 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 that 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 given time, David, at this stage in the novel, cannot accept Rosa’s perspective as a complement to his own; rather, he struggles against the story she is trying to tell. 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 proves too strong for the narrator. 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.⁶

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 seems 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 Steerforths' flaws. 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; ch. 24). Rosa consistently presents her questions as motivated by curiosity, by an innocent desire "to know," through couching 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" (366; ch. 29). 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; ch. 24).

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; ch. 20).⁷ 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 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; ch. 29). 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; ch. 29). 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.⁸ It is this intimate access, united with the freedom from suspicion that the companion's performance of sympathy allows, that 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 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?" (368; ch. 29). 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. Ex-actly. 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; ch. 29). 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.

In these two scenes, Dickens establishes a rich, complex dynamic of sympathy and repulsion between his characters. Rosa's ambivalent relationship with the 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 to the

recipient, rather than salutary. 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.

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 performance of sympathy, Rosa makes her condemnatory 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 also begin to represent a loss of control over that critique 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 performs the role of sympathetic companion. She "glided" to her station behind her mistress's chair, "touched her" and "tried to soothe her" (395, 398; ch. 32). 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; ch. 32). Rosa's reaction clarifies for the reader the depths of Steerforth's transgression, an act which arises out of the very behavior 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 James “ ‘has a false, corrupt heart, and is a traitor,’ ” Rosa’s speech simultaneously 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; ch. 32). 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; ch. 32). 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 performances 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 form and then assert her own narrative of the woman who has captured “ ‘James Steerforth’s fancy,’ ” however briefly, 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; ch. 50). 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; ch. 50). 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 reports her response as a way of describing the full meaning of the scene for his reader. Rather than fight the competitive narrative she presents, he acknowledges 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; ch. 50). 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; ch. 50). When Rosa responds, "You love him? *You?* . . . And tell that to *me*," she confirms Emily's assertion.⁹ 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.

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 arrival 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; ch. 56). 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; ch. 56). 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.¹⁰ Next, Rosa finally 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 your loss of him, moan for mine!’” (673; ch. 56). 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 motivation 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 his estrangement from his mother and from herself, she also reveals the depths of her own obsession with James.

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; ch. 56). As she unfolds the story of her youthful relationship with James and the reverberations it has had in her own life and that of the Steerforths, she exposes the whole of the Steerforths' 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 Steerforth's eventual betrayal and abandonment. This, a kind of origin story of the family's current dynamics and dysfunction, 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. 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.¹¹ 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; ch. 56). 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 overcome her devotion to James.

Rosa is incapable of reconciling her own criticism of Steerforth with her love for him and so she cannot move forward, even after his death. Instead, she reveals herself to be just like those she has attempted to expose throughout the novel: callous, stubborn, and obsessive, she is no different than her mistress or her former lover. 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 storyteller in the novel. With Rosa's help, David is able to transcend his biases and emotions regarding Steerforth, whereas Rosa, in the end, cannot. However, Rosa's prowess as an agent of the narrative is ultimately acknowledged by David's very act of including her in his account in this way. After all, David narrates his story retrospectively; so 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 adversary in his narrative; 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 on some level. Thus, while Rosa may be left to suffer in the diegesis, she is empowered in the narrative structure of the novel.

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; ch. 56). Despite the history between them, no longer a secret, companion and mistress are stuck with one another—perhaps, 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; ch. 56). Graham Storey has called this scene ''as melancholy as anything in Dickens,'' and, indeed, this is a sad fate for the hypercritical companion (85).

As 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 indeed acts as a grindstone in *David Copperfield*, sharpening and bringing into focus obscured histories and deeper meanings beneath the surface of the text. Dickens utilizes the complex, ambiguous nature of the companion's position in society and in the domestic circle to create a figure who can provide an alternative to the narrator's perspective within the novel. However, Dickens does not reward his 'edge-tool'; instead, he seems to punish Rosa for executing exactly the work he formed her to do. The companion is left unfulfilled and static because, although her efforts on the interpretive level are necessary for Dickens and, in turn, for his readers, he cannot condone her problematic behavior on the level of the plot.

By exposing the Steerforths' dysfunction to David and his readers, Rosa can gain 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. While she succeeds in her critical work, her own 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.

Dickens employs Rosa as a critic in *David Copperfield*, but he also critiques her 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, 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 form of sympathy stands in contrast to other manifestations of genuine sympathy throughout the novel, and those characters who practice a selfless, generous version of sympathy generally are rewarded. Although Rosa's use of her own malign form of sympathy becomes a narratological instrument for Dickens, he eventually turns on his own narrative device. Rosa acts as a critique of herself: Dickens's own commentary on the potential dangers of the companion's position and the manipulative modes of sympathy she can use to accomplish her self-serving goals. Thus, Dickens acknowledges, explores, and even seems to identify with the darker side of sympathy in *David Copperfield* but ultimately refuses to align himself with it.

In the Victorian era, some novelists began to interrogate the conventional view of sympathy as a force which forges bonds of sentimental understanding between individuals, underpinning social hierarchies and stability. A particularly acute site of sympathetic expectation and potential manipulation, the mistress-companion relationship allowed authors like Dickens, and others such as Wilkie Collins, Anthony Trollope, Charlotte Brontë, and William Makepeace Thackeray, to experiment with portrayals of sympathy as a self-serving, disruptive, but often revelatory mode of relating. As Dickens's use of Rosa shows, the companion figure's ambiguous placement in the home, coupled with her cultural characterization as a locus of sympathetic prowess, also allowed Victorian authors unique opportunities for disclosure in their narratives. A wide variety of novelists made effective use of this device. In *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Anne Hereford*, for instance, Mary Elizabeth Bradon and Ellen Wood portray their companion characters as covert detectives. Phoebe Marks and Charlotte Delves Penn use their companion positions, particularly their manipulation of sympathy with their mistresses and others, to uncover and distribute the secrets at the cores of their respective novels, offering a feminine alternative to the techniques of the burgeoning male detective figure in mid-century sensation fiction. Companion narrators such as Charlotte Brontë's Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, Esther Summerson in *Bleak House*, and Collins's Madame Pratolungo in *Poor Miss Finch*, are able to relay the private confidences of their mistresses and other exclusive information directly to their readers; while other companions, like Mrs. General in *Little Dorrit*, are used much more subtly as touchstones that can reveal or emphasize information about other characters in the narrative.

Throughout the plots of these novels and others like them, the presence of the companion in the home, as well as her ability to manipulate sympathy, represented the dangerous infiltration of the public, economic world into the domestic space and domestic relationships. The companion's double allegiance to the private and public spheres represents a significant threat to the sanctity of private knowledge within the domestic realm. Because companions are at once intimate members of the family circle as well as paid employees, they are capable of seeing and acting in both directions. Their position grants them access to secret, familial knowledge, but in the absence of any genuine investment in those they serve, their status as professional women simultaneously allows them the ability to circulate that knowledge beyond the boundaries of the household. In this way, although often little more than minor characters, companions come to play a crucial role in many nineteenth-century novels, enabling Victorian writers to address troubled contemporary issues as diverse as sympathy, gender roles, employment dynamics, homoeroticism, and narrative structure in their work. Yet, despite the unsettling power of this figure, the companion is often lost to historical and literary studies. She lingers, strangely enough, mainly in the Victorian novels we read today.

NOTES

1. The paucity of critical or historical work on the companion makes it necessary to turn to the Victorian governess, an analogous but distinct figure, for insight into the daily conditions of actual companions. My work on the companion has benefited from valuable studies on the governess by scholars such as Kathryn Hughes and Bronwyn Rivers.
2. 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).
3. Alex Woloch's work on the intersection of and competition among various characters' "character-space" within the "character-system" of a narrative is particularly relevant here.
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 theoretical 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).
5. The portrait of Rosa serves as a reminder that Rosa's employer regards her as a relation as well as a paid female companion, as was the case for many Victorian companions. Rosa's status as a part of the family amplifies her privileged access to the Steerforths' secrets as it simultaneously heightens the sense of betrayal inherent in her critical work. Despite this acknowledgement of Rosa's connection

- to the Steerforths, the placement of the portrait, hidden away in a spare bedroom, duly reflects her status within the family circle.
6. 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.
 7. Françoise 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).
 8. 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 at no time implies that Rosa's mistress attributes this abnormality to anything more than her companion's harmless eccentricity. Steerforth, however, 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). But, like his mother, Steerforth is never able to see through Rosa's pretense of sympathy with the family.
 9. 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 acknowledgment 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).
 10. 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.
 11. 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 (59). 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.

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