

DISABLED DOMESTICITY: REPRESENTATIONS OF DISABILITY IN NINETEENTH- CENTURY LITERATURE

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Disabled Domesticity: Representations of Disability in Nineteenth-century
Literature

This thesis explores the representations of the blind, deaf, and physically disabled in literature of the nineteenth century. Focusing upon literature published around the mid-century, the texts discussed are: *American Notes*, Charles Dickens (1842), 'The Cricket and the Hearth', Charles Dickens (1845), *Olive*, Dinah Craik (1850), 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', Harriet Martineau (1853), *Hide and Seek*, Wilkie Collins (1854), 'Dr Marigold's Prescriptions', Charles Dickens (1865), *A Noble Life*, Dinah Craik (1866) and *Poor Miss Finch*, Wilkie Collins (1872), all of which include portrayals of disability in a primarily domestic setting. It explores the effects of class upon the experience of the afflicted, as well as the state of society in terms of its attitude towards gender roles and familial modes, as well as marital and maternal roles and adoption. Many of the texts explored in this thesis include adoption plots of some form, which serves to argue that the disabled person, with no expectation of becoming part of a new generation of a biological family, is able to fulfil their familial desires. By investigating these disabilities alongside each other, this thesis is able to illuminate great differences in the experience and cultural approach to different afflictions. The afflicted had to work hard to carve out identities that reached beyond their crippled legs or useless eyes, and yet the results of this study show surprising outcomes to this. The disabled individuals discussed in these pages are not housed in freak shows, put on display, or taken advantage of, but rather they exist in a primarily domestic setting, attempting to carry out their daily lives in much the same way as their able-bodied counterparts. The question is, of course, how far Victorian society, in light of the newly emerging discoveries in the scientific and medical fields, would allow this.

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Introduction

This thesis looks at the portion of society which, according to the Victorians, did not fit readily into any perceived category, requiring management, supervision and organisation; that is, the disabled. The focus is on the representation of the disabled within a domestic context, and how authors use disability to subvert and question ideals of both family and gender. 'Disabled Domesticity: Representations of Disability in Nineteenth-century Literature' focuses primarily on selected works of fiction by three nineteenth-century authors: Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens and Dinah Craik. It also draws upon the writings of Harriet Martineau, both fiction and non-fiction pieces, and scientific debates put forward by figures such as Charles Darwin and Francis Galton.

Chronologically, the pieces focused upon are: *American Notes*, Charles Dickens (1842), 'The Cricket on the Hearth', Charles Dickens (1845), *Olive*, Dinah Craik (1850), 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', Harriet Martineau (1853), *Hide and Seek*, Wilkie Collins (1854), 'Dr Marigold's Prescriptions', Charles Dickens (1865), *A Noble Life*, Dinah Craik (1866), *Poor Miss Finch*, Wilkie Collins (1872), *The Dead Secret*, Wilkie Collins (1875), and *The Little Lane Prince*, Dinah Craik (1875), which all include portrayals of disability in a primarily domestic setting, in the mid-century. These texts, as well as including usually neglected and lesser-known pieces, include a wide range of literary genres

such as short fiction, novels and travel writing. This thesis primarily explores how far the afflictions of blindness, deafness and physical abnormality affected the nineteenth-century ideal of womanhood, and indeed, how far womanhood affected these afflictions, with a contrasting exploration of male disability to create a gender-sensitive comparison between both sexes' achievement of traditional and established roles.

Although principally literature-based, the thesis looks more broadly at nineteenth-century debates concerning heredity, in particular discussions of the congenital transmission of affliction and the moral obligations associated with this possible passing down of 'flawed' physical characteristics, as well as discussion of the nature of the disabled individual's condition. Although hereditary debates are not present within all of the texts considered in this thesis, this omission is always significant. Some of the authors considered here make a deliberate break from scientific perspectives, in order to suggest alternative philosophies of disability. The thesis considers the ways in which literature often turns away from a scientific treatment of the disabled; the active rejection of scientific musings presented in the texts through the (often unsympathetic) figure of the medical man.

The thesis looks at society's attitude towards gender roles and familial modes, including marital and maternal roles and adoption. Many of the texts explored in this thesis include adoption plots of some form, which serve to argue that the disabled person, often with no expectation of becoming part of a new generation of a biological family, is able to fulfil their familial desires. It explores feminine ideals through the figure of the disabled woman, outlining the

importance of this deviation from, or indeed adhesion to, such ideals, as well as the scope of familial modes in the mid-nineteenth century. Victorian fiction existed not only to entertain, but also to educate. Its authors held a position of social responsibility and influence, creating a platform from which to voice their own observations on subjects that were perhaps inaccessible to a public not versed in medical, scientific or political discourse. Contextual debates such as issues of heredity and the often competing claims of science and religion frame the arguments made in this thesis.

The first chapter explores blindness, challenging the perceived infirmity of this disability within society. Victorian views of the blind suggest that they were more widely accepted into mainstream society than individuals with other, more seemingly debilitating disabilities. However, the authors discussed here position blind characters in coming-of-age narratives in order to explore prejudices against the blind. The texts discussed here are Charles Dickens' 'The Cricket on the Hearth' (1845), Dinah Craik's *Olive* (1850), Wilkie Collins' *Poor Miss Finch* (1872), and Collins' *The Dead Secret* (1875), which all show differing schools of thought as well as presenting blindness within frameworks that differ greatly from each other. Despite each of these backdrops being domestic, each respective setting provides a different experience of the blind characters, showing that no two experiences of blindness were the same and thus questioning a blanket system of their management.

The management of the disabled was a constant source of debate during the nineteenth century, and through an exploration of Charles Dickens' case study of Laura Bridgman, we are able to see just how far these issues affected the

literature of the period, producing a particularly emotionally charged approach to the afflicted individuals and drawing focus away from a wholly scientific methodology that was beginning to gather momentum during this period.

The fulfilment of romantic desires is a prevalent theme in the blindness plots discussed in this chapter, and goes some way in humanising the often dispassionate marriage market of the nineteenth century through the higher level of emotional attachment depicted in courtship plots that feature a blind party. The blindness of the characters, both male and female, discussed here offers the disabled a chance to escape the pitfalls of matrimonial fulfilment, allowing them instead scope to fulfil their own, personal longings in such a way that does not challenge the social order of the mid-century; their matrimonial attachments are formed out of genuine affection as opposed to contributing factors such as social stature that related to courtship between the able-bodied.

Chapter two explores the experience of the deaf, showing it to be largely dissimilar to that of blindness. This affliction was widely considered to be more obscure and socially threatening, and led to a more restricted and isolated feeling amongst the deaf, in turn leading to colonies of the afflicted. Themes of management are more distinctly prevalent here, as fear of ‘otherness’ manifests itself in the perceived savagery of the deaf. The chapter focuses upon Harriet Martineau’s ‘The Deaf Playmate’s Story’ (1853), Charles Dickens’ ‘Dr Marigold’s Prescriptions’ (1865), and Wilkie Collins’ *Hide and Seek* (1854), as well as additional material by Martineau, ‘Letter to the Deaf’ (1834), and ‘Deaf Mutes’ (1854).

An exploration of the work of Harriet Martineau, who was deaf and wrote

extensively about the experience of deafness in both her fiction and journalism, shows the balanced consideration that this disability received. Martineau as a deaf writer provides insight into how far the handicap is allowed by the afflicted to alter their experience of both the disability of deafness and of their place in the social order of the mid-nineteenth century. The issue of identity becomes even more significant, and the carving out of this identity, despite apparent societal restrictions, as discussed here through a return to Dickens' study of Laura Bridgman and the fiction she inspired, directly reflects a breaking away from primitive expectations of the deaf in the mid-century.

The issue of the chosen family is taken further in this chapter. In concentrating on demonstrative human relationships, we see that the affliction does not detract from human connections and affection, and can instead enrich them. Through an affective presentation of the deaf as both and inspiring and experiencing strong feelings, these authors challenge the long association of deafness with savagery. This in turn humanises affliction in such a way that challenges its social perceptions, as through exploration of deafness on an individual level, the fear of 'otherness' is, at least in part, reduced.

The third and final chapter explores physical deformity in the mid-nineteenth century. Rather than continuing a critical focus on the exploitation of different bodies in freak shows, the chapter examines the representation of the disabled within a more domestic setting.¹ The impact of physical disability upon narratives primarily concerned with coming of age allows for a deeper

¹ See Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), and Nadja Durbach, *Spectacle of Deformity: Freak Shows and Modern British Culture* (California: University of California Press, 2010) for more on the freak show.

consideration of society's own disability in its ability to accept difference, and themes of class and status are again significant in this discussion. The texts discussed in detail here are Harriet Martineau's *Life in the Sick-room* (1844), a return to Dinah Craik's *Olive* (1850), Craik's *A Noble Life* (1866), and Craik's *The Little Lame Prince* (1875).

Gender ideologies take on particular importance in consideration of physical abnormality, as established roles are, as we will see, challenged and altered. The disability plots discussed here are used to expose monstrous social inequalities as well as ushering in changes to previously held models of the social order. To compare a physically strong male of the lower classes to an aristocratic cripple, for example, reflects newly emerging attitudes relating to the importance of class and social standing around the mid-century. This suggests a broad shift towards a more meritocratic understanding of social placement and hierarchy, in which character, ability, attitude, and hard work began to compete with birth as the measure of social standing.

To take into account concerns with heredity, particularly of flawed congenital physicality, further challenges this perceived propriety because it recognises that noble birth is not exclusively conducive to physical health. The move towards placing increased importance on an individual that displaced reputation and standing from a family name and birth circumstance serves to highlight the questionable foundations of both early understandings of heredity and traditional, established social convention that was based upon rank and birth right. In this way, then, disability, particularly physical deformity, epitomises the widespread struggle of the period.

The Mid-Century Context

The progression from a largely rustic and bucolic Britain into an age of industry and expansion of knowledge characterises the middle decades of the nineteenth century, and these developments can be seen directly in the evolution of scientific understanding that was occurring around the mid-century, discussed in more detail later in the introduction. There were strong connections in between scientific and literary work. As Bernard Lightman argues: ‘the towering literary figures of the day also took a strong interest in science and in their works reinforced its close relationship with Victorian culture’,² and the authors considered in this thesis regularly engage with scientific findings and debates, exploring in their fiction what they meant for society in their everyday lives.

Lightman goes on to confirm this hypothesis, stating:

in defining knowledge, human cultures often define themselves; by ordering nature to conform to a particular pattern, scientists and intellectuals frequently reveal the social order for which they yearn; and in the process of practising science, of measuring, experimenting, and controlling phenomena, we not only find nature but also encounter ourselves as inquisitive, social, and political beings,³

recognising the integral part science plays in the formation of cultural ideals and values.

In relation to the wider shifts, progressions, and transformations of the mid-century, disability is a striking and prominent theme, and one that takes on increasing focus and importance. It was, at the same time, both largely ignored and extensively studied, celebrated and banished, charitably pitied and yet deeply

² *Victorian Science in Context*, ed. by Bernard Lightman (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), p. 2.

³ *Victorian Science in Context*, ed. by Lightman, p. 11.

loathed. Scientific ideas of heredity were just coming into being, which can be seen through the dramatic lack of medical discourse related to heredity in publications such as the *British Medical Journal* prior to 1870, and the expanse of material available upon the subject published after this date.⁴ Attitudes to, as well as treatments of, disability were also much contested during this time. The connotations of deviation from an ideal, functioning body affected all aspects of life from religion to science, familial ideals to empire challenges, as well as extensive debate upon the practical management of the disabled.

Contemporary medical understanding of the afflictions discussed in this thesis were, although gaining momentum, predominantly vague during the mid-century. Physicians were primarily concerned with the treatment of affliction and expansion in the field of medical response, as opposed to increased emphasis upon its causes, which only became a central concern later in the century. This makes the texts studied here, to some degree, exploratory as opposed to responsive; both science and art were concerned with providing the Victorian public with answers to the questions surrounding the reasons for affliction and, subsequently, the management of the disabled. Of course, both influenced each other, and literature which included disability plots looked to contemporary medical understanding in order to contextualise characters. As the century progressed, we see a trend for discussion, in both fiction and medicine, of the management of the afflicted. This placed medical concerns very much in the public sphere, taking into account political and social agendas in order to

⁴ For example, the *British Medical Journal* database shows a total of three articles relating to heredity between 1840 and 1870, with a further forty six articles published in the following decade, demonstrating the increase in interest and importance heredity debates as the century progressed.

contextualise an understanding of affliction that went beyond a purely scientific and medical consideration. Authors of the mid-nineteenth century were able to make their own, distinct contribution to shaping attitudes towards the appropriate treatment of the afflicted. Indeed, disability as a concept was mobilised for different ideological ends.

The mid-century provides a wealth of authors concerned with physical affliction, many of whom are in direct dialogue with one another, who present plots of disability intermingled with narratives of the chosen family. This allows for a more expansive study of disability on a domestic level, exploring how the family, as a small-scale version of society which placed a higher concern upon a more sentimental and passionate reaction to disability, dealt with physical difference.

The way in which the nineteenth century dealt with this physical difference changed the face of heredity. Contrary to popular belief, this scientific, medical, political, judicial and social phenomenon had its roots in the public sphere long before Francis Galton's coining of the term 'eugenics' in the 1880s. It had long been recognised that the character and standing of a particular individual can be, at least in part, attributed to their hereditary line, and this was not diminished even during an era of increased focus upon self-improvement, epitomised by such publications as Samuel Smiles' *Self Help*, first published in 1859. Of course, hereditary debates were more prevalent as the century progressed, gaining increasing momentum as the Victorian era passed and gave way to the twentieth century.⁵

⁵ See histories of twentieth-century eugenics and ideas on heredity, specifically within World War Two; examples for starting points include Alan Bullock, Robert Bertram Woodings and John Cumming's *Twentieth-Century Culture: a Biological Companion* (New York: Harper & Row,

The History of Heredity

The notion that “like begets like” has its basis in antiquity, with civilisations as early as the Ancient Greeks recognising the similarities in physical and intellectual stature in close communities as well as familial circles. Indeed, during this time, ‘the adjective hereditary was loosely employed when a given trait was found to characterize a family or another genealogical group’.⁶ Widely recognised and yet rarely explored in detail, this phenomenon was largely only informally understood until the late-eighteenth century, after which ideas of heredity received more formal scrutiny. Originally, heredity as a term referred to the judicial system, meaning that property and position would be passed down a familial line. This led to increasing numbers of intra-familial marriages, as nobility was seen as something that required preservation. David Warren Sabean recognises this trend as primarily political, pointing to a shift from ‘Clan’ to ‘Kindred’, and asserting that the amount of marriages taking place within the family had doubled between the 1820s and 1860s.⁷

While it is certainly true that heredity as a discipline of study in itself was born and developed in the nineteenth century, the groundwork had been laid prior to this. As a number of schools were conducting research into heredity in all its avenues, Staffen Muller-Wille and Hans-Jong Rheinberger understand:

1983), Celeste Michelle Condit, *The Meanings of the Gene: Public Debates about Human Heredity* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), and Michael Cummings, *Human Heredity: Principles and Issues* (California: Thomson Brooks/Cole, 2006).

⁶ Carlos Lopez-Beltran, ‘The Medical Origins of Heredity’, in *Heredity Produced: At the Crossroads of Biology, Politics and Culture, 1500-1870*, ed. by Staffen Muller-Wille and Hans-Jong Rheinberger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 105-132 (p. 106).

⁷ David Warren Sabean, ‘From Clan to Kindred: Kinship and the Circulation of Property in Premodern and Modern Europe’, in *Heredity Produced*, ed. by Muller-Wille and Rheinberger, pp. 37-60 (p. 51).

These connections point less to a “culture” or “episteme” of heredity that suddenly emerged around 1800, than to a piecemeal relaxation of social and natural ties in several cultural subfields. It is only by their subsequent conjunction that a discernible field of phenomena was outlined that eventually, in the mid-nineteenth century, came to be addressed by theories of heredity.⁸

Eighteenth-century France was where the majority of this groundwork was conducted, with numerous medical and scientific figures contributing to the phenomenon.⁹ Carlos Lopez-Beltran points to the French Revolution (1788-1790) as a key moment in the development of the social significance of heredity. In the 1790s, the Royal Society of Medicine, based in Paris, called for a widespread submission of essays on the subject of heredity, and this increased focus on the discipline in turn enabled heredity to approach the mainstream sector. Lopez-Beltran views this as a time wherein: ‘the hereditary domain extended from family resemblance to hybridization and from transmission of physical deformity to hereditary diseases’,¹⁰ pointing to a transmission from scientific focus upon hereditary congeniality to a much more widespread understanding of the term and its connotations. He states: ‘Influential medical men moved towards considering heredity a central concept for the conception of the human bodily frame, and its set of physical and moral dispositions’,¹¹ which corresponds with the nineteenth-century view of heredity and its effects outside the body.

‘Hard’ and ‘soft’ inheritance became the established model for understanding heredity at the early and mid-nineteenth century. ‘Soft’ inheritance was championed by figures such as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) and

⁸ *Heredity Produced*, ed. by Muller-Wille and Rheinberger, p. 23.

⁹ See Mary Efrosini Gregory, *Evolutionism in Eighteenth-century French Thought* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008) for more on these figures.

¹⁰ Lopez-Beltran, ‘The Medical Origins of Heredity’, p. 121.

¹¹ Lopez-Beltran, ‘The Medical Origins of Heredity’, pp. 125-6.

alludes to the influences of factors outside of the self on characteristics, whereas ‘hard’ inheritance is closer to what we know of heredity today, and alludes to the genealogy of heredity transmission. As Muller-Wille and Rheinberger state: ‘Nature and nurture, or hereditary and environment, were not yet seen as oppositions’,¹² and outward influences were seen as just as important to an individual’s character as genetic transmission. In this way, the notion of hard and soft inheritance bridges the gap between the early, judicial ideas of heredity and the biological and medical ideas we have come to associate with the late-nineteenth century and beyond.

The nineteenth century witnessed a dramatic shift in the understanding of heredity, from the relatively unobtrusive framework of the early decades to the eugenic attitude of the late. This period was the arena for many debates regarding heredity and how far it affected each aspect of life, and took the comparatively new understanding of the early century, through figures such as Erasmus Darwin to the scientifically advanced studies of Francis Galton and Alexander Bell.¹³ Figures such as Charles Darwin and August Weismann provided the basis for much debate about lineage. Weismann proposed a theory of heredity, as explained by William Ernest Castle and Gregor Mendel thus: ‘Weismann believed that a new type of organism arises only in consequence of the origin of a new type of germ-cell’.¹⁴ Weismann’s theories were first published in a variety of essays a

¹² *Heredity Produced*, ed. by Muller-Wille and Rheinberger, p. 4.

¹³ Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), grandfather of Charles Darwin and Francis Galton, was a natural philosopher and physician. He is said to have anticipated some of Lamarck’s views on heredity. For more on this, see his prominent work *Zoonomia* (Philadelphia: Edward Earle, 1818).

¹⁴ William Ernest Castle and Gregor Mendel, *Genetics and Eugenics: A Text-Book for Students of Biology and a Reference Book for Animals and Plant Breeders* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1922), p. 47.

year after Darwin's death, and, as George John Romanes, writing in 1895, suggests: 'unquestionably, it has been these essays which have given such prominence to this subject during the last decade'.¹⁵ Romanes continues to propose:

Although it is usually supposed that this question was first raised by Weismann, such was not the case. Any attentive reader of the successive editions of Darwin's works may perceive that at least from the year 1859 he had the question clearly before his mind; and that during the rest of his life his opinion with regard to it underwent considerable modifications-becoming more and more Lamarckian the longer that he pondered it,¹⁶

and it is clear that Darwin's own views of heredity evolved over his career.

Rasmus G. Winther suggests that between 1837 and 1875, Darwin's work presents 'shifts in his views',¹⁷ showing the extent to which ideas of characteristic acquisition were open to revision and debate throughout the century.

Originally, Darwin was influenced by Thomas Andrew Knight, a botanist who published in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. Peter J. Vorzimmer summarises Knight's writing thus: 'the writings reflected the prevailing notion that the only general law of inheritance was that like always generates like, with observed exceptions viewed merely as nature's own unpredictable irregularities',¹⁸ and it was from here that Darwin built his own theory of evolution and hereditary transmission. Darwin was also influenced by Thomas Malthus and his theory of population, which led to Darwin's theory concerning natural selection.¹⁹ Darwin initially noted that each individual was

¹⁵ George John Romanes, *Darwin, and After Darwin II: Post-Darwinian Questions, Heredity and Utility* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1895), p. 39.

¹⁶ Romanes, *Darwin, and After Darwin*, p. 40.

¹⁷ Rasmus G. Winther, 'Darwin on Variation and Heredity', *Journal of the History of Biology*, 33:3 (Winter 2000), 425-455 (p. 440).

¹⁸ Peter J. Vorzimmer, *Charles Darwin: The Years of Controversy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1970), p. 23.

descended and developed from their ancestry explaining the differences between individuals as being the result of outside influences. Although *On the Origin of Species* was first published in 1859, Darwin was working on his theories as early as 1842.

Darwin's views on evolution and heredity have long since been recognised as being 'paradoxically inconsistent',²⁰ and the contribution that has the most hold over theories of heredity and genetic transmission of characteristics is that of 'Blending Inheritance'. This theory, put forward by Darwin, is described as 'the view of inheritance as a fusion of both paternal and maternal elements in the offspring in an inseparable mixture which results in external features appearing to be midway between the two',²¹ which was the view held by many, if not all, nineteenth-century naturalists. John C. Waller recognises the varying views on heredity throughout the century, and states:

The concept of heredity played a powerful role in structuring nineteenth-century debates over sickness, morality, class, race, education, social change and evolution. But there was very little agreement as to which qualities were heritable and how new hereditary variants were acquired.²²

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the idea of transmission mainly referred to race. It was widely recognised that certain characteristics, both physical and otherwise, could be seen in members of the same family, of course, but it also meant that whole races of people could be studied in the same way.

¹⁹ See Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), which argues that a continual growth in population is responsible for poverty and other such life conditions.

²⁰ Vorzimmer, *Charles Darwin*, p. 78.

²¹ Vorzimmer, *Charles Darwin*, p. 99.

²² John C. Waller, 'Parents and Children: Ideas of Heredity in the Nineteenth century', *Endeavour*, 27:2 (2003), 51-56 (p. 53).

Rudolph Virchow, a German man of science,²³ proposed in the mid-century that living things could only come from living things- that is, hereditary transmission from parent to offspring was the only way in which resembling characteristics could be obtained. This varied greatly from Darwin's contribution, which cited natural selection for such transmission, in that species evolve over time, reacting to environmental factors.

Heredity, it seems, was often manipulated and stretched to fit with convenient discourse. That is, the term 'heredity' was invoked as convenient explanation for otherwise difficult to account for phenomena. Waller recognises that: 'occasional moral lapses or even brief excursions into intemperance were often blamed for the transmission of hereditary ills',²⁴ and even states that doctors 'tended to confine their use of the adjective 'hereditary' to chronic, incurable maladies',²⁵ presumably to maintain and secure their positions when faced with medical conditions beyond their expertise. In addition to this, Victorian Life Insurance companies in both Britain and America ensured that no liability could be left with them in cases where close family members suffered from mental disorders.

As the mid-century gave way to the late, fears of degeneration, and therefore heredity as a form of social management was developed. Such degeneration was seen as the result of previously lax control over hereditary transmission, and so eugenic thought began to permeate the public sphere.

²³ Rudolph Virchow (1821-1902) was primarily a doctor and biologist, and opposed Darwinism. He published his works between 1848 and 1880. See Erwin Heinz Ackerknecht, *Rudolph Virchow: Doctor, Statesman, Anthropologist* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1953) and James Gray Carr, *Rudolph Virchow* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1938) for more on Virchow and his work.

²⁴ Waller, 'Parents and Children', p. 54.

²⁵ Waller, 'Parents and Children', p. 55.

Heredity became both an excuse and a cause for this newfound interest in the betterment of the race, and as Waller states: ‘The idea of hereditary transmission was more frequently and more pessimistically invoked in Britain as the breathless optimism of the mid-century gave way to the more volatile social and political milieu of the late Victorian period’,²⁶ as: ‘most Victorian Britons were intoxicated by the ideology of progress and saw in the inheritance of acquired characteristics a reassuring promise of ongoing improvement’.²⁷

Literature and Hereditary Debates

Literature was an arena wherein ideas about, and fears of, heredity and its increasingly uncertain place within the public sphere could be explored and aired. Much nineteenth-century literature includes allusions to heredity, mainly within the domestic sphere. Although such literature participated in a broader investigation of ideas of heredity outside the medical press, prior to the 1870s, relatively little information on the scientific and medical basis for heredity was found outside of this. Literature was the primary way through which these debates reached, and to some extent educated, a general audience. From the 1870s onwards, the public had the opportunity to become well versed in scientific discourse, as there was greater clarity surrounding heredity than at mid-century. Newspapers spanning the country included countless articles on heredity and its influence on social behaviour, examples of which include ‘The Heredity of Crime’, in *Northern Echo*, January 1875, ‘Heredity and Hybridism: A Suggestion by Edwards W. Cox’, in *The Lancaster Gazette, and General Advertiser for*

²⁶ Waller, ‘Parents and Children’, p. 55.

²⁷ Waller, ‘Parents and Children’, p. 54.

Lancashire, Westmorland, Yorkshire, &c., April 1875, “‘Heredity’ and Drunkenness’, in *the Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, October 1880, ‘Heredity and Vice’, in *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, October 1886, ‘Heredity and Marriage’, in *Leicester Chronicle and The Leicestershire Mercury*, September 1893, and even more specific considerations such as ‘Mrs Besant on Heredity’, in *The Royal Cornwall Gazette Falmouth Packet, Cornwall Weekly News, and General Advertiser*, August 1893, and ‘Our Ladies’ Column’, in *The Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News*, June 1894.²⁸ Similarly, nineteenth-century periodicals included many articles on heredity during the late 1870s and beyond. These publications were wide-ranging and scanned many readerships, from *Punch Magazine*, to *The Women’s Penny Paper*, *The Women’s Herald*, and *The Woman’s Signal*, signifying that the medical and scientific considerations of heredity had become widely disseminated within the public sphere. Literature, also, became concerned with ideas on heredity, and narratives concerning these subjects became more than mere entertainment and instead took on the role of educator for a public not versed in scientific and medical discourse. It was not just the public at large who were finding themselves affected by this influence, and in 1882, Queen Victoria, who had ‘been brought up with the knowledge that her descendants would rule Europe’,²⁹ came face to face with hereditary abnormality herself. She was a carrier of the disease called haemophilia today, and her son, Prince Leopold, was directly affected. Blamed on the controversial use of pain-relief at Leopold’s birth, the inherited condition ‘had never been seen in the Royal

²⁸ This list is by no means exhaustive; rather it strives to show the wide-ranging and diverse literature concerning ideas of heredity at the time given.

²⁹ Steve Jones, *In the Blood: God, Genes and Destiny* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996), p. 251.

Family before'.³⁰

The Victorian public, however, were knowledgeable to a certain extent on the likeness produced within familial circles. This is due in no small part to the established tradition of familial likeness passed down through generations, and literature often included allusions to the fraught nature of the abnormal, and where such deformity had originated. Many readers of the mid-century still held fast to a more moral approach derived from biblical references such as warnings of God 'visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children'.³¹ The extent to which religion might be overtaken or displaced by science played a large part in literary themes as the century progressed. As Victoria came to the throne, she ruled over a society primarily concerned with Christian leaning, but this relative security was to be short-lived. Figures such as T. H. Huxley, Francis Galton, and even leading politician William Gladstone, all observed that scientific leanings were of prominence over a wholly and potentially dangerous accepting view of religion.³² The nineteenth century is a crucial period for the exploration of the shift from a wholly religious basis of understanding of disability to a scientific consideration of genetic transmission and legacy.

Waller suggests of the heredity allusions in Charles Dickens' 1837 narrative *Oliver Twist*: 'Victorian readers were entirely familiar with the inheritance of physical characteristics: facial profiles, hair and eye colour, large foreheads or receding chins had seemingly always provided families with

³⁰ Jones, *In the Blood*, p. 252.

³¹ Exodus 34.7.

³² For more on the specific scientific debates occurring as the century progressed, see John W. Draper, *History of the Conflict between Science and Religion* (New York: D. Appleton, 1874), and Andrew D. White, *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology* (New York: Cosimo Books, 2009).

distinctive insignias',³³ continuing to recognise: 'Morally fortified by his heritage, Oliver transcended his immediate surroundings'.³⁴ In this way, Waller is recognising a prominent theme that is prevalent in all the texts studied here; that is, how familial modes were affected by hereditary influences. The importance of family is dominant throughout the texts, and yet the authors subvert the ideal of a biological togetherness in favour of a more organic representation of self-made family. Adoption, friendship, and alliance are all very much sought after conditions, providing their varied readerships with an alternative to the expectation of a biologically unspoiled familial unit. Through the texts discussed in the following chapters, we see a trend towards the forms of alternative modes to the strictly limited roles available to the able-bodied, particularly to women. The celebration of alternative homes and families wherein disabled figures have a valuable place becomes the focus of the agency of these disability plots.

There are, however, numerous examples of characters that do not fit into the domestic context explored within the thesis. These are the characters who do not surpass society's apparent prejudice towards disability and are instead directly viewed as a product of their respective disabilities, their authors deeming them without hope to find liberation through deformity. Importantly, they are largely omitted from, or are peripheral to, the Bildungsroman genre of narratives that proves itself the most fertile for the transcendence of the restrictions and expectations of disability found in texts such as Dinah Craik's *Olive*, Charles Dickens' 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions' and Wilkie Collins' *Hide and Seek*. They are instead largely representative characters, serving to include a form of

³³ Waller, 'Parents and Children', p. 55.

³⁴ Waller, 'Parents and Children', p. 55.

difference and otherness that the able-bodied find difficult to account for or overlook. The reaction to difference in some way affects the protagonist, usually to their detriment.

Misfits: Anti-Disability Narratives

Charles Dickens' portrayal of the physically deformed Daniel Quilp in his 1841 novel *The Old Curiosity Shop* is one such example of this, as he presents a striking example of grotesque physical embodiment of inward immorality and is a remarkable contrast to the depictions of disability explored in Dickens' other narratives discussed in this thesis. The initial description of the novel's antagonist is extensive, and includes: 'The child was closely followed by an elderly man of remarkably hard features and forbidding aspect, and so low in stature as to be quite a dwarf, though his head and face were large enough for the body of a giant'.³⁵ There is no further reference to Quilp's deformity in what follows, and the description of the character, although relating to his incongruous physical appearance, could be applied without reference to disability. It is instead used to emphasise the repulsion Dickens wishes his readers to experience towards Quilp, drawing on, even relying upon, the contemporary societal trend to place judgement on physical difference.

Dickens uses an exploration of landscape to position Quilp, as a disabled man, in a wider social context, stating:

It was flood tide when Daniel Quilp sat himself down in the wherry to cross to the opposite shore. A fleet of barges were coming lazily on, some sideways, some head first; all in a wrong-headed, dogged, obstinate way, bumping up against the larger craft, running under the bows of steamboats;

³⁵ Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1995), p. 22.

getting into every kind of nook and corner where they had no business, and being crunched on all sides like so many walnut-shells; while each with its pair of long sweeps struggling and splashing in the water looked like some lumbering fish in pain.³⁶

These barges are representative of Quilp himself, and provide a foretelling of his ultimate fate. Dickens places the disability question amongst other social concerns that these barges also represent, such as advancement of industry and the disputed longevity of traditional belief systems, in order to highlight the difficulty Victorian Britain faced in coming to terms with such shifts in development. The question of the position of the disabled within society is taken further in Quilp's residency in *The Curiosity Shop* itself. Dickens presents us with a scene of infiltration: 'the dwarf proceeded to establish himself and his coadjutor in the house, as an assertion of his claim against all comers; and then set about making his quarters comfortable to his own fashion',³⁷ which is taken further in Quilp's encouragement to fill the shop with cigarette smoke. The outwardly wholesome shop, although occupied with secrets and curiosity, is polluted and poisoned by Quilp and his actions, which suggests a hyperbolic and accusing nod to disability permeating mainstream society, a view Dickens uncharacteristically endorses in this instance. This approach is further exemplified through Nell's reaction to Quilp's presence:

Here she stood for a few moments quite transfixed with terror at the sight of Mr Quilp, who was hanging so far out of bed that he almost seemed to be standing on his head, and who, either from the uneasiness of this posture or in one of his agreeable habits, was gasping and growling with his mouth wide open, and the whites (or rather the dirty yellows) of his eyes distinctly visible.³⁸

This depiction of Quilp as a strange and frightening contortionist directly

³⁶ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p. 39.

³⁷ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p. 83.

³⁸ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, pp. 94, 96.

questions the suitability of the disabled to exist in a homely, domestic setting.

As the narrative progresses, Quilp's morality is challenged. Although often ridiculed, he was able to maintain some level of fearful respect amongst his contemporaries in the constricted setting of the shop, and yet cannot exist in the same manner as the setting of the novel widens. Dickens states:

The little door out of which he had thrust his head was close to the inn larder; and there he stood, bowing with grotesque politeness... blighting all the legs of mutton and cold roast fowls by his close companionship, and looking like the evil genius of the cellars come from under ground upon some work of mischief,³⁹

which suggests that removing Quilp from his position of perceived power has served to diminish it entirely.

The mock-respect with which Quilp's perceived death is treated - "“We'll not say very crooked, ma'am,” said Brass piously. “Let us not bear hard upon the weaknesses of the deceased. He is gone, ma'am, to where his legs will never come in question””⁴⁰ - is superseded in his eventual genuine death which is a fitting and dramatic conclusion for Dickens' deformed character, and one that links directly to his earlier passage on the river. The scene is described thus:

For all its bubbling up and rushing in his ears, he could hear the knocking at the gate again- could hear a shout that followed it- could recognise the voice. For all his struggling and plashing, he could understand that they had lost their way, and had wondered back to the point from which they started; that they were all but looking on while he was drowned; that they were close at hand, but could not make an effort to save him; that he himself had shut and barred them out. He answered the shout- with a yell, which seemed to make the hundred fires that danced before his eyes tremble and flicker as if a gust of wind had stirred them. It was of no avail. The strong tide filled his throat, and bore him on, upon its rapid current. Another mortal struggle, and he was up again, beating the water with his hands, and looking out with wild and glaring eyes that showed him some black object he was drifting close upon. The hull of a ship! He could touch

³⁹ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p. 350.

⁴⁰ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p. 362.

its smooth and slippery surface with his hand. One loud cry now- but the resistless water bore down before he could give it utterance, and, driving him under it, carried away a corpse.⁴¹

This is a particularly significant scene in relation to Quilp's position in the wider social order, due to both his character and his disability. As Wilfred P. Dvorak suggests, 'The circumstances surrounding Quilp's death are emblematic of his character in the novel. Essentially, he has isolated himself on the decaying wharf from any meaningful human contact'.⁴² This argument is taken further in Vybarr Cregan-Reid's reading of Quilp's death: 'Whereas most other histories of drowning romanticise its representation as a triumphant and deserved return to nature, Quilp's death articulates a rupture or a dissonance with such narratives'.⁴³ This isolation is present in both the representation of Quilp and also the representation of *The Old Curiosity Shop* itself in that the dramatic and grotesque life and death of its deformed antagonist stands apart from more subtle and delicate considerations of disability. The way in which water brings about Quilp's end is also telling, as whatever water can cleanse, it will. What it can't, it will carry away. In his use of water then, Dickens is commenting upon both the unpardonable characteristics of Quilp, and the alienation imposed by the social order to the portion of society he represents in his deformity.

Dickens' treatment of Quilp is two-fold. He undoubtedly portrays an unscrupulous and corrupt character, and yet through Quilp's disability we are invited to explore how far society has augmented these characteristics in him.

There is a subtle sympathy within Dickens' presentation of Quilp, suggesting that

⁴¹ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p. 499.

⁴² Wilfred P. Dvorak, 'On the Knocking of the Gate in *The Old Curiosity Shop*', *Studies in the Novel*, 16:3 (Autumn, 1984), 304-313 (p. 305).

⁴³ Vybarr Cregan-Reid, 'Bodies, Boundaries and Queer Waters: Drowning and Prosopopoeia in Later Dickens', *Critical Survey*, 17:2 (2005), 20-33 (p. 24).

his character and the isolation it produces is, at least in part, a response to the prejudice against him. This is seen most clearly in Quilp's death scene, where his self-assurance is questioned and his vulnerability heightened, wherein Dickens states: 'He darted forward for a few paces, as if into the mouth of some dim, yawning cavern; then, thinking he had gone wrong, changed the direction of his steps; then stood still, not knowing where to turn'.⁴⁴ Through this narrative, Dickens acknowledges the cultural power of representing the treatment of difference. Even an author such as Dickens, who is elsewhere clearly committed to progressive representations of disability, can also reinforce old associations of disability with sin, and evil in order to comment on how disabled people were generally represented.

Although Quilp is undeniably 'bad', then, Dickens uses the circumstances of his death to question how far society is responsible for creating this character in his disability and physical difference. Prejudice towards the disabled, the novel suggests, is as natural and unquestioned as the landscape itself, and the natural environment used as a backdrop here is both influential and reactive. This is also seen in Dickens' further description of climate and offers a statement about the invidious effects of environment: 'The mist, though sluggish and slow to move, was of a keenly searching kind. No muffling up in firs and broadcloth kept it out. It seemed to penetrate into the very bones of the shrinking wayfarers, and to rack them with cold and pains.'⁴⁵ Together with the moments in which the possibility of sympathy for Quilp is suggested, this description suggests that the harsh and unaccommodating social climate may have had some standing in the creation of

⁴⁴ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p. 499.

⁴⁵ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p. 494.

Quilp as a monstrous being. The mist described here is representative of society's judgement and discrimination of otherness, portrayed as just as natural as the elements.

Dickens does not pardon Quilp, but he does go some way in exploring what we would now refer to as the Nature/Nurture debate, responding, in a nuanced way, to ideas about how a person's environment, both natural and social, influences their character. Although Dickens does not allow for character development of Quilp, instead using him as a representative character, he does allude to Quilp's apparent awareness of society's lack of acceptance of him through: "'I've got a country-house like Robinson Crusoe'" - said the dwarf, ogling the accommodations; "a solitary, sequestered, desolate-island sort of a spot, where I can be quite alone when I have no business on hand"',⁴⁶ suggesting that Quilp is required to steal from society a place for himself when he is not carrying out his established role in the public sphere.

Dickens was not the only author using landscape in order to signal both physical difference and the unrest that follows. This is a technique also seen in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. As her 1860 novel opens, we are presented with a particularly revealing scene. Eliot remarks; 'How lovely the little river is, with its dark, changing wavelets!'⁴⁷ This suggests that the ensuing narrative will bear witness to irrevocable shifts in circumstance, and the following observation of 'the white ducks that are dipping their heads far into the water here among the withes, unmindful of the awkward appearance they make in the drier world above'⁴⁸ portends of Philip Wakem, the hunchback who will play a large role in

⁴⁶ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p. 366.

⁴⁷ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1995), p. 5.

⁴⁸ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 6.

protagonist Maggie Tulliver's demise. This foretelling relates largely to the capacity of the disabled to exist in 'normal' society and their ability to escape the negative connotations linked to their deformity. Indeed, as Luke, the head miller, suggests, "“Things out o’ natur niver thrive: God A’mighty doesn’t like ‘em””.⁴⁹ Here Luke represents the traditional, antiquated view of difference. He is discussing the death of Tom's rabbits, excusing Maggie's forgetting to feed them by arguing that they would have been unable to survive anyway, as they are a breed which deviates from the norm. This is reflected in both the remnants of archaic opinion of wider society regarding disability and also the doomed romance of Maggie and Philip; suggesting that if a society is not ready, or refuses to make allowances for variance, the physically different cannot live as the able-bodied do.

The attempt to discern character from physiognomy, and the ability of the subject to survive in its landscape, is explained by Eliot as we are introduced to Maggie's brother, Tom. She states of him:

He was one of those lads that grow everywhere in England, and, at twelve or thirteen years of age, look as much alike as goslings:- a lad with light-brown hair, cheeks of cream and roses, full lips, indeterminate nose and eyebrows- a physiognomy in which it seems impossible to discern anything but the genetic character of boyhood.⁵⁰

This reading of physiognomy is extended to the first impressions given of Philip:

‘The lad’s a poor deformed creatur, and takes after his mother in the face’,⁵¹

which immediately gestures to the feminisation of male disability. Eliot presents a social understanding of this antediluvian view of deformity and highlights the

⁴⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 27.

⁵⁰ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 28.

⁵¹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 142.

naivety of such a school of thought, using the young Tom as a vehicle through which to illuminate it. In this way, Tom's thought processes regarding deformity reflect those of a largely unchallenged, social consensus:

An anatomist- even a mere physiognomist- would have seen that the deformity of Philip's spine was not a congenital hump, but the result of an accident in infancy; but you do not expect from Tom any acquaintance with such distinctions: to him, Philip was simply a hunchback. He had a vague notion that the deformity of Wakem's son had some relation to the lawyer's rascality, of which he had so often heard his father talk with hot emphasis; and he felt, too, a half-admitted fear of him as probably a spiteful fellow, who, not being able to fight you, had cunning ways of doing you mischief by the sly.⁵²

There is, in actuality, very little focus placed upon Philip's own relationship with his deformity, particularly in adulthood, although it is made clear that he is aware of the limitations it places upon him through his statement: 'Find a single person in St Oggs who will not tell you that a beautiful creature like her would be throwing herself away on a pitiful object like me'.⁵³ Rather, Eliot uses her other characters, particularly Tom, to convey a wider attitude to disability. In a narrative that is concerned with social change at large - the challenging of previously held ideals and exploration of the struggle between nature and industry - it is fitting that Eliot's early novel should include reference to approaches to disability, in particular to physical deformity. A tenacious and often stubborn clinging to familiarity in the face of social alteration in all aspects is most poignantly expressed through Eliot's observance of Tom's steadfast opinion:

Tom... never thoroughly overcame his repulsion to Philip's deformity; he was a boy who adhered tenaciously to impressions once received: as with all minds in which mere perception predominates over thought and

⁵² Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 144.

⁵³ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 381.

emotion, the external remained to him rigidly what it was in the first instance.⁵⁴

Established by a largely unspoken consensus on what is accepted as normal and abnormal, accentuated and given a sense of scientific grounding by newly expanding findings in medical fields, society had the final say in either accepting or dismissing a portion of society from its hearth.

In contrast to Tom's interpretation of disability, though, is Maggie's. She is seemingly the sole way in which Philip could transcend his existence as a cripple, and yet her own fears of 'the other' prevent this from occurring. In this case, 'the other' is a life that requires independence; not only practically but, more importantly, emotionally. There are numerous references to this 'otherness' present within *The Mill on the Floss*, particularly through the gypsies that Maggie encounters in childhood, and as Philip Fisher suggests:

More important than the gypsies or the images of pilgrim and prodigal son are the implications of the character of Philip Wakem. An outsider by accident of birth, he is a hunchback and therefore exempt, different, someone with whom all relationships take on a special tone and set of unwritten rules.⁵⁵

The ability of the surrounding characters to accept this difference is what determines Philip's ability to exist in their world, and ultimately, none of them are able to accommodate it. Maggie responds to Philip's enquiry about a deeper bond between them, and a fracturing away from her brother, in this way: "No, not better; because I don't think I *could* love you better than Tom. But I should be so sorry- *so sorry* for you." Philip coloured: he had meant to imply, would she love him in spite of his deformity, and yet when she alluded to it so plainly, he winced

⁵⁴ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 148.

⁵⁵ Philip Fisher, *Making Up Society: The Novels of George Eliot* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), p. 96.

under her pity',⁵⁶ - in a stark contrast to Tom's inability to accept any emotion towards the hunchback. Indeed, Maggie later states of Philip's disability: 'The deformity you insult would make me cling to him and care for him the more'.⁵⁷ Neither of these approaches embody the acceptance of disability that exists in the primary texts considered in this thesis, rather they both portray damaging attitudes towards the agency of deformity.

The conclusion of the narrative shows this to be the case. A 'happy ending' is bestowed upon none of Eliot's characters, because none of them embrace or even accept the need for a shift in attitude. It is interesting to note that out of the struggle that drives the novel, the facilitator lives while the embodiment of the opposing schools of thought perish in the storm. John Hagan states of Maggie: 'Her destiny is a tragic one; this tragedy is primarily determined not by her character but by the particular circumstances in which she finds herself',⁵⁸ which opens up the limitations of the disabled to include the able-bodied. In this way, *The Mill on the Floss* becomes a narrative primarily concerned with the perilous failure to embrace individuality and independence of thought and instead remain rigidly faithful to propriety for fear of being carried away by the changing tide. Eliot's closing allusion to Philip, 'The other [Philip] was always solitary. His great companionship was among the trees of the Red Deeps, where the buried joy seemed still to hover- like a revisiting spirit',⁵⁹ is both hopeful and ominous in its ambiguity. This is Eliot's somewhat bleak vision of disability acceptance as the century progresses, and the fact that her deformed character remains without the

⁵⁶ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, pp. 163-4.

⁵⁷ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 312.

⁵⁸ John Hagan, 'A Reinterpretation of *The Mill on the Floss*', *PMLA*, 87:1 (Jan., 1972), 53-63 (p. 55).

⁵⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 468.

fulfilment of romantic desires and familiar marriage placement after he has come of age separates the narrative from the celebration of disabled characters who achieve this.

This largely desolate image of the lack of, or limitations in, acceptance of disability, is also seen in Wilkie Collins' 1868 novel *The Moonstone*, through the character of 'Limping' Lucy Yolland. Although numerous references are made to the fated Rosanna Spearman's deformed shoulder, the figure of her loyal friend Limping Lucy is more significant and expressive in a consideration of the treatment of disability. The narrative itself is primarily concerned with 'difference' and 'the other'; from its preoccupation with a priceless treasure from a faraway land and the fear and distrust for the Indian characters who aspire to its return to its rightful place, to the dismissive treatment of Rosanna and Lucy, who do not adhere to the desired normative agenda through both social class and disability.

We hear of Limping Lucy before we are presented with her. Collins states: 'Limping Lucy, always weak and weary, was resting on her bed upstairs',⁶⁰ and yet this representation could not be more different to the defiance and independence of will that she exhibits throughout the novel. We are introduced to Lucy through her altercation with the novel's narrator, house-steward Gabriel Betteredge, and immediately consideration is given to her capacity to attract a suitor. Gabriel states:

I found myself face to face with the fisherman's daughter, Limping Lucy. Bating her lame foot and her leanness (this last a horrid drawback to a woman in my opinion), the girl had some pleasing qualities in the eye of a man. A dark, keen, clever face, and a nice clear voice, and a beautiful

⁶⁰ Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994), p. 131.

brown head of hair among her merits. A crutch appeared in the list of her misfortunes. And a temper reckoned high in the sum total of her defects.⁶¹

Her 'fixing me [Gabriel] with a fierce look, as she rested herself on her crutch'⁶²

further exemplifies the contrast in her. She is both attractive and flawed, ferocious, and at the same time requiring physical support, and Collins is, in a sense, required to physically disable her in order to make her defiance and rebelliousness acceptable. Of this relative delinquency, Mark Mossman suggests: 'Lucy as a body represents disruption, a sudden disturbance to the normalized perceptual field working through Victorian culture and society'.⁶³ Lucy's striking exclamation of 'I said, "No man is worth fretting for in that way"',⁶⁴ would be particularly difficult, even intolerable, for Victorian society to accept, but through her deformity Lucy is permitted to express such beliefs. This example of Lucy's strength of character is counteracted by the circumstance within which she expresses it, of which Collins states: 'One or two of the people at work in the grounds near us looked up- saw it was Limping Lucy- knew what to expect from that quarter- and looked away again',⁶⁵ and Collins includes this reaction in order to sidestep any problematic responses to such an outspoken woman in the narrative should she not be deformed and presumed defective. Therefore Lucy's threat to the patriarchal agenda of Victorian society in the mid-century is defused through her disability.

Lucy's next and final appearance, another altercation with an able-bodied male, this time Franklin Blake, the driving force behind each of the novel's

⁶¹ Collins, *The Moonstone*, p. 188.

⁶² Collins, *The Moonstone*, p. 188.

⁶³ Mark Mossman, 'Representations of the Abnormal Body in *The Moonstone*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37:2 (2009), 483-500 (p. 489).

⁶⁴ Collins, *The Moonstone*, p. 190.

⁶⁵ Collins, *The Moonstone*, p. 189.

unfortunate events, reads somewhat differently. She is no longer an outspoken, aggressive, but ultimately harmless girl figure, but instead takes on a more ominous presence. Franklin states:

an apparition advanced towards me, out of a dark corner of the kitchen. A wan, wild, haggard girl, with remarkably beautiful hair, and with a fierce keenness in her eyes, came limping up on a crutch to the table at which I was sitting, and looked at me as if I was an object of mingled interest and horror, which it quite fascinated her to see.⁶⁶

This turns a mirror to Franklin and the privileged portion of society that he, as an able-bodied, middle class male, represents, and Collins attributed to him some level of understanding of how Lucy is perceived and reacted to, with this mingled and fascinating response. In this way, Franklin embodies difference and ‘otherness’ to Lucy. Her behaviour during this exchange, described by Lewis Roberts as a ‘bitter and scathing castigation’,⁶⁷ is both a product of her disability and a reaction to it.

Lucy exits the narrative, as a relatively unexplored figure, thus: ‘With those parting words she limped away from me at the top of her speed. The one interpretation that I could put on her conduct has, no doubt, been anticipated by everybody. I could only suppose that she was mad’⁶⁸ - invites parallels between *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White*, published nine years previously. Her ‘thumping away from the dismayed Franklin Blake, into the obscurity and silence of the attic’,⁶⁹ as posed by Mossman, is an echo of Charlotte Brontë’s 1847 narrative *Jane Eyre*, inviting further exploration into fear of difference. Although

⁶⁶ Collins, *The Moonstone*, p. 304.

⁶⁷ Lewis Roberts, ‘The ‘Shivering Sands’ of Reality: Narration and Knowledge in Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*’, *Victorian Review*, 23:2 (Winter 1997), 168-183 (p. 172).

⁶⁸ Collins, *The Moonstone*, p. 305.

⁶⁹ Mossman, ‘Representations of the Abnormal Body’, p. 491.

Bronte's Bertha is able-bodied, she is foreign, and therefore susceptible to villianisation, just as Collins' Limping Lucy is.

Through her part in *The Moonstone*, Collins uses the physically deformed Lucy to open up debates surrounding difference and social division that go further than disability as well as exemplifying it. Elizabeth Steere suggests that 'by exposing the subjectivity of class identification, he [Collins] suggests a radical new form of social hierarchy where a person's birth and rank are irrelevant',⁷⁰ which proposes that Collins saw Victorian Britain's treatment of disability in much the same vein as other factors that produced prejudice, namely class and race. Lucy, it is implied, will never fulfil the familiar coming-of-age story concerned with marriageability and maternity, and yet her defiance in the face of this is essential in understanding the freedom of expectation that we see in the other Collins texts discussed in the thesis. However, whereas her able-bodied counterparts require an invisible crutch to transport themselves through Victorian society, most often in the form of a husband and a heightened social position, Limping Lucy's crutch and defect are visible. As Collins outlines in the Preface to his narrative, 'In some of my former novels, the object proposed has been to trace the influence of circumstances upon character. In the present story I have reversed the process. The attempt made here is to trace the influence of character on circumstances',⁷¹ giving much more agency to difference in gender, class, and physical ability.

Although these texts, Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, and Collins' *The Moonstone*, all present disability in such a way that

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Steere, *The Female Servant and Sensation Fiction: Kitchen Literature* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 70.

⁷¹ Collins, *The Moonstone*, preface.

deviates from the other, more liberating and accepting depictions of disability discussed in the thesis, they still provide forms of critical commentary upon their society's ability to deal with difference. To varying degrees, each character demonstrates a rage at their treatment which directly relates to wider prejudices against disability. These are more threatening and blunt representations of disability, and can be seen to show the idealism of the narratives, on which this thesis focuses, which emphasise the liberty and autonomy of disability. However, they are too committed to the exploration of a society trying to make sense of, and accommodate, the disability question in the mid-nineteenth century.

In this respect, literature such as Dinah Craik's *Olive* and *A Noble Life*, Wilkie Collins' *Hide and Seek* and *Poor Miss Finch*, and the majority of Dickens' work went some way in soothing the concerns of a worried public who were witnessing first-hand the shift from a religious basis of transmissible characteristics to a wholly scientific explanation. What Dickens, Collins, Craik and Martineau have in common here is the ability to recognise that in the freedom of a self-made familial mode, in plots that liberate characters from biological expectation, the family becomes able to both appreciate and nurture its members. The apparent choice gained through disability plots is the most significant factor here; a rejection of hereditary demands provides direct commentary on the scientific and social repercussions of creating a consistent and unspoiled biological line that would, in theory, benefit the empire. This could be seen as a reaction to disabled women and their suitability for motherhood, specifically the tensions this created within gendered domestic ideology. Most disabled women were presumed to be removed from the marriage market, not expected or desired

to fulfil their womanly duties of matrimony and maternity. The literature studied here rejects these assumptions, championing a range of choices for disabled women, and we find that many, if not all, disabled female protagonists do fulfil these roles, but to realise inner desires instead of the desires and expectations imposed by society. This is particularly liberating when read in a feminist framework, as in freeing themselves from expectation, the protagonists are able to pursue other interests and embark upon a journey of self-discovery that was largely unavailable to their able-bodied counterparts. Afflicted males, similarly, are also released from this expectation.

Disability Studies and the Reading of Victorian Affliction

This thesis positions itself in disability studies discourse. As a relatively new discipline, disability studies covers a wide range of genres and media, generating new understanding of the depth of influence disability has upon each area of society. The first academic journal dedicated to Disability Studies was released in 1986, under the name of *Disability, Handicap and Society*, later known as *Disability and Society*, although research regarding disability has of course existed prior to this.

A concern with the way in which society defines and represents the afflicted provides the basis for disability studies. In its treatment of the disabled, society places the infirm firmly as a minority group, and in this way the plight of the disabled, both throughout history and in a modern framework, can be likened to the plights of other minority groups, thus placing as much importance upon the study of a cultural, political, and economical understanding of disability as has

been given to issues concerning race, gender and class. Rather than accepting the traditional emphasis on the physicality and physiology of affliction, this expanding discipline suggests the impairment lies within society, in its reaction to the disabled amongst them.

Amongst the leading contemporary critics are Michael Berube, Lennard J. Davis, Tom Shakespeare and Tanya Titchkosky.⁷² Michael Berube suggests that the influence of disability is inescapable, recognising its influence to transcend impairment in a traditional sense and extend itself into society through any representation of difference:

A good deal of disability studies work in literature thus far has concentrated on the depiction of individual characteristics in narratives. This strand of disability studies has tended to focus on the representation of human bodies and to insist that Western literature of the past two millennia has often participated in the Christian tradition of reading disability as an index of morality.⁷³

The body has been, and is indeed sometimes still, viewed as an outward embodiment of this morality index, and as such, any deviation from whatever form society has deemed acceptable during a given time period will incite reactive response. Berube goes on to argue: 'Re-reading narrative from the perspective of disability studies, then, leads us to re-read the role of temporality, causality, and self-reflexivity in narrative',⁷⁴ suggesting that society's acceptance of and reaction to its disabled people are merely a reflection of society itself, documented in the literature of the period that includes narratives of disability.

⁷² This is by no means exhaustive, rather it is intended to provide the reader with a starting point in current Disability Studies research. Other key figures include James Charlton, Laura Hershey, Robert McRuer, Tom Gerschick, Paul K. Longmore, Fiona K. Campbell and Tobin Anthony Siebers, amongst many others.

⁷³ Michael Berube, 'Disability and Narrative', *PMLA*, 120:2 (Mar., 2005), 568-576 (p. 569).

⁷⁴ Berube, 'Disability and Narrative', p. 576.

In 'Autobiography as Performative Utterance', Berube takes this further, recognising the need for 'someone capable of self-reflection and self-representation, someone capable of life-writing',⁷⁵ which argues that literature depicting disability must come from a place of authenticity. In this thesis, Harriet Martineau provides an autobiographical perspective of disability, and the personal experiences represented through this writing provide a genuine and realistic account of how society influences the experience of the disabled and vice versa. Berube also alludes to the need for a stronger sense of self-representation and the carving out of a desired identity of the disabled, which we see clearly in each of the representations of disabled characters discussed within the thesis.

Lennard J. Davis also recognises a need for self-representation of the disabled in his numerous edited works, as well as an extensive body of individually authored work. His work is characterised by his ability to present a comprehensive overview of the changing face of disability studies, constantly questioning the place this field has in a wider academic and social order. He asks: 'Are we in the dawn, the midday, or the twilight of disability studies? Is there a post-disability studies waiting in the wings?',⁷⁶ which suggests that to those involved in this field, the discussion of disability and its wide-ranging implications are not a new phenomenon. The very notion of 'disability' is questioned by Davis, as he looks back upon the discipline thus: 'The history of disability studies is still intricately tied to a medical history... This binary [medical-disability] is putatively based on a medical diagnosis and then a cultural,

⁷⁵ Michael Berube, 'Autobiography as Performative Utterance', *American Quarterly*, 52:2 (Jun., 2000), 339-343 (p. 341).

⁷⁶ Lennard J. Davis, 'Disability: The Next Wave or Twilight of the Gods?', *PMLA*, 120:2 (Mar., 2005), 527-532 (p. 528).

social, political barrier that turns the impairment into a disability'.⁷⁷ This reflects what nineteenth-century authors were achieving in their disability narratives, removing affliction from a physiological root and instead planting it in a social framework, experimenting with how it would adapt to its new surroundings.

Davis states in 'Crips Strike Back: The Rise of Disability Studies',

Before the nineteenth century in Western culture the concept of the "ideal" in relation to bodies was the regnant paradigm, and so all bodies were less than ideal. The introduction of the concept of normalcy, however, created an imperative to be normal, as the eugenics movement proved by enshrining the bell curve (also known as the "normal curve") as the umbrella under whose demanding peak we should all stand,⁷⁸

and the significance of an understanding of 'the normal' is an important one in relation to the work the authors discussed in this thesis were doing to widen the perceptions of what was expected of those who did not adhere to this ideal of normalcy.

Tom Shakespeare alludes to this consideration in his own understanding of, and contribution to, disability studies. Using this established idea, he builds upon it to emphasise how disability moulds itself throughout a changing society. He states: 'Replacing a traditional deficit approach with a social oppression understanding was and remains very liberating for disabled individuals. Suddenly, people were able to understand it was society that was at fault, not them', continuing to challenge the 'deep-seated idea that disabled people are defined by their incapacity'.⁷⁹ This approach directly resonates with the foretelling of liberation present in the literary texts explored within the thesis, as they work to counteract the oppression of their protagonists with epiphanies of identity and

⁷⁷ Davis, 'Disability', p. 531.

⁷⁸ Lennard J. Davis, 'Crips Strike Back: The Rise of Disability Studies', *American Literary History*, 11:3 (Autumn, 1999), 500-512 (p. 504).

⁷⁹ Tom Shakespeare, *Disability Rights and Wrongs Revisited* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 13, 17.

defining themselves outside of their afflictions.

This branching out into other academic disciplines, whilst at the same time recognising the roots of disability understanding is a particular theme in the work of Tanya Titchkosky. She argues: 'The most authoritative representations of disabled persons arise from medical and/or therapeutic disciplines, and the social sciences',⁸⁰ acknowledging that in its infancy, disability studies must start there. The now seemingly separate disciplines of medicine and sociology, which are not separate concerns in much nineteenth-century writing, are, as Titchkosky argues, inseparable in considering disability. She states that: 'medicine studies pathology, sociologists study deviance, and both begin with a similar conception of the disabled body- the condition of having, and thus being, a problem'.⁸¹ These two approaches to disability are entwined, especially in consideration of social factors such as living and working conditions in the disabling of inhabitants through events such as injury and poor hygiene levels.

Modern understanding of disability studies can be directly linked back to where it was arguably born- the nineteenth century. Critics such as Titchkosky explore issues of access:

Disability is a key way of constitutively perceiving non-normalcy; it is a way of referring to and dealing with that which is regarded as anomalous and is almost always devalued. This means that the concept of disability gives us access to certain people, places, and events, but it does so while shoring up a belief in a naturalized version of access: one either has access or does not; one personally needs access or does not. Through unexamined relations to both disability and non-disability, the idea that the world is 'naturally' for some and not for others is introduced,⁸²

⁸⁰ Tanya Titchkosky, 'Disability Studies: The Old and the New', *The Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 25:2 (Spring 2000), 197-224 (p. 198).

⁸¹ Titchkosky, 'Disability Studies', p. 208.

⁸² Tanya Titchkosky, *The Question of Access: Disability, Space, Meaning* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011), p. 6.

and this is directly applicable to nineteenth-century literary discourse on the subject. Access to places, such as Craik's Prince Dolor's tower (as discussed in chapter three), which is impenetrable to outsiders, walls out as much as it walls in, and a wider understanding of access is applied to the female disabled characters who are socially discharged from spheres such as the marriage market and maternity.

In this way then, it could be argued that the nineteenth century witnessed the birth of what we know today as Disability Studies. Critics such as Martha Stoddard Holmes, Miriam Bailin, Maria H. Frawley, Rosemarie Garland Thomson, David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, Mary Wilson Carpenter, Elisabeth Gitter, Douglas C. Baynton, and Kate Flint (all of whose work has contributed to the following discussions) are just a few who recognise the wide-ranging social implications in a society that was becoming increasingly concerned with normalcy, progression, and identity on both a national and international stage. If disability studies is primarily concerned with identity, then the nineteenth century provides the perfect setting for such a study.⁸³

Holmes suggests that disability discourse, in the nineteenth century, had an agenda. She recognises its ability to '[demonstrate] how disability has been drawn and redrawn as an emotionally resonant social identity, often to the exclusion of other forms of meaning, and what cultural functions that emotional inscription of disability has served',⁸⁴ which suggests that when a person is disabled, that

⁸³ This is by no means exhaustive, rather it is intended to provide the reader with a starting point on existing research surrounding disability in the nineteenth century. Other key figures are numerous and can be found in bibliography and anthology surrounding disability discourse.

⁸⁴ Martha Stoddard Holmes, "'Happy and Yet Pitying Tears': Deafness and Affective Disjuncture in Dickens's 'Doctor Marigold'", *Victorian Review*, 35:2 (Fall 2009), 53-64 (pp. 54-5).

becomes their whole identity, one that, to a certain extent, eclipses other factors such as class and gender. She states:

The stories that pervade our lives make disability resound so intensely in emotional terms that all other possible registers (scientific, environmental, artistic, sexual, economic, geographic, epistemological, statistical, sartorial, political, and so on) are often informed and overshadowed by affect. All these registers clearly work together: emotional messages about disability are both motivated by and shored up by economics, for example. In public discourse, however, an emotional context or subtext tends to be obligatory when disability is the subject, while a host of other possible contexts for its meaning are optional or secondary,⁸⁵

Holmes maintains that the primary function of representation of disability is to elicit an emotional response, using the figure of the afflicted person as a benchmark on which to measure our own social standing; an approach which nineteenth-century authors, particularly around the unsettled period of the mid-century, capitalised upon.

This is a school of thought that is also clearly expressed in Miriam Bailin's work concerning sentimentality as 'a protest or reaction to a range of disturbing conditions having to do with the social and cultural transformations of the nineteenth century'.⁸⁶ Sentimentality and representations of the ill go hand in hand, evoking specific reactions that can seemingly only exist in the landscape of the Victorian sickroom. The sickroom then becomes an exaggerated version of a sympathetic Victorian society that looked with pity upon the disabled. Still, at the heart of these dynamics, is the need for identity of the afflicted:

Identity is clearly an issue in all of these delirious states, as are the separations and connections that inform and complicate its fashioning and that necessitate the sickroom's powers of reconciliation. The presentation of the dilemma of identity as both an endless restlessness and

⁸⁵ Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 3.

⁸⁶ Miriam Bailin, "'Dismal Pleasure': Victorian Sentimentality and the Pathos of the Parvenu", *ELH*, 66:4 (Winter 1999), 1015-1032 (pp. 1015-16).

disorientation, and a painfully undesirable attachment or connection, suggests that a fixed identity with its potentially unassimilable implications and conjunctions is as threatening as an indeterminate identity with its equally undesirable uncertainties and insecurities- perhaps more so.⁸⁷

Victorian society necessitates the sickroom, and as such exaggerates the difference and often grotesque representation of the identity of disability.

Disability is primarily a social construct, one portrayed in the literature discussed here as lacking in medical support, and Maria H. Frawley suggests of this: 'The absence of specific medical information in most invalid's narratives necessarily- and perhaps fortunately- undercuts an effort to reconstruct their experiences through a medical model of symptom, diagnosis, treatment, and response'.⁸⁸ With the exception of Herr Grosse in Collins' *Poor Miss Finch*, each narrative discussed here chooses to forego a showcasing of medical knowledge in favour of a more sentimental representation of disability, moving the focus out of the surgery and into the homes of Victorian Britain. Both due to this, and because of this, Frawley recognises that 'in the first half of the nineteenth century the figure of the invalid assumed a kind of public visibility unparalleled in earlier periods of English history'.⁸⁹ Literature of the period, then, was both reacting to, and creating, public demand for a representation of these figures.

Rosemarie Garland Thomson explores this visibility in more depth. She argues that the representation of the disabled cannot coexist with the able-bodied, stating: 'the disabled body demands a narrative, requires an apologia that accounts for its difference from unexceptional bodies',⁹⁰ which creates a further segregation

⁸⁷ Miriam Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 82.

⁸⁸ Maria H. Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 4.

⁸⁹ Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity*, p. 12.

in the reality of the two very separate experiences of existence. She also adds more depth to the representation of the afflicted, gendering the experience of the disabled, stating:

Both the female and the disabled body are cast as deviant and inferior; both are excluded from full participation in public as well as economic life; both are defined in opposition to a norm that is assumed to possess natural physical superiority. Indeed, the discursive equation of femaleness with disability is common, sometimes to denigrate women and sometimes to defend them.⁹¹

This parallels the perceived sentimentality of affliction, in that emotional response is largely culturally reserved for women, and that a woman's body is seen as weaker and therefore more susceptible to affliction. That a gendered consideration of disability can be used, as Thomson suggests, to both denigrate and defend women further suggests the role of the social order in shaping the experiences of the disabled, as both examples of inferior bodies are, during this period of the mid-century, accountable to those perceived to be physically superior- male and able-bodied.

The need for a separate place of self-identification as suggested by Thomson is echoed in the work of David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, and yet they view this in a much less positive light. They state: 'Disability began to be construed as an undesirable deviation from normative existence',⁹² and so, although giving the disabled a separate voice, this unconventionality of their being did not allow for a measured and equal representation. Of this voice, Mitchell and

⁹⁰ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, 'Staring Back: Self-Representations of Disabled Performance Artists', *American Quarterly*, 52:2 (Jun., 2000), 334-338 (p. 334).

⁹¹ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 19.

⁹² David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 3.

Snyder identify self-expression as the most common:

The discourse of disability has been largely defined by the genre of autobiography. Guided by the assumption that people with disabilities need to write their own stories in order to counteract the dehumanizing effects of societal representations and attitudes, these personal narratives usually offer the narrator as a disputatious figure critiquing the less than humane responses of a flat, often hostile, and uniformly able-ist culture,⁹³

an acknowledgment that is seen through here through the discussion of Harriet Martineau.

Mary Wilson Carpenter offers a more specific consideration of disability, focusing on the representation of the deaf and the blind. She too recognises the self-representation that characterised disability discourse in the mid-nineteenth century, and acknowledges this as a considerable development in the experiences of the deaf. She states: ‘Perhaps the most important aspect of deaf history to emerge in the nineteenth century was the representation of the deaf by themselves’,⁹⁴ which alludes to the genre of autobiography that Mitchell and Snyder argue was characteristic. Through these candid portrayals of deaf experience, Carpenter argues that ‘this century was also the first century when the deaf emerged as fully human: able to communicate and to become integrated members of society’,⁹⁵ suggesting that this mode of autobiography, of reclaiming one’s identity, was constructive in creating a social place for the deaf. The blind, however, as Carpenter suggests, did not require such an antagonistic technique in order to gain acceptance in the wider social order. She suggests: ‘Blindness is represented here, as in most Victorian literature, as a metaphor for

⁹³ *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, ed. by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 9.

⁹⁴ Mary Wilson Carpenter, *Health, Medicine, and Society in Victorian England* (California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010), p. 110.

⁹⁵ Carpenter, *Health, Medicine, and Society*, p. 110.

insight rather than as actual sensory loss',⁹⁶ and in this way, the lack of emphasis upon sensory damage and increased focus upon an experience of enlightenment that did not discriminate against the able-bodied, meant that normative society could more easily empathise with the experience of the blind. It also enabled the blind to coexist with the able-bodied more easily, as the level of difference was not as vast as it was between the able-bodied and the deaf or the physically abnormal.

Douglas C. Baynton's work focuses upon the exploration of the results of this sensory loss and the vast difference it creates in the experiences of the disabled and able-bodied. The deaf were subject to higher levels of derision and anxiety in a social context, and perhaps more susceptible to the progression in scientific findings becoming social ideals as the century progressed. A greater significance was placed upon the management of the deaf and Baynton cites the treatment of their exclusive method of communication as an example of this, stating:

The reasons for the turn against sign language were many and complex, but among them was the influence of the new theories of evolution. Evolutionary theory fostered a perception of sign languages as inferior to spoken languages, fit only for "savages" and not for civilized human beings.⁹⁷

In this way, the deaf became public property. Baynton also recognises that nineteenth-century debates around the management of the deaf represented a deeper, more ominous, concern. He argues:

⁹⁶ Carpenter, *Health, Medicine, and Society*, p. 147.

⁹⁷ Douglas C. Baynton, "'Savages and Deaf Mutes': Evolutionary Theory and the Campaign Against Sign Language in the Nineteenth Century', in *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship*, ed. by John V. Van Cleve (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 1999), pp. 92-112 (p. 93).

Oralists and manualists have generally been portrayed as standing on opposite sides of an ideological fault line. While in many ways accurate, this formulation obscures fundamental similarities between them. Both created images of deaf people as outsiders. Implicit in these images was the message that deaf people depended upon hearing people to rescue them from their exile,⁹⁸

which suggests the deaf became something of a bargaining tool between opposing ideologies that characterised the mid-century.

Returning to the blind, Elisabeth G. Gitter recognises the problematic placement of them in the social order, despite the idea that more sympathy was reserved for the blind than those suffering with other afflictions. They were less threatening than the deaf or the physically disabled, certainly, and although the able-bodied were allowed, at least in part, to enter their sphere, the blind were not permitted to fully integrate themselves into established, normative society. Using Dickens' Bertha from 'The Cricket on the Hearth' to represent this, Gitter states:

Irredeemably ineligible for marriage, she [Bertha] exists outside the conventions of narrative closure. Neither dying, like Nydia, the lovelorn blind flower girl who conveniently drowns herself at the end of Edward Bulwer Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii*, nor achieving marriageability through a physically transformative "softening," like Dickens's other dolls' dressmaker, the deformed Jenny Wren of *Our Mutual Friend*, blind Bertha is excluded from the dance that her music makes possible. Marginal and partnerless, she is nevertheless necessary for the final *pas d'ensemble*; without her, there can be no fairy-tale ending.⁹⁹

This gendered consideration of the blind suggests that although they were humoured and to some extent pacified by nineteenth-century society, they were kept just far enough away so as not to challenge the social order in any real, threatening way. Gitter also recognises the idealisation and romanticism attached to the representation of the blind, particularly blind women, in literature of the

⁹⁸ Douglas C. Baynton, "'A Silent Exile on this Earth': The Metaphorical Construction of Deafness in the Nineteenth Century", *American Quarterly*, 44:2 (Jun., 1992), 216-243 (p. 220).

⁹⁹ Elisabeth G. Gitter, 'The Blind Daughter in Charles Dickens's "Cricket on the Hearth"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 39:4 (Autumn, 1999), 675-689 (p. 675).

mid-century. She states: 'blind characters were more easily integrated into marriage plots than they were in life',¹⁰⁰ suggesting that authors concerning themselves with blind disability discourse were championing a far more normative and accepting experience for the blind than they were facing in their reality.

Judgements of able-bodies versus the disabled body based upon physical appearance were part of a wider preoccupation with the body as an index to the type of person in question, and yet Kate Flint argues that appearance-based judgement was not a concern exclusive to the disabled. She states:

the idea was widespread, in the mid-century, that different social types, and different types of character, were physiognomically distinguishable. Not only faces in their entirety offered themselves up to be read, but facial expressions (pathognomy), lines on the forehead (metoposcopy), lines on the hand (chiromancy and chirognomy), and moles (neomancy) were all available for deciphering.¹⁰¹

In this way, the able-bodied had some overlapping experiences of being interpreted, especially in terms of their morality and marriageability, subject to physical characteristics. In literature, the characteristics of an individual were literally spelled out for its readers, and through practices such as those which Flint allude to, with their basis in scientific understanding, the same could be said for Victorian society. She recognises the 'assumption that the appearance of bodies revealed the truth about the person who inhabited it',¹⁰² and in this way, every Victorian was subject to appearance-based prejudice. This could be used to explain why disability, and physical and social difference, was such a prevalent

¹⁰⁰ Gitter, 'The Blind Daughter', p. 676.

¹⁰¹ Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 14.

¹⁰² Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, p. 14.

concern in the mid-nineteenth century.

The social and familial position, as well as the identity of the disabled are prevalent themes within this thesis, which recognises and explores the debates concerning heredity, family, and disability in mid-century Victorian Britain. It argues that domestic fiction of the mid-century champions the disabled as a means of challenging the broader social norms and gendered ideologies that were present during the period.

Chapter One

See No Evil: Blindness in Nineteenth-century Literature

‘The attempt here made is to appeal
to an interest of another kind,

by exhibiting blindness as it really is'¹⁰³

While blind people in the nineteenth century were often regarded as less than full members of society, the texts studied in this chapter tell a different story and are, fundamentally, both tales of triumph over prejudice and examples of adapted domestic roles juxtaposed with common ideas of able-bodied domestic arrangements. The blind were in constant darkness, and thus this affliction has rich metaphorical implications. This 'blindness' is of particular importance when attached to females on the verge of womanhood, as the turbulence of this time is well documented in able-bodied women.

For blind females during this time of transition there are two schools of thought to be explored in this chapter. The first is that blind females kept in this metaphorical darkness as a result of their affliction were imprisoned and managed by those around them, from a domestic scale to the nationwide institutions available for their education and organisation. Although this was seen as a safer option for this portion of the population who were viewed as unable to integrate themselves into mainstream society, both public and private management of blind women pose countless ethical issues and present an extension of the wider social management of women that occurred in the nineteenth century. This treatment is seen in Charles Dickens' 1845 narrative, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', wherein Bertha is kept in darkness about her domestic arrangement and as such is unable

¹⁰³ Wilkie Collins, *Poor Miss Finch* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1913), p. x.

to grow until the truth is finally revealed. As a result of this, she is unable to form an accurate understanding of those around her.

The second school of thought, as depicted in Dinah Craik's *Olive* (1850), and Wilkie Collins' *Poor Miss Finch* (1872), is that blindness and the resulting metaphorical connotations are a positive aspect in the development of the afflicted. Treated with a deeper level of understanding, possibly due to the later dates of publication, characters in these novels are able to use their blindness to explore their other senses, and become excellent judges of character. Their blindness, chosen in one text and graciously welcomed in another, becomes not a burden but an enlightening aspect of their characters which has allowed them to grow and make the transition from girlhood to womanhood, albeit at different stages of their lives.

Charles Dickens' 'The Cricket on the Hearth' is a more sinister portrayal of blindness than the other texts included in this chapter. Disguised as a sentimental fairy tale, its depiction of the blind female is interesting in its departure from the 'happy ending' present in many texts with a disability plot. This, of course, may in some part be attributed to the publication date, and the formative years of the mid-century in determining the social roles of the afflicted. It is also fair to suggest, given Dickens' self-conscious use of his work, particularly his Christmas writings, for social reform, that he had a distinct agenda with this disturbing 'utopian' tale. Bertha is eternally childlike, kept in her infancy by those around her who have decided it is kinder, safer and altogether more acceptable to create for her a world which does not exist. As a result of this, she is unable to exist as a woman, unprepared for society outside of her immediate

carers and is treated as such. Dickens is using this plot device to comment upon the dangers of this, championing the normalisation of the blind.

Dinah Craik's *Olive* explores blindness taking hold within another transitional period of a woman's life, and differs from the other texts studied because the afflicted, Olive's mother, is not blind from birth but instead descends into it as a result of age. She is fundamentally altered from the character she was when she was in possession of her sight, and it takes this affliction to enable her to grow and 'see' the error of her ways. Olive's mother's blindness allows her long-awaited freedom from the feminine expectations she has upheld throughout her life as wife and mother, and this is symptomatic of the crippling ideals expected of women in domestic, maternal and marital roles.

Wilkie Collins' *Poor Miss Finch* depicts an example of a new type of protagonist, headstrong and of an independent nature, in place of the previous portrayals of those who are dependent and largely compliant. In this way, Collins is able to create a more radical narrative than the others explored within this chapter, and is bold in his commentary on the positive aspects of blindness. Much like 'The Cricket on the Hearth', a false world is created for Lucilla, and the revelation enables her to realise that her blindness is indeed a large aspect of her person, and not something that necessarily requires a cure. In some ways, she is retreating back into a world wherein she is in control and can imagine society and circumstance as she wishes them to be, and yet there is astonishing bravery in her acceptance of her condition as something that does not require management or supervision; indeed, as something that has enabled her to conclude without prejudice and 'see' things clearly. In each of these texts, blindness can only be

accepted when the afflicted comes to terms with the reality of it. There must be some truth to be learnt before the culmination of the narratives; an aspect of society that they must accept or a relationship to be healed that would not be possible if the woman involved had not been blind.

In contrast to this, Collins' 1857 novel, *The Dead Secret*, portrays a blind man, whose treatment differs from that of the depictions of blind women. In a predominantly patriarchal society, men were seen as the driving force, and the public face, of Victorian Britain, and thus were required to act accordingly. In presenting a blind male character, Collins is able to both portray a new representation of masculinity as well as adhering to established images of maleness. His characterisation of Leonard Franklin is perhaps the most complex of those discussed in this chapter, as he is able to exist, and excel, in both the domestic and public spheres.

The sightless are by no means hopelessly cast down by their calamity': Victorian Views of the Blind

In 1826, medical periodical *The Lancet* included an article by Sir William Lawrence, in which he wrote: 'Everyone feels that sight is the most valuable of our senses; that it not only is, in itself, the most important inlet of knowledge - the most indispensable medium of our communication with surrounding persons and objects'.¹⁰⁴ In 1870, an unknown contributor wrote in Charles Dickens' publication, *All the Year Round*, which ran from 1859 up until 1893: 'it is indisputable that the sightless are by no means hopelessly cast down by their

¹⁰⁴ William Lawrence, 'Lectures on the Anatomy, Physiology and Diseases of the Eye', *The Lancet*, 5 (1826), 513-520 (p. 513).

calamity. Many a blind man is, in reality, a far less helpless, and far more useful member of society, than hosts of people who have all their faculties about them'.¹⁰⁵ The fundamental difference between these two pieces of nineteenth-century journalism depicts the wide-ranging, and ultimately wildly ambiguous, reaction to the blind and the question of their management in Victorian Britain and the significance of the mid-century in the development of understanding. Kate Flint argues that: 'The Victorians were fascinated with the act of seeing, with the question of the reliability - or otherwise - of the human eye, and with the problems of interpreting what they saw',¹⁰⁶ and in the age of the printing press, widely available newspapers and periodicals, and medical advancement, the Victorians were indeed preoccupied with the idea of sight and blindness, and all its literal and metaphorical avenues. Indeed, the era was 'visually orientated, if not visually obsessed'.¹⁰⁷

Visual media was taking over Britain, and an embossed portrait of Queen Victoria was created in her early years as Queen. This portrait, measuring just four inches in length, was designed to enable blind people to 'see' their Queen.¹⁰⁸ It was not a particular success, however, and the blind were unable to make sense of the offering, due to the as yet un-established nature of a widely used format of silent communication for the blind.

This societal inclusion of the blind is typical of the social history of blindness. It is a history that differs greatly from that of other afflictions, and since

¹⁰⁵ Anonymous, 'Blind Leaders of the Blind', *All the Year Round*, 3 (1870), 550-552 (p. 511).

¹⁰⁶ Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁷ Vanessa Warne, "'So that the sense of touch may supply the want of sight": Blind Reading and Nineteenth-century British Print Culture', in *Media, Technology and Literature in the Nineteenth Century: Image, Sound, Touch*, ed. by Colette Colligan and Margaret Linley (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), pp. 43-64 (p. 45).

¹⁰⁸ See Warne, "'So that the sense of touch may supply the want of sight'" for more on this.

antiquity this fascination has been widely recorded; Moshe Barasch points to ‘A certain ambiguity or ambivalence [that] characterises the image of the blind’, an observation that resonates throughout historical representations of the affliction.¹⁰⁹

This idea is taken further in Philip L. Safford and Elizabeth J. Safford’s suggestion:

since antiquity blindness has evoked responses other than pity. Fear, awe, even reverence, were founded on superstition, of course. But... accomplished blind persons suggested yet other images, images of competence, independence, even sometimes special talent.¹¹⁰

The affliction itself was often linked to innocence, purity and even angelic character in that the blind are literally ‘blind’ to the sinful and unattractive sights of their surroundings. However, importantly, they still possess the ability to hear the word of God and involve themselves in many aspects of society; the lack of which deemed their deaf and dumb counterparts ‘savage’ and ‘beast-like’. Given the historical aspects of communicating biblical and moral teaching; that is, before the written word was available or even understood, the blind were afflicted by a disability that did not interfere with character development, and as such were almost celebrated in historical antiquity. It is at the very beginnings of social civilisation that the symbolic aspects of blindness took root. Blindness was looked upon as a mystery, an affliction that carried as much metaphorical meaning as it did medical; and the countless references to blindness in the Bible meant that such figures were often looked upon as: ‘dwell[ing] in two worlds’, even being

¹⁰⁹ Moshe Barasch, *The History of a Mental Image in Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.3.

¹¹⁰ Philip L. Safford and Elizabeth J. Safford, *A History of Childhood and Disability* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996), p. 122.

considered as closer to God than able-bodied people.¹¹¹ Hereditary blindness was often overlooked in favour of elaborate and symbolic rhetoric on sight; indeed, as Barasch recognises: ‘the belief, widespread in the ancient world, that [the blind] had been granted the ability to communicate with worlds that are outside the reach of mortal human beings’.¹¹²

This is not to say that the blind did not suffer stigma and segregation as a result of the disability. It was not until the eighteenth century that blind people were thought worthy of educating, and it took much of the nineteenth century to more fully realise this ideal. Prior to Louis Braille and his invention of a means for communicating the written word to the blind, there was little, if any, hope that the blind could hope to join mainstream society in their ability to read and write.¹¹³

In order to decrease the mentality of difference between the blind and the able bodied, the blind had to in some way directly coalesce with, and contribute to mainstream society. The success of such cohesion continues to be under close review even today, as the blind have historically been viewed as difficult to place in terms of their care and management. Victorian Britain ‘designated blindness as a specific social problem, demanding its own solutions’.¹¹⁴

In Britain, the first school for the blind opened in Liverpool in 1791: The Liverpool School for the Indigent Blind by Edward Rushton.¹¹⁵ As the name

¹¹¹ Barasch, *Blindness*, p. 3.

¹¹² Barasch, *Blindness*, p. 11.

¹¹³ For more on Louis Braille and the system of communication, see Michael C. Mellor, *Louis Braille: A Touch of Genius* (Boston: National Braille Press, 2006).

¹¹⁴ Gordon Ashton Phillips, *The Blind in British Society: Charity, State and Community, c. 1780-1930* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), p. 19.

¹¹⁵ Rushton was blinded during his time on a slave ship in the 1770s, contracting ophthalmia, an inflammation of the eye. Upon his return to Liverpool, he became a social reformer, and his personal experience with blindness led to his opening of the school.

suggests, he wished to create a system of asylum for those who were treated with disdain in mainstream society. The School did not teach reading until 1862, and, as Mary Wilson Carpenter suggests: 'The Victorian era in Britain... can be seen as a time of real, through limited, progress against blindness itself and toward improvement in the lives of the blind'.¹¹⁶ As Mary Klages observes:

the philosophical construction of the social meaning of blindness removed blind people from the status of "freaks", whose infirmity provided only a spectacle, but relegated them still to the status of anomalous objects - of investigation rather than ridicule.¹¹⁷

Blind adults in particular were visited by the general public, who revelled in seeing them read with their fingers, through the use of Braille. This 'casual cruelty',¹¹⁸ of making the blind work as spectacle was counteracted by Victorian attitudes towards charity, and the plight of the blind was particularly focused upon within the charitable sphere. In 1869 Francis W. Roswell, in writing for *The Quiver: An Illustrated Magazine for Sunday and General Reading*, suggested to his readers: 'Among the many forms of practical charity, there are none more eminently worthy of attention than those connected with the comfort and well-being of the blind',¹¹⁹ continuing to proclaim: 'Blind people have in a special manner a claim upon our forbearance and active benevolence'.¹²⁰ Phillips observes: 'Four types of blind charity were established between the late-eighteenth century and mid-nineteenth century: asylums and schools; workshops; home visiting societies; and pension associations',¹²¹ suggesting that the blind

¹¹⁶ Carpenter, *Health, Medicine, and Society*, p. 132.

¹¹⁷ Mary Klages, *Woeful Afflictions: Disability and Sentimentality in Victorian America* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 14.

¹¹⁸ Carpenter, *Health, Medicine, and Society*, p. 133.

¹¹⁹ Francis W. Roswell, 'Charities', *The Quiver: An Illustrated Magazine for Sunday and General Reading*, 4 (1869), 296-298 (p. 296).

¹²⁰ Roswell, 'Charities', p. 296.

¹²¹ Phillips, *The Blind in British Society*, p. 8.

were fortunate in as much as their care could be tailor-made for the specific circumstance of the afflicted individual. Yet, as he continues to suggest, 'it is possible, of course, to entertain doubts on how far these individuals and organizations were representative of a larger constituency'.¹²² This is reflected in the shift in tone as the century progressed, and as the era drew to a close, mainstream society was calling for a state funded alleviation of the lot of the blind, as opposed to the charitable organisations that had previously been their sole source of funding and relief.

Advances in medical authority, including the prevention of infectious eye diseases, meant that the nineteenth century saw a dramatic reduction in those afflicted with blindness as the century progressed. In 1840, John Walker's 'Diseases of the Eye' appeared in *The Lancet*, and relayed, in extreme detail, his findings on the treatment of the wide-ranging afflictions related to blindness. Of the causes of the affliction, he cites only smallpox and 'increased vascular action'.¹²³ In 1871, *The Lancet* included an article by J. Soelberg Wells, entitled 'Internal Diseases of the Eye as seen with the Ophthalmoscope', which was an innovative tool created in the mid-century, using mirrors with which to gain further understanding of the eye. This article cited causes for blindness, including tumours, haemorrhagic effusions, meningitis, syphilitic deposits, softening of the brain, diseases of the spinal cord, anaemia, blood poisoning, typhus, and scarlet fever. He states of this grouping together of blindness not caused by direct trauma to the eye, that 'special attention must be paid to the history of the case',¹²⁴ which

¹²² Phillips, *The Blind in British Society*, p. 11.

¹²³ John Walker, 'Diseases of the Eye', *The Lancet*, 1 (1840), 937-942 (p. 939).

¹²⁴ J. Soelberg Wells, 'Internal Diseases of the Eye as seen with the Ophthalmoscope', *The Lancet*, 2 (1871), 421-432 (p. 421).

highlights the perceived importance of the afflicted's personal history, allowing for hereditary exploration. An 1861 article relating to blindness, however, goes some way in removing such need for hereditary concern, stating that of the 30,000 blind individuals counted in the 1851 census, only one in twenty 'are born blind, or lose their sight in early infancy'.¹²⁵

These examples emphasise the importance of the decades of the mid-century in the understanding of the causes of, and treatment of, blindness. Throughout this period, there remains little congenital evidence of the affliction, with one article from 1850 stating: 'I could collect no evidence respecting blindness in other members of the family, but I may remark that hereditary cataract occurs generally in the curable form of the disease.'¹²⁶ The article continues to suggest: 'a family tendency shows itself more frequently among brothers and sisters than between parents and their children'.¹²⁷ Many blind people, it was understood, were victims of outside influences such as trauma to the eye, or experienced blindness as a side effect of other diseases. With the lack of specialised optical care in terms of prevention of blindness, the mid-century's understanding of blindness also extended to an over-exertion of one eye in compensation of the weaker one, resulting in progressive deterioration of sight.

In its application to society, blindness was treated, as we will see, with an increased sympathy and understanding, wherein corruption and morally questionable behaviour were, in some instances, explained as literary devices.

¹²⁵ Anonymous, 'The Blind', p. 442.

¹²⁶ Augustin Pritchard, 'Statistics of Blindness', *Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal*, 14:2 (1850), 35-37 (p. 36).

¹²⁷ Pritchard, 'Statistics', p. 36.

Charles Dickens, in correspondence with Mary Hurnall in 1840, states of his depiction of Stagg in *Barnaby Rudge*:

My intention in the management of this inferior and subordinate character, was to remind the World who have eyes, that they have no *right* to expect in sightless men a degree of virtue and goodness to which they, in full possession of all their senses, can lay no claim- that it is a very easy thing for those who misuse every gift of Heaven to consider resignation and cheerfulness the duty of those to whom it has deprived of some great blessing- that whereas we look upon a blind man who does wrong, as a kind of monster, we ought in Truth and Justice to remember that a man who has eyes and is a vicious wretch, is by his very abuse of the glorious faculty of sight, an immeasurably greater offender than his afflicted fellow.¹²⁸

This relates to the medical understanding of blindness, as the nature of the blind, as shaped by their affliction, was, in part, understood to result in such character faults. Dickens is suggesting that the blind are not expected to adhere the same moral values as the able-bodied because they are without such blessings that enable them to be fully integrated into society, and therefore follow conventional social instructions. Indeed, as stated in the *British Medical Journal*: ‘Egotism, jealousy, and suspicion, are the most prominent failings of the blind.’¹²⁹

The 1851 census revealed that 1,110 people in every million were blind, a number which dropped to 830 per million by 1901. Rosqwell refers to medical success in his article ‘Charities’, citing: ‘In all of these assistance is afforded to thousands of sufferers every year, and in many cases complete and enduring sight has been the happy result of wonderfully clever operations upon persons who were born blind.’¹³⁰ John Fletcher Clews Harrison observes a more mixed picture than that suggested by such triumphant narratives of progress: ‘The incidence of

¹²⁸ *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Jenny Hartley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) pp. 86-7.

¹²⁹ Wells, ‘Internal Diseases of the Eye’, p. 422.

¹³⁰ Rosqwell, ‘Charities’, p. 298.

reported blindness fell sharply after 1871; [but] for lesser forms of impaired sight there was little improvement in treatment'.¹³¹ The inclusion of medical details, however, in fiction such as Collins' *Poor Miss Finch* depicts a growth in medical authority within this period. Notwithstanding these medical advances, the institutional management of the blind was still primitive, and Phillips argues: 'The asylums for the blind certainly displayed features of the total institution: an immuring architecture, strict routine, careful schemes of supervision, introspective communal life, and self-justifying charity'.¹³²

Dickens, Howe, and the Education of the Blind (Girl)

Dr Samuel Howe is an important figure in the debates surrounding the appropriate care and education offered to the blind in the Victorian era. He set up a School in 1832 that accommodated only 6 children, teaching them in the home of his father in Boston, America. An anonymous contributor to *The Social Service Review* states of Howe: 'Few people had ever thought of teaching children except through the sense of sight, and his experiment aroused the greatest interest',¹³³ and his work led to the introduction of a national printing press for the blind in the late-nineteenth century, albeit following numerous unsuccessful attempts. Howe was focused on the education of the blind, holding unyielding views on the care and social involvement of the afflicted. He 'looked to restoring the blind child to a normal place in its family and the community',¹³⁴ arguing against the asylum-based mentality that had prevailed prior to his intervention in these debates.

¹³¹ John Fletcher Clews Harrison, *Late Victorian Britain: 1875-1901* (Oxon: Routledge Press, 1991), p. 132.

¹³² Phillips, *The Blind in British Society*, p. 5.

¹³³ Anonymous, 'Source Materials: Samuel Gridley Howe, 1801-1876', *The Social Service Review*, 1:2 (June 1927) 291-309 (p. 292).

¹³⁴ Anon, 'Source Materials', p. 294.

Simon Hayhoe argues that although the schools and institutions set up for the blind ‘differed widely in their methods and somewhat in their objectives, they had in common the desire to alleviate the lot of the blind by beginning with children’,¹³⁵ and although Collins’ *Poor Miss Finch* and Craik’s *Olive* are primarily concerned with adult blindness, we see in the often childlike traits of the blind characters that age can actually have little to do with the psychological state of the blind in this society.

Howe’s attempt to incorporate the blind into mainstream society was recognised by Charles Dickens, and Howe features heavily in Dickens’ 1842 travelogue, *American Notes*, which I examine in more detail in the next chapter. Dickens was particularly interested in the bringing of reading materials to the blind, and on the 2nd February 1868, in correspondence with Howe, he enquires: ‘What would be the cost of printing in raised letters for the use of the blind, an edition of- say 250, or 500 copies- of *The Old Curiosity Shop*?’¹³⁶ of which Dickens later states: ‘The sum, according to your estimate, I place at your disposal for the production of 250 copies of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, printed in raised letters for the use of the Blind’,¹³⁷ sent on the 18th May in the same year. Throughout the period between the publication of *American Notes* and this example of correspondence from 1868, Dickens and Howe continued to communicate upon this topic amongst others, and settled into a friendship of mutual respect and admiration.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Simon Hayhoe, *God, Money and Politics: English Attitudes to Blindness and Touch, from the Enlightenment to Integration* (USA: Information Age Publishing Inc., 2008), p. 66.

¹³⁶ *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Graham Storey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 56.

¹³⁷ *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Storey, p. 113.

¹³⁸ For more on this, see *Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe: The Servant of Humanity*, ed. by D. Estes (Boston: Colonial Press, 1909).

The inclusion of the idea of the hearth and the increasing focus on family, and its impact upon disabled individuals became a focus for much literature of the nineteenth century, and Dickens used his fiction to explore the impact of modes of care within this sphere. Whereas his journalism tended to explore the political and medical aspects of disability, the fiction depicting disabled individuals, although also political, often took a much more domestic approach, as is seen within his narrative 'The Cricket on the Hearth.' The narrative is described by Stoddard Holmes as depicting characters who fail to 'see the truth about those they love',¹³⁹ and it is here, within the domestic sphere, that Dickens is able to explore what this meant for individuals afflicted with blindness and how they can be misinterpreted. Klages argues: 'in nineteenth-century depictions of blind people the question would arise whether the disabled could also speak for themselves, and in what terms they understood and articulated their own experience',¹⁴⁰ and the blind girl portrayed within 'The Cricket on the Hearth' addresses this question directly.

'The Cricket on the Hearth', published in 1845 as a Christmas book, and later re-published alongside Dickens' *Christmas Stories*, was a great commercial success for Dickens. It is principally ambiguous, particularly in its narration, and depicts a small community within which a husband and wife, a toymaker and his blind daughter, and an ill-natured master are focused upon. It is predominantly a domestic tale, and lends itself to the fairy-tale genre in parts, with the all too blurred lines between reality and imagination being themes of the narrative. In this way, this charming, fairy-tale like tale becomes one of dystopian nightmare. This dystopia is revealed through the nightmarish descriptions of the blind

¹³⁹ Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 43.

¹⁴⁰ Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, p. 25-6.

daughter's living arrangements, as well as the misrepresentation she receives from her father.

The narrative was one close to Dickens' heart, as he had previously wished to bring to fruition a weekly journal entitled *The Cricket: A Cheerful Creature that Chirps on the Hearth* in 1845, although this ambition was short-lived and gave way to more pressing projects. The text itself has been recognised as being 'published by Dickens to stimulate public awareness of social problems' and 'invite charitable giving',¹⁴¹ and as such, Holmes suggests of the blind figure in the narrative: 'Bertha has functioned mostly as a plot nexus and a character whose supposed dependency and suffering... have allowed others to reveal their worth'.¹⁴²

The narrative opens with a war of wills between a household kettle and a cricket. There are undertones of a juxtaposition between nature and an increasingly developed society, and also of the reality of the domestic that often differed from idealised portrayals of the private sphere. The kettle is described as: 'aggravating and obstinate',¹⁴³ and Dickens continues: 'it would lean forward with a drunken air, and dribble, a very idiot of a kettle on the hearth... it hadn't quite made up its mind yet, to be good company',¹⁴⁴ and it is here that the domestic characters are introduced. Heather Tilley suggests: 'The narrative demonstrates that looking is not just a function of the eyes, it is also a culturally and socially constructed act',¹⁴⁵ and this is immediately set up in the personification of

¹⁴¹ Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 43.

¹⁴² Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 46.

¹⁴³ Charles Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', in *Christmas Books* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1854), 1-97 (p. 1.)

¹⁴⁴ Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', pp. 2-3.

inanimate objects. The home belongs to Mary, called Dot by her husband John, and a young child, overlooked by the cricket of whom Mary states: 'This has been a happy home, John, and I love the cricket for its sake...To have a cricket on the hearth is the luckiest thing in all the world'.¹⁴⁶ Their situation is one of serene domesticity, and is used to contrast to the family mode of their neighbours, Caleb and his blind daughter, Bertha, of whom Dickens states:

Caleb Plummer and his Blind Daughter lived all alone by themselves, in a little cracked nutshell of a wooden house... It stuck to the premises of Gruff and Tackleton like a barnacle to a ship's knell, or a snail to a door, or a little bunch of toad-stools to the stem of a tree.¹⁴⁷

The use of capitalisation is of particular importance, as it bestows a talismanic fairy-tale significance, rather than a named individuality, to the Blind Daughter, a token of her otherness as the only disabled character. Gitter has noted that:

The text is dotted with eyes: there are the dark, 'penetrating' eyes of the bespectacled Stranger; the dull, 'wandering' eyes of Caleb; the staring eyes of the dolls; the glittering, half-shut Quilp-like little eye of Tackleton; the beautiful, downcast eyes of May Fielding; the 'twinkling of an eye' in which the story time passes,¹⁴⁸

which all point to the more sinister aspects of fairy-tale narrative. Gitter continues to suggest: 'The story's sentimental veneer barely conceals a punishing aggression directed toward the Blind Daughter who, surrounded by eyes and games of seeing, is herself stranded in sightlessness'.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Heather Anne Tilley, 'Sentiment and Vision in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and 'The Cricket on the Hearth', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 4 (2007), 1-22 (p. 1).

¹⁴⁶ Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', p. 11.

¹⁴⁷ Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', p. 30.

¹⁴⁸ Gitter, 'The Blind Daughter in Charles Dickens' p. 678.

¹⁴⁹ Gitter, 'The Blind Daughter in Charles Dickens', p. 679.

Bertha's age is not directly stated, although it is thought that she is not a young child, and is of similar age to May, Bertha's brother Edward's love interest, who is of marrying age. Her child-like demeanour is a result of her blindness and her father's insistence on creating a world of fancy for his daughter, blinding her to the harsh reality of their situation. As Tilley suggests:

Bertha's existence in this make-believe world is more distinctly unsettling because it is uncertain whether she can be who she thinks she is, depending upon how far we accept that subjects are determined by the objective world around them,¹⁵⁰

which highlights Dickens' appeal, following Howe, to integrate the blind into normative society and avoid this level of detrimental protection.

Bertha works with her father, and this employment as a toy-maker continues a child-like manner in her doll-making. This fantasy world is encouraged by Caleb, and Dickens states of their living arrangements: 'I have said that Caleb and his daughter lived here; but I should have said that Caleb lived here, and his poor Blind Daughter somewhere else; in an enchanted home of Caleb's furnishing, where scarcity and shabbiness were not, and trouble never entered'.¹⁵¹ Throughout the narrative, Dickens uses Caleb to voice concerns about sheltering the afflicted, and to dramatise the often fraught distinction between emotional and practical care. As Gitter suggests, Caleb 'pretending to act as his daughter's trusted eyes, creates for her pleasure an imaginary world in which he is youthful, well off, and handsome, while Tackleton is benevolent, manly and noble'.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Tilley, 'Sentiment and Vision', p. 14.

¹⁵¹ Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', p. 30.

¹⁵² Gitter, 'The Blind Daughter in Charles Dickens', pp. 679-70.

Caleb is keeping Bertha in childhood, protecting her against the outside world in the same way as Mary and John do for their own infant son. As a result of this:

The Blind Girl never knew that the ceilings were discoloured; walls blotched, and bare of plaster here and there; high crevices unstopped, and widening every day: beams mouldering and tending downward. The Blind Girl never knew that the iron was rusting, wood rotting, paper peeling off; the very size, and shape, and true proportion of the dwelling, withering away.¹⁵³

This may seem harmless enough, and yet the tone of the passage quickly changes, as Dickens goes on:

The Blind Girl never knew that ugly shapes of delf and earthenware were on the board: that sorrow and faint-heartedness were in the house; that Caleb's scanty hairs were turning greyer and more grey before her sightless face. The Blind Girl never knew they had a master, cold, exacting and uninterested: never knew that Tackleton was Tackleton in short; but lived in the belief of an eccentric humorist who loved to have his jest with them; and while he was the Guardian Angel of their lives, disdained to hear one word of thankfulness.¹⁵⁴

The shift in tone here alludes to the relative innocence of creating a world of fancy for the blind girl crossing over into the more sinister aspects of deeming her unable to exist unprotected by childhood fantasy. Klages suggests: 'since blindness, limiting physical mobility, produced a more visible form of disability than deafness, blindness became the form of disability producing the most sympathy and compassion',¹⁵⁵ and it is due to this that Bertha's blindness 'made her the object of everyone's concern and kindness'.¹⁵⁶ It is this school of social thought that Dickens tackles within 'The Cricket on the Hearth', showing Bertha to be capable of as much understanding and feeling as her able-bodied

¹⁵³ Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', p. 30.

¹⁵⁴ Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', p. 31.

¹⁵⁵ Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, p. 22.

¹⁵⁶ Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, p. 2.

counterparts, and yet repressed in her ability to integrate herself within the able-bodied community. Indeed, Bertha is reduced to evoking such reactions in the able-bodied as 'looking at a blind girl, in the end, is no different from looking at a desirable dummy'.¹⁵⁷

Bertha's employer, Tackleton, is representative of the ignorance shown towards the afflicted in his dealings with her, portraying a distinct lack of perception of blindness, although 'in good Christmas Book fashion, he... is ultimately transformed and redeemed'.¹⁵⁸ He views the blind girl as an undesirable, and yet his stern demeanour is softened by her innocence. Tackleton refers to Bertha as a 'poor idiot', questioning her mental capacity, and Dickens even states that Tackleton, 'assume[ed] for the nonce, a little cordiality'.¹⁵⁹ This is difficult to accept, however, as Bertha, often referred to as 'Blind Girl', but never 'Blind Child', is continuing to adhere to other characters' perception of her, and in this way, she is not a character in her own right. This use of gender specific reference, in that Bertha is 'Blind Girl', is of particular importance here, as it allows Dickens to join the affliction of blindness and the gender of girlhood together, recognising the parallels in each circumstance. Both are symptomatic of vulnerability and dependency, and by using them together, he is able to highlight the condition of being both disabled and a woman in the nineteenth century. At the hands of her father, who undoubtedly has no sinister motives in the upbringing of his daughter, Bertha's blindness becomes twofold, as Dickens states: 'How

¹⁵⁷ Gitter, 'The Blind Daughter in Charles Dickens', p. 683.

¹⁵⁸ Harry Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens: Cannibalism, Passion, Necessity* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1994), p. 209.

¹⁵⁹ Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', p. 37.

different the picture in her mind from Caleb, as he sat observing her'.¹⁶⁰ However, despite the lack of sinister motive, Elaine Ostry suggests:

Caleb's use of fancy as a kind of escape from hardship is criticised despite his best intentions. It is as if Dickens were criticising himself, suggesting that creating an illusion of the perfect home where poverty resides is neither productive nor honest. It will not bring better times, and may engender false hopes.¹⁶¹

This becomes even more ominous when the fantasy world made possible through blindness and protection is able to attach itself to the realm of the able-bodied also. Of Caleb, the narrator observes: 'I think Caleb's vague bewilderment of manner may have half originated in his having confused himself about himself and everything around him, for the love of his blind daughter',¹⁶² which calls into question the nature of the course of action in accommodating the blind. Phillips observes: 'The more the blind are made objects of exclusive treatment, the more unlike others they are assumed, and assume themselves, to be',¹⁶³ and the Victorian attitude to charity is seen as detrimental in its inability to allow disabled individuals the chance for character development that existed for the able-bodied. This is particularly significant when exploring the literary roles of girls and young women, as their disabilities added to the already stifling environment that often oppressed mental stimulation and discouraged forms of character development that took them out of the domestic realm. Howe describes the danger of such a mentality:

Do not be over-anxious about him. Do not watch him too closely. Do not smooth away all difficulties and carpet his walk of life. If he is groping his way across the room, and a stool or other article chance to be in his path, do not scream to warn him, nor hasten to remove it, but let him trip and

¹⁶⁰ Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', p. 35.

¹⁶¹ Elaine Ostry, *Social Dreaming: Dickens and the Fairy Tale* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 101.

¹⁶² Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', p. 35.

¹⁶³ Phillips, *The Blind in British Society*, p.5.

tumble over it; the pain will be well paid for by the lesson. And so with a hundred little things. He had better pinch his fingers slightly with a pair of nippers, or with the nut-crackers, or in the joint of the tongs; he had better jam them a little with the hammer, or wound them with a screwdriver, than never handle these articles.¹⁶⁴

Dickens is defiant on this question, and the constant allusions to the two worlds which Bertha inhabits, without fully entering into either, point to the responsibility that the social order had in accommodating the blind. He states: 'With his [Caleb's] own lips he had forged the innocent deception which should help to keep her from suspecting how much, how very much, he every day denied himself, that she might be happier'.¹⁶⁵ Caleb states of his own eyes: 'Here they are...Always ready. They are more yours than mine, Bertha, any hour in the four and twenty',¹⁶⁶ and yet the 'innocent deception', and the contradiction present within the statement, are more damaging as Bertha's life continues. Caleb is actually ensuring that his blind daughter 'cannot finally be integrated into the plot. Her condition remains incurable'.¹⁶⁷

As this realisation bears itself upon Caleb's conscience, he struggles with his own morality, eventually confessing to his daughter: 'I have wandered from the Truth and have lost myself, my child... I have wandered from the Truth, intending to be kind to you; and have been so cruel',¹⁶⁸ continuing to admit: 'The world you live in, heart of mine, doesn't exist as I have represented it. The eyes you have trusted in, have been false to you'.¹⁶⁹ With this, the child is thrown into blindness once more, and has fully to face her affliction. As her father has

¹⁶⁴ *Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe*, ed. by Laura Elizabeth Howe Richards (Boston: Dana Estes & Company, 1909), p. 23.

¹⁶⁵ Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', p. 37.

¹⁶⁶ Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', p. 39.

¹⁶⁷ Gitter, 'The Blind Daughter in Charles Dickens', p. 680.

¹⁶⁸ Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', p. 80.

¹⁶⁹ Dickens, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', p. 81.

‘surrounded [her] with fancies’,¹⁷⁰ she is as a person newly blinded, and ultimately, more in the dark than she was previously. It falls to Mary to explain the reality of her father’s appearance and demeanour for Bertha to understand his ‘innocent deception’ and Dickens is keen to emphasise that Bertha’s maturity has not been arrested by her blindness. She states: ‘It is my sight restored. It is my sight!... I have been blind, and now my eyes are open. I never knew him! To think I might have died, and never truly seen the father, who has been so loving to me!’¹⁷¹ and as Gitter argues: ‘Both literally and figuratively, the blind girl is the daughter who cannot see the sins of the father’.¹⁷² In this way, Dickens adheres to common representations of the afflicted, described by Klages thus: ‘Disabled people continued to function as images to encourage and strengthen the empathetic capabilities of the able-bodied’,¹⁷³ and yet he approaches this in a manner dissimilar to the more straightforward model suggested by Klages. Instead, he portrays Bertha and her treatment at the hands of her father as a warning; a depiction of the detrimental effects of encompassing the blind in a ‘miniaturised, fairy-tale frame’.¹⁷⁴ In this way, Dickens is endorsing Howe’s view of appropriate treatment of the blind, viewing them as socially responsible individuals and allowing them to act as such.

The narrative has a particularly unsatisfactory ending for Bertha, but that is the point. Of the final scene, Gitter argues: ‘Dickens shifts the burden of punishment almost entirely onto Blind Bertha: while she remains ineligible for marriage and outside of narrative closure, Tackleton, like the other foolish men of

¹⁷⁰ Dickens, ‘The Cricket on the Hearth’, p. 81.

¹⁷¹ Dickens, ‘The Cricket on the Hearth’, p. 83.

¹⁷² Gitter, ‘The Blind Daughter in Charles Dickens’, p. 683.

¹⁷³ Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, p. 7.

¹⁷⁴ Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 44.

the story, Caleb and John, is chastened, then forgiven',¹⁷⁵ and this heightens the sense of dystopia, dissatisfaction and bitter critique present in the narrative. It is possible that Dickens is commenting upon the vastly different outcomes of gender in the text, using hyperbole to enhance the pantomime effect given through Bertha's playing of the harp: 'Sightless and partnerless, playing her harp so that others can dance, she is the suffering servant who allows Dickens in the end to turn a blind eye... Through her he is able to make light out of darkness'.¹⁷⁶ She is angelic in her playing of the harp, and her conclusion is satisfactory to her. In ending his novella thus, Dickens is using a potent mix of melancholic reflection and biting satire in his use of the domestic realm in order to 'cast a shadow over the projected Utopia of home'.¹⁷⁷

'Craik: Representing Disabled Womanhood'

Blindness as a metaphorical allusion occurs in much of Dickens' work, and is present in the case of mistaken identity of Edward, Caleb's son, within this narrative. This literary technique is not exclusive to Dickens, however, and occurs in many other disability plots discussing blindness. In 1850, literary publishing house Chapman and Hall, who were also Dickens' publisher between 1840 and 1844 and 1858 and 1870, released *Olive*, one of Craik's few novels not be serialised. The novel portrays a physically disabled protagonist who 'supports and cares for her frail, blind mother after her father's death'.¹⁷⁸ Craik's dual consideration of blind motherhood and disabled daughterhood in *Olive* allows for

¹⁷⁵ Gitter, 'The Blind Daughter in Charles Dickens', p. 680.

¹⁷⁶ Gitter, 'The Blind Daughter in Charles Dickens', p. 686.

¹⁷⁷ Ostry, *Social Dreaming*, p. 101.

¹⁷⁸ Dinah Craik, *Olive* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. x.

a more nuanced exploration of attitudes towards the position of women, and of the disabled, within society. As in Dickens's novella, the 'disabled girl' takes a central role, but in this instance, Craik positions this alongside a consideration of blindness in older age, in order to consider the social and familial infantilisation of women; that is, female roles beyond those determined by familial modes and the roles available to them such as wife, mother, and daughter.

The narrative is primarily concerned with the ideals of familial modes and the way in which disability affects this, along with expectations of class and gender. Although the protagonist is the disabled daughter, her mother, Sybilla Rothesay, is also an integral part of the novel, and the character who perhaps embarks upon the most life-changing journey. By interweaving the plots of a girl's disability and her mother's blindness, Craik critiques the domestic violence and expectation exerted by a series of constraining feminine ideals: perfect wife, mother and daughter. Through these interrelated disabilities, one congenital and one acquired in later life, she considers attitudes towards the hereditary transmission of disability, and explores the social treatment of the blind and the physically disabled.

The contrast between child and child-bearer has scarcely been greater than as depicted between Sybilla Rothesay and her first-born child; indeed, Craik uses the term 'opposition' in order to describe the generational difference between the two. Sybilla is described as an 'exquisitely beautiful woman',¹⁷⁹ and yet is depicted as little more than a doll-like child herself. She is immortalised in her beauty, 'a Venus de Medici transmuted from the stone',¹⁸⁰ which serves to further

¹⁷⁹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 7.

¹⁸⁰ Craik, *Olive*, p. 9.

emphasise this stark contrast. Sybilla utters: 'Really, I think a baby is a very pretty thing; and it will be so nice to play with when Angus comes home',¹⁸¹ increasing the importance and imminent disappointment of Olive's condition. This relatively minor condition, a 'slight curve at the upper part of the spine, between the shoulder and neck',¹⁸² ensures that Olive, far from exhibiting the perfection exuded by her mother, is 'The new Miss Rothesay, who has come into opposition to the old Miss Rothesay'.¹⁸³ Olive invokes very little in maternal instinct in her mother, who is herself little more than a love struck child. Sybilla is representative of the juxtaposition between angelic maternity and sexual practice with the reproductive reality of childbearing. Of this juxtaposition between virginal wife and sexual being, Angelique Richardson states: 'The Victorian world placed substantial pressure on middle-class women to prove their capacity for mothering',¹⁸⁴ and it is here that the lines between piety and sexual activity become blurred. Richardson also suggests:

By mid-Victorian days, women's claim to superior morality relied heavily on the idea that female sexual experience differs qualitatively from male. To sire a child may seem the work of a moment, and a moment of physical gratification at that. But to give birth is the culmination of nine months of discomfort endured for another... often presented as the epitome of the supreme Victorian virtue, selflessness,¹⁸⁵

which enables women to escape from the morally loose element of self-gratification that was so entwined with the view of male sexual activity.

Sybilla does, however, take on the naming of the child with something akin to authoritative duty. She defiantly decides against naming her child after a

¹⁸¹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 9.

¹⁸² Craik, *Olive*, p. 6.

¹⁸³ Craik, *Olive*, p. 9.

¹⁸⁴ Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.160.

¹⁸⁵ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 100.

previous member of the Rothesay family, serving to distance the child from the superior genetic pool of her birth, and she is instead named following a particularly telling dream of Sybilla's. Within the dream, Olive is depicted as an angel - a foretelling of her role as the narrative progresses. Indeed, the nursemaid Elspie recognises: 'It was nae dream; it was a vision. God send it true'.¹⁸⁶ Acting as a maternal substitute for Sybilla, Elspie wishes to allow the new mother to remain in the sweet dream-like state of recent motherhood, and yet the child's condition cannot be ignored. Upon Sybilla's realisation, magnified by the situation and high breeding of the family, the new mother who is little more than an elfin child herself 'fell back, and fainted in Elspie's arms'.¹⁸⁷ Sybilla's reaction significantly alludes to what Ruth Bienstock Anolik views as 'a society that dehumanizes deviation, this diagnosis amounts to diagnosing deviance as inhuman, as monstrous'.¹⁸⁸ As excessive as this reaction may seem, Craik uses it to emphasise the child's impurity against the backdrop of a seemingly perfect genetic line. Much nineteenth-century literature includes allusion to heredity, mainly within the domestic sphere. Heredity in the nineteenth century was primarily a social phenomenon and a social concern, and much of the literature of the period reflected this, concerning itself with a domestic world preoccupied with the theme of heredity and what it meant for the public. As we saw in the introduction, Lopez-Beltran views this as a time wherein: 'the hereditary domain extended from family resemblance to hybridization and from transmission of

¹⁸⁶ Craik, *Olive*, p. 12.

¹⁸⁷ Craik, *Olive*, p. 14.

¹⁸⁸ *Demons of the Body and Mind: Essays on Disability in Gothic Literature*, ed. by Ruth Bienstock Anolik (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2010), p. 6.

physical deformity to hereditary diseases’,¹⁸⁹ pointing to a shift from a scientific focus upon hereditary congenital conditions to a much more widespread understanding of the term and its connotations. Craik depicts Sybilla’s inability to confront the disability of her child as a result, in part, of her pride in the aristocratic family line into which she has married. Sybilla’s reactions are also shaped by a sense of failing to fulfil the inextricable roles of perfect wife and perfect mother.

Craik’s description of the ways in which Sybilla ‘glorified in her own perfections’,¹⁹⁰ not only magnifies the child’s imperfections, but also the imperfections of her society; as Anolik suggests, ‘the critical displacement of the disabled or diseased body reflects the invisibility of disability in “polite” society’.¹⁹¹ It is also a precursor to the unfolding narrative, through which Sybilla must learn that: ‘instead of beauty creating love, love has the power to create beauty’.¹⁹² This is indeed the lesson laid out for Sybilla as the narrative progresses and she loses her sight. Sybilla’s child-like innocence is exemplified through her musings on her husband’s expected reaction to the disabled child. Craik states: ‘how should she ever dare to show the poor cripple to its father, and say, ‘this is our child- our first-born’. Would he not turn away in disgust, and answer that it had better died?’¹⁹³ which demonstrates Sybilla’s lack of maternal instinct and protection over the child, which points to ‘the cruel social practice of defining human identity based on a fixed standard and demonizing difference’.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Lopez-Beltran, ‘The Medical Origins of Heredity’, p. 121.

¹⁹⁰ Craik, *Olive*, p. 14.

¹⁹¹ *Demons of the Body and Mind*, ed. by Anolick, p. 6.

¹⁹² Craik, *Olive*, p. 14.

¹⁹³ Craik, *Olive*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁴ *Demons of the Body and Mind*, ed. by Anolick, p. 6.

Indeed, 'Mrs Rothesay positively refused to see or notice her child',¹⁹⁵ as if she had been presented with a doll bearing a manufacturing deformity and not her own infant. Indeed, the perfection of the child is of paramount importance to the mother, as she states: 'She will certainly be a beauty. I should break my heart if she were not'.¹⁹⁶ So used to being surrounded with items of beauty and superiority, upon hearing of the child's deformity, she disregards her toy, fainting in response to the news and leaving Elspie to carry out all aspects of maternal duty.

Olive's baptism, organised and attended by Elspie alone, plagues Sybilla further. Renouncing the name she originally gave to the child, she states: 'Take her away; she is not my sweet angel-baby'.¹⁹⁷ Craik's explanation that: 'Love to her seemed a treasure to be paid in requital, not a free gift bestowed without thought of return',¹⁹⁸ hints at the change that will take place in Sybilla as the novel progresses, going some way to redeeming her for her childish actions and instead placing the blame with 'the impulse of western culture to define the human norm by the physical ideal and to construe the non-normative as dangerously close to non-human'.¹⁹⁹ Through Sybilla's musings upon her husband, Angus, Craik suggests that Sybilla considers herself a failure in her domestic role. It would be all too easy for Craik to invite her audience to condemn the young Mrs Rothesay, and yet, she instead uses Sybilla as something of a representative figure, highlighting the plight of countless young women so unable to take on such roles and adhere to the incoherent and contradictory expectations placed upon them.

¹⁹⁵ Craik, *Olive*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁶ Craik, *Olive*, p. 13.

¹⁹⁷ Craik, *Olive*, p. 16.

¹⁹⁸ Craik, *Olive*, p. 16.

¹⁹⁹ *Demons of the Body and Mind*, ed. by Anolick, p. 4.

Craik states: 'Mrs Rothesay's education- that education of heart, and mind, and temper, which is essential to a woman's happiness- had to begin when it ought to have been completed- at her marriage'.²⁰⁰ Sybilla is therefore bereft of the level of independence and self-governing thought that would enable her to embrace her child in its disability.

As the novel progresses and is still without Mr Rothesay, Sybilla 'still lived the life of a wayward, petted child'.²⁰¹ The binding responsibilities of being wife to an absent husband and mother to a disabled child forces Sybilla, and therefore Craik's readership, to recognise that through these two principal relationships, Sybilla is denied the conditions that would allow her to fulfil a feminine ideal. She is neither perfect wife, as she keeps significant details from her absent husband, nor perfect mother, if such a role were defined by the ideal child. Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes suggest: 'Relentlessly, those writing for Victorian mass audiences depicted the home as the source of all comfort, the best evidence of (or substitute for) divine love at a time when the existence of God was increasingly coming into question'.²⁰² The woman became an increasingly important figure as the century progressed and were looked upon as preservers of the race, responsible for the bearing of the next generation and taking on this increased pressure to adhere to the regulations set out for them. John Ruskin, in his lecture, 'Of Queens' Gardens', published as the second of three lectures under the title *Sesame and Lilies* in 1865, states:

²⁰⁰ Craik, *Olive*, p. 17.

²⁰¹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 17.

²⁰² *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain, 1875-1925*, ed. by Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes (London, Macmillan, 1997), p. 1.

But this, their ideal of woman, is, according to our common idea of the marriage relation, wholly undesirable. The woman, we say, is not to guide nor even to think for herself. The man is always to be wiser; he is to be the thinker, the ruler, the superior in knowledge and discretion, as in power.²⁰³

Ruskin's reaction embodies a characteristic response to the lax moral code of the eighteenth century and his rejection of looser social regulations that allowed women freedom and room for error. Through this lecture, he is prescribing more sombre, circumscribed gendered behaviour against a backdrop that seemingly demanded it. Indeed, a dominant Victorian view of the ideal woman is that she exists purely to render the life of her family more comfortable.

This issue becomes visible in a physical manifestation of Sybilla's departure from the 'angel in the house' as she later becomes blind and regresses into financial and emotional dependence on Olive. The young mother has escaped her responsibilities completely, and Olive's condition remains a secret to her absent husband for fear of his reaction to an imperfect example of his blood line. Craik continues to defend Sybilla, however, and portrays her actions as having their roots 'more in desperation than deceit'.²⁰⁴ This reliance upon the continuing of the hereditary line without imperfection, and the repercussions of falling short of this, set the landscape for Mr Rothsay's return, as the narrative continues 'each month, each day, sowing seeds that would assuredly spring up, for good or for evil, in the destinies of all three'.²⁰⁵ This momentous language refers to, and reverberates in, his fathering of Christal, his illegitimate daughter and consequently Olive's half-sister. Sybilla's inability to produce a healthy first-born

²⁰³ John Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens', in *Sesame and Lilies* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1865), pp. 119-196 (p. 140).

²⁰⁴ Craik, *Olive*, p. 18.

²⁰⁵ Craik, *Olive*, p. 18.

child for her beloved and socially 'superior' husband means that she regards her child with cold indifference, refusing to call the child 'Olive'. Upon her husband's return, her child-like manner has been at last recognised to herself, however, and her responsibilities are heavy upon her, although Angus states that she was 'Just as much a child as ever'.²⁰⁶

With the erosion of the marital relationship, however, a maternal one takes its place. Craik states: 'The chill which had unconsciously fallen on the heart of the wife, caused the mother's heart to awaken',²⁰⁷ continuing to explain: 'Feelings unwonted began to dawn faintly in Mrs Rothesay's bosom; they were reflected in her eyes; and then the mother would be almost startled to see the response which this new, though scarcely defined tenderness created in her child'.²⁰⁸ The family has yet to be bound by the inclusion of Olive, however, and the angelic representation of the child magnifies the injustice of this. Craik goes some way in removing Olive's condition as a reason for this, instead placing the focus on the relationship between Angus and Sybilla, and their inability to create a familial environment for the child. Angus' early absence is also alluded to and criticised, pointing to the effects of absence due to war upon familial modes.

It takes the death of Elspie to awaken an inkling of maternal instinct in Olive's own mother. Craik refers to Sybilla's dream, reversing the roles as a telling clue to further events of the narrative. She states: 'Olive saw, as though she had never seen it before, the face which, now shining with maternal love, seemed beautiful as an angel's'.²⁰⁹ There is little use for Elspie now, as she has led the

²⁰⁶ Craik, *Olive*, p. 22.

²⁰⁷ Craik, *Olive*, p. 31.

²⁰⁸ Craik, *Olive*, p. 31.

²⁰⁹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 44.

disabled girl through childhood, and in her passing she returns Olive to her biological mother. Indeed, as Craik states: 'The full tide of living love now flowed towards Mrs Rothesay as it had never before, perhaps never would have done but for Elspie's death'.²¹⁰

As Olive looks upon the deceased Elspie for the final time, her bravery fuelled by 'the intensity of love that must have been in that young child's heart to nerve her thus'²¹¹ is directly paralleled with the 'tender-hearted softness'²¹² of her biological mother. Olive 'sank to convulsions'²¹³ upon seeing her nurse, but after Elspie's death, Olive's 'glowing imagination'²¹⁴ allows her to '[idealise] all sorrow into poesy',²¹⁵ and the child, not yet jaded by the life that awaits her, is able to view Elspie in nature and in the newly awakened relationship between biological mother and child. Indeed, 'truly the mother's heart now thirsted for that flood'.²¹⁶ This allows Sybilla to adhere to domestic ideology of the period, as she does wholly as the novel progresses and she falls into dependence upon the child she once shunned.

This new found 'flood' of emotion between Sybilla and Olive is, however, to the detriment of Sybilla's matrimonial feeling and duty. The Rothesays' marriage, now a 'gulf of coldness, indifference and distrust',²¹⁷ is shown to be unable to recover from Sybilla's secretiveness towards Angus with regard to Olive's condition. Angus' disappointment is too great to overcome the increasing rift between a man old before his time, touched by his life experiences, and his

²¹⁰ Craik, *Olive*, p. 44.

²¹¹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 45.

²¹² Craik, *Olive*, p. 45.

²¹³ Craik, *Olive*, p. 46.

²¹⁴ Craik, *Olive*, p. 46.

²¹⁵ Craik, *Olive*, p. 46.

²¹⁶ Craik, *Olive*, p. 46.

²¹⁷ Craik, *Olive*, p. 47.

ductile and childish wife. As Craik suggests: ‘Their current of existence flowed on coldly and evenly, in two parallel lines, which would never, never meet!’²¹⁸ Craik describes Sybilla as ‘one of those “charming women” who make society so agreeable’,²¹⁹ and yet she chooses to now bestow upon her another dimension of character in the new relationship between the ‘mistress of the Hall’²²⁰ and ‘the little deformed child’.²²¹ In this way, Sybilla has moved from ‘wife’ to ‘mother’, recognising her biological responsibilities. Olive, ‘innocent as she was of all worldly guile’²²² as a result of her protected girlhood, is destined to remain so as a result of her physical abnormality, and she subscribes to the school of thought that her existence ‘is often but another name for self-denying martyrdom’.²²³

This sense of martyrdom is particularly present within the relationship between Olive and her mother, and following the death of her father, Olive embraces her new found maternal role, and of this shift in the familial mode, Craik states:

As Olive looked down upon her [Mrs Rothesay], strange, new feelings came into the girl’s heart. The natural instinct of filial tenderness seemed transmuted into a devotion passing the love of child to mother, and mingled therewith was a sense of protection, of watchful guardianship.²²⁴

Mrs Rothesay’s regression is taken further in her utterance of: ‘Take care of me, Olive! I do not deserve it, but take care of me!’²²⁵ which marks a definitive shift not only in the familial mode, but also in the structure of Sybilla’s daughter’s own existence. The tone of the narrative shifts here, as Sybilla’s reaction has altered

²¹⁸ Craik, *Olive*, p. 47.

²¹⁹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 48.

²²⁰ Craik, *Olive*, p. 48.

²²¹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 48.

²²² Craik, *Olive*, p. 72.

²²³ Craik, *Olive*, p. 91.

²²⁴ Craik, *Olive*, pp. 102-3.

²²⁵ Craik, *Olive*, p. 103.

from one of horror to one of fear. By way of explanation of this new trepidation, Anolik argues: 'horror thus depends on this visible spectacle, the realised experience, to provide fear. The iconic figure of horror is the monster. Terror, on the other hand is the *frisson* that is provoked by the invisible, by what lurks unseen in the dark'.²²⁶ Sybilla's terror lies in the life she now faces; her affliction of blindness following a lifetime of sight, and her initially rejected daughter becoming her sole carer.

Craik states: 'She was holding conference- she only- for her mother was incapable of acting, and this girl of sixteen was the sole ruler of the household now',²²⁷ a role which Olive grasps with full capability. Her stronger mind enables Olive to assert: 'I am as a mother unto my mother. I, the strongest now, take her in her feeble age, like a child to my bosom- I shield her, and cherish her, and am to her all in all'.²²⁸ This becomes a new fulfilment in the deformed girl on the cusp of womanhood; she would not, it has been determined by society from birth, gain this maternal position through her own biological child.

As the novel shifts in location, Craik uses Olive's new surroundings in a deeply figurative manner. Following paths 'crooked, unpaved [and] winding',²²⁹ the mother and daughter bravely venture into their new roles, and Craik describes their new abode as 'peculiar' and 'charming'; both elements of Olive's character.²³⁰ Their new living arrangement is altogether more organic than the structured expectation of their previous existence, allowing Olive the freedom to explore herself and her new position, and her mother the freedom to return to the

²²⁶ *Demons of the Body and Mind*, ed. by Anolik, p. 8.

²²⁷ Craik, *Olive*, p. 104.

²²⁸ Craik, *Olive*, p. 106.

²²⁹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 109.

²³⁰ Craik, *Olive*, pp. 109-10.

protected state that she is so used to. Although situated in London, their cottage provides them with an 'Eden',²³¹ as does Olive's increasing interest in art. Indeed, this interest flourishes, even under her physical condition, in much the same way as such an Eden can flourish against the odds under the conditions of 'a western environ of London',²³² as Craik argues that physiological states can overcome stifling circumstance.

As Mrs Rothesay sinks into the degenerative blindness of which she was so fearful, Craik insistently presents her fate as a positive one. She states:

Her sight faded so gradually, that its deprivation caused no despondency; and the more helpless she grew, the closer she was clasped by those supporting arms of filial love, which softened all pain, supplied all need, and were to her instead of strength, youth, eyesight!²³³

and in this regression into dependency upon her daughter is a sense of returned maternal duty. Mrs Rothesay, once so concerned with the quest for physical perfection, has been released from this system of value, and is now able to fulfil the maternal roles of unquestioning love towards her physically abnormal child. It is here imperative to note the alterations in Craik's addressing of Olive's mother; in her youth, 'Sybilla', in her middle-age, 'Mrs Rothesay', and as Olive's productivity and cheerfulness increase, 'mother', a shift which can only occur when Mrs Rothesay has experienced some level of physical imperfection and disability herself. This represents the narrative's shift in focus, and Olive's ability to grow from deformed, hidden child to accomplished and able woman charges the text to change in location and pace once more, to evolve as she evolves, with the roles that society has created for both women developing along with it.

²³¹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 110.

²³² Craik, *Olive*, p. 109.

²³³ Craik, *Olive*, p. 140.

Olive's angelic quality is depicted in her unfaltering care of her now elderly mother. Craik states: 'No other human tie could come between her and her mother',²³⁴ and the strength of their bond enables Mrs Rothesay to exclaim: 'I shall fear you are growing quite an angel- an angel with wings',²³⁵ a direct contrast to the dream experienced in Olive's infancy, and the doubt and disappointment felt at this. In the death of her mother, Olive is released from her long-established role of 'daughter' and is able to progress into another role. In stating: 'Olive bent down and kissed her. With that last kiss, she received her mother's soul',²³⁶ Craik is able to communicate that her protagonist, no longer an active daughter, is now able to progress into the role of mother, thus using her angelic quality in a new inflection. In this respect, she embodies religious influence, sent to alleviate suffering in others whilst experiencing it herself, and as Craik states of her protagonist: 'She was one of those women who seem born ever to devote themselves to some one'.²³⁷ In this religious allegory lies the basis for the strategic naming of Craik's protagonist, as well as the novel itself in conjuring images of the bringing of peace in the olive branch and narrowing the divide between the disabled and the able-bodied, providing a long sought-after 'sweet and consoling... fellowship'.²³⁸

Gabriel Farrell states: 'from the earliest times, Blindness has aroused compassion, based primarily on two almost conflicting emotions: fear and

²³⁴ Craik, *Olive*, p. 202.

²³⁵ Craik, *Olive*, p. 203.

²³⁶ Craik, *Olive*, p. 209.

²³⁷ Craik, *Olive*, p. 225.

²³⁸ Harriet Martineau, *Life in the Sick-room*, ed. by Maria H. Frawley (Ontario: Broadview, 2003), p. 40.

sympathy',²³⁹ and this is particularly visible within the character of Sybilla Rothesay. This is not, of course, an exclusive notion, and is also present in reactions to the protagonist of Wilkie Collins' *Poor Miss Finch*. The protagonist in Collins' eleventh novel differs from the blind character in Craik's *Olive*, as Collins' blind protagonist, Lucilla Finch, is blind throughout the novel. Through both texts, we see examples of the interrelationship of disability plots. Whereas Craik has paired a physically disabled daughter with a blind mother, Collins brings together a blind heroine and an epileptic hero. Both authors are concerned with deviation from the feminine ideal, and the domestic sphere. These distinctive pairings of disabled figures are examples of the different ways in which Craik and Collins tackle shared questions about the roles of both women and the disabled. However, Collins focuses upon his romance plot, and in doing so, places a much more direct emphasis than Craik on questions of reproduction and heredity.

Collins and the Romance of Blindness: Gendered Erotics, Marriage and Disability

Poor Miss Finch, published in 1872, portrays a young, middle-class woman, Lucilla Finch, who has been blind since her early childhood. The novel takes a more direct approach to the issue of disability, and given the contextual evidence, it is rather controversial. Holmes suggests of Collins' choice of disability plot:

Collins radically replotted disabled women's sexual and reproductive 'place' in at least three of his novels, transgressing not only the barrier of marriage but also that of childbearing. Even more significantly, while Collins's novels are mined with references to cultural anxieties about disabled women's capacity to produce disabled children, his narratives' most persuasive message is that we should move beyond the question of

²³⁹ Gabriel Farrell, *The Story of Blindness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 3.

‘should she marry?’ in favour of much more interesting issues (and much more sensational plots).²⁴⁰

Taking this into account, Collins himself had grown in confidence since the death of Charles Dickens in 1870, perhaps freed from the restrictions of his mentor, who ‘was not the man to run well in a double harness’.²⁴¹

Collins states in his dedication:

more than one charming blind girl, in fiction and in drama, has preceded ‘Poor Miss Finch’. But, so far as I know, blindness in these cases has been always exhibited, more or less exclusively, from the ideal and the sentimental point of view. The attempt here made is to appeal to an interest of another kind, by exhibiting blindness as it really is,²⁴²

and has, then, an explicit objective to deviate from the model of literature provided by both his predecessors and his contemporaries, which is, of course, also true of Craik’s intention with *Olive*.

Collins’ narrator is a Madame Pratolungo, a ‘curious foreign woman’,²⁴³ which highlights the strange and unfamiliar nature of his subject matter. Her constant commentary and questions directed at the reader ensure that she is the eyes and guides Collins’ audience through the narrative. She is given ‘a duplicate key of the door of communication between the two sides of the house’,²⁴⁴ and it seems that it is Collins’ hope that through the understanding he wishes his audience to gain, they will obtain this key to perception and insight also.

However, this is particularly optimistic of Collins, as:

²⁴⁰ Martha Stoddard Holmes, “‘Bolder with her Lover in the Dark’: Collins and Disabled Women’s Sexuality”, in *Reality’s Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins*, ed. by Maria K. Bachman and Don R. Cox (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), pp. 59-93 (p. 61).

²⁴¹ Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship* (New York: Cornell, 2002), p. 199.

²⁴² Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. x.

²⁴³ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 1.

²⁴⁴ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 64.

Ironically, while Collins himself shifted the sensational value of disability away from these women characters and onto other plot elements... Victorian culture [was] not yet ready to abandon the concept of disability's radical difference.²⁴⁵

Lucilla's 'dark life'²⁴⁶ is emphasised by her living arrangements. Residing behind a 'heavy oaken door at the further end of the passage',²⁴⁷ there is a definite segregation between the blind young woman and her family, and Lucilla is, in this instance, depicted as being imprisoned not only by her literal circumstance but also by her disability. This is emphasised in Samuel Lydon Gladden's suggestion that 'for Collins, blindness operates as a barrier, a boundary that separates one from the world at large, a site at which one assumes the position of the "other", and gets set apart from the "normal" world of those-who-can-see'.²⁴⁸ Also, as Steven Mintz suggests: 'Victorians often regarded the family as a walled garden, yet the family was walled in as much as it walled out'.²⁴⁹ Collins gives his protagonist the name 'Finch' to highlight this, as if she is bird trapped in a cage of limitation at the hands of society and expectation, as well as her family. This contrasts with Madame Pratolungo's optimistic perspective of this residence, of which she states: 'there were no barriers here'.²⁵⁰

Collins is quick to dispel the fear of the unknown in his audience, through Madame Pratolungo's utterance: 'There was no deformity; there was nothing to

²⁴⁵ Holmes, "Bolder with her Lover in the Dark", p. 62.

²⁴⁶ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 4.

²⁴⁷ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 4.

²⁴⁸ Samuel Lydon Gladden, 'Spectacular Deceptions: Closets, Secrets, and Identity in Wilkie Collins' *Poor Miss Finch*', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33:2 (2005), 467-486 (p. 469).

²⁴⁹ Steven Mintz, *A Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 10.

²⁵⁰ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 7.

recoil from, in my blind Lucilla',²⁵¹ and Collins describes Lucilla as a figure of society that does not differ from that of his audience. He states:

There was no other personal defect in her. She had the fine height, the well-balanced figure, and the length of the lower limbs, which make all woman's movements graceful of themselves. Her voice was delicious-clear, cheerful, sympathetic. This, and her smile - which added a charm of its own to the beauty of her mouth - won my heart, before she had got close enough to me to put her hand in mine.²⁵²

This increases the connection to his protagonist, as such a disability as blindness was easier to accept than a physical deformity. It also withholds an overly sympathetic reaction to Lucilla, as Collins, 'unlike Dickens, who could not resist a furious assault on his reader's tear ducts...was content that we should drop a single tear for the woman in white or poor Miss Finch'.²⁵³

Eager to portray his protagonist as a character with intelligence and a strong will, and paving the way for later events, Collins bestows upon Lucilla a potent depth of sensory intelligence. The 'sparkling beauty of adornment in Lucilla's habitation',²⁵⁴ and the way she is immediately aware of Madame Pratolungo's dark dress, leads Madame Pratolungo to admit: 'the blind can live in their imaginations, and have their favourite fancies and illusions like the rest of us'.²⁵⁵ Collins ensures she has a place within society, further challenging the stigma attached to such afflictions, and depicts Lucilla as a character who can appreciate the everyday domestic in much the same way as an able-bodied character. Indeed, perhaps even more so, as 'She takes great pleasure in shocking

²⁵¹ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 14.

²⁵² Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 14.

²⁵³ Bradford A. Booth, 'Wilkie Collins and the Art of Fiction', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 6:2 (Sep. 1951), 131-143 (p. 139).

²⁵⁴ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 15.

²⁵⁵ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 15.

those around her by way of the many tasks she accomplishes in the dark'.²⁵⁶

Undeterred by her blindness, Lucilla thrives on all that nature has to offer. Above the often patronising aid that well-wishers may wish to bestow upon her, she is confident in her knowledge of her surroundings and leads Madame Pratolungo to state; '*You shall guide me, my dear*'.²⁵⁷ Indeed, she 'was established, as an independent lodger, in her own father's house!'²⁵⁸

The inclusion of a marriage plot further exemplifies this, and Collins emphasises Lucilla's romantic capacity. Holmes views Lucilla's sexual presence as potent throughout the narrative, and states of the later medical intervention: 'the surgery Herr Grosse performs on Lucilla is not cast as a sexual initiation but as a threat to her existing romance'.²⁵⁹ Lucilla requires Madame Pratolungo not as a music teacher, but as an accomplice; a confidante and aid in her romantic and domestic pursuits. Indeed, it appears that Madame Pratolungo will become to Lucilla the 'friend even in whose sympathies she could take refuge, in whose advice she could trust'.²⁶⁰ As a disabled woman, Lucilla is 'consigned to an eternal childhood, a celibate version of the 'fallen' woman, or some other kind of 'odd' and superfluous female',²⁶¹ and she is seemingly all too aware of the limitations placed upon her. This is made evident through housekeeper Zillah's precautions surrounding Oscar Dubourg: 'I have made all the doors and windows fast, downstairs; he can't get in now, my dear, if he tries'.²⁶² Oscar, Lucilla's neighbour and love interest, wishes 'to live in the

²⁵⁶ Gladden, 'Spectacular Deceptions', p. 472.

²⁵⁷ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 19.

²⁵⁸ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 33.

²⁵⁹ Holmes, "Bolder with her Lover in the Dark", p. 75.

²⁶⁰ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 33.

²⁶¹ Kate Flint, 'Disability and Difference', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 153- 167 (p. 155).

²⁶² Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 24.

strictest retirement'²⁶³ suggesting that he himself exists within a prison. The two are linked, albeit unknowingly at this stage, by their disabilities. Collins uses the sensation genre, for which he was well known, in *Poor Miss Finch* to highlight the figurative blindness encapsulated by normative sensation plots. He disjoints Lucilla from the norm, using her blindness as a screen which separates her from the typical society:

The minds of the blind, are, by cruel necessity, forced inward on themselves. They live apart from us- ah!, how hopelessly far apart! - in their own dark sphere, of which we know nothing. What relief could come to Lucilla from the world outside? None! It was part of her desolate liberty to be free to dwell unremittingly on the ideal creature of her own dream... her fancy was left to work unrestrained in the changeless darkness of her life.²⁶⁴

Collins' basis in sensation fiction plays an important role within *Poor Miss Finch*. In the inclusion of the mysterious foreign character Madame Pratolungo, fears of the 'other' are challenged, and the reader's witnessing of unfolding events is seen largely through her eyes. This both adheres to and confronts the 'threatening strangeness and uncertainty'²⁶⁵ that was permeating the mid-Victorian sphere. In the character of Lucilla herself, we see a driving force of mystery and suspense. In her blindness, she is protected, her eyes are closed to the sensational elements of the plot; the blue faced man, the heavy oaken door of separation, and the plots to trick her. Within the seemingly relative safety of middle-class domesticity, Collins' sensation fiction is able to bring home the gothic 'otherness' of exotic settings, and in this way, highlights the 'otherness' of disability. The 'other' is

²⁶³ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 25.

²⁶⁴ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 34.

²⁶⁵ Lyn Pykett, 'Sensation and the Fantastic in the Victorian Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Deidre David (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 211-230 (p. 218).

demonised in gothic fiction; Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Frankenstein's monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* both depict their characters' inability to accept this difference and deviation and adhere to what Lyn Pykett recognises as 'the effect of projection - of projecting unconscious fears or desires onto one's environment or other people'.²⁶⁶

Blindness is used by Collins to highlight and emphasise the sensational elements of his narrative. Mistaken identity is a particularly common scenario in sensation fiction, and through his use of disability plots, Collins is able to depict and mirror the blindness of his readers in his protagonists. The way in which these examples of mistaken identity and the keeping of secrets take place within a familial setting serves to domesticise the 'personal or political unconscious',²⁶⁷ fears of the era, from physical difference in *Poor Miss Finch* to questions of illegitimacy in *The Dead Secret*. Sensation fiction notoriously deals with subjects of a taboo nature. As Patrick Brantlinger suggests: 'Subjects were broached in sensation novels that many good Victorians thought inappropriate',²⁶⁸ one of these being romantic relationships. Through both *Poor Miss Finch* and *The Dead Secret*, Collins explores the gendered balance of power within couples, as well as providing a frank treatment of erotic attraction, encompassing female as well as male desire.

Through Lucilla's initial exchanges with Oscar, Collins highlights the influence of her affliction. This affliction, against the backdrop of romantic and sexual desire, both infantilises her and allows for a boldness that comes from her

²⁶⁶ Pykett, 'Sensation and the Fantastic in the Victorian Novel', p. 219.

²⁶⁷ Pykett, 'Sensation and the Fantastic in the Victorian Novel', p. 212.

²⁶⁸ Patrick Brantlinger, 'What is "Sensational" about the Sensation Novel?', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 37:1 (June 1982), 1-28 (p. 7).

freedom from conventions of gendered propriety. Madame Pratolungo states, ‘Her perfect self-possession, her easy familiarity with this stranger- so bold, and yet so innocent- petrified me’,²⁶⁹ which emphasises Lucilla’s childlike state as a result of her disability. This is taken further through her admission: ‘She had grown up with the passions of a woman - and yet, she had never advanced beyond the fearless and primitive innocence of a child’.²⁷⁰ Holmes argues that: ‘For Collins to move disabled women characters progressively closer to sexual reproduction, while concurrently referencing the very clinical contexts in which “dysgenic” births were theorised, was as risky as it was engaging’,²⁷¹ which again points to the valiant effort that Collins is making to normalise the disabled through this narrative. Madame Pratolungo states: ‘Instead of her blindness making her nervous in the presence of a man unknown to her, it appeared to have exactly the contrary effect. It made her fearless’.²⁷² Collins offers a commentary upon a society that had become all too concerned with social etiquette and respectability. Here, blindness is almost a relief, an affliction almost to be envied, as Lucilla is blind to the cruel eyes that she may encounter, and not required to endure the same treatment that society bestows upon Oscar: “‘Have *you* been stared at by hundreds of cruel eyes?’” he burst out passionately. “‘Have *you* been pointed at, wherever you go?... I can’t get away from them- I can’t hide myself, even here’”.²⁷³ Collins’ use of disability to critique what he views as an unnatural and restrictive emphasis on propriety is realised through Madame Pratolungo’s admission:

²⁶⁹ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 38.

²⁷⁰ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 61.

²⁷¹ Holmes, “Bolder with her Lover in the Dark”, p. 62.

²⁷² Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 38.

²⁷³ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 41.

It meant that here was one strange side shown to me of the terrible affliction that darkened her life. It meant that modesty is essentially the growth of our own consciousness of the eyes of others judging us- and that blindness is never bashful, for the one simple reason that blindness cannot see.²⁷⁴

This leads Madame Pratolungo to admit, ‘When I left her that night, I sincerely believe “poor Miss Finch” was the happiest woman in England’.²⁷⁵

This appears to provide little compensation for the disability, though. The constant state of darkness, the ‘incurable suspicion of the blind - always abandoned to the same melancholy distrust of the persons about them; always doubting whether some deceit is not being practised on them’²⁷⁶ invites the title of ‘Poor’ Miss Finch. In fiction, the disabled are looked upon as representative of a section of society that were ill-equipped in some way to contribute to it, and ‘Lucilla, whose blindness, ultimately, becomes an inseparable part of her near-caricatured role as a type of female dependency’²⁷⁷ is ‘always in the dark’.²⁷⁸ It is here that Collins demonstrates the deeply rooted, more sinister aspect of not only disability, but also of disempowered groups within society. He does this in positioning *Poor Miss Finch* in what Holmes views as: ‘a counter-discursive to stereotypes of disability, but [Collins] achieves its counter-discursive effects within a text that alternates between iconoclasm and endorsement of stereotypes’.²⁷⁹

Of her surrounding darkness, Lucilla admits, ‘I have the oddest ideas in this blind head of mine. I associate life and beauty with light colours, and death

²⁷⁴ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 61.

²⁷⁵ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 67.

²⁷⁶ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 64.

²⁷⁷ Flint, ‘Disability and Difference’, p. 155.

²⁷⁸ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 64.

²⁷⁹ Holmes, “Bolder with her Lover in the Dark”, p. 73.

and crime with dark colours. If I married a man with a dark complexion, and if I recovered my sight afterwards, I should run away from him'.²⁸⁰ Through Lucilla's misplaced prejudices, fears created by ignorance, specifically racist fears of 'darkness', are shown to be unfounded and capable of illumination. Through his narrator, he argues: 'This singular prejudice of hers against dark people was a little annoying to me on personal grounds. It was a sort of reflection on my own taste'.²⁸¹ Indeed, 'what Lucilla fears and reacts to is the thing she neither knows not understands'.²⁸²

The attack on Oscar, which results in a head injury and his development of epilepsy, awakens a protective instinct in Lucilla. Collins states:

Lucilla steadily pursued that process of her own of curing him, which was to end in marrying him. Never had I seen such nursing before - never do I expect to see such nursing again. From morning to night, she interested him, and kept him in good spirits. The charming creature actually made her blindness a means of lightening the weary hours of the man she loved,²⁸³

which suggests that this temporary disability serves to narrow the gap between the able-bodied and the disabled in showing that Lucilla is far from an invalid. The permanent residue of the attack tightens this gap even further, as if Collins is suggesting that no one person is exempt from joining the circle of disability and affliction. He highlights a general and all-encompassing fragility and vulnerability, as 'As soon as Oscar was well enough to go down-stairs, she [Lucilla] insisted on leading him... she took him into his own drawing-room, as if it was he that was blind, and she who had the use of her eyes'.²⁸⁴ Collins removes

²⁸⁰ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 76.

²⁸¹ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 76.

²⁸² Gladden, 'Spectacular Deceptions', p. 474.

²⁸³ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 90.

²⁸⁴ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 91.

any connotations of self-pity within Lucilla's disability and highlights that her role within the domestic realm is practical and valuable. Her blindness provides a constant influence in Oscar's condition, as she is unable to witness his epilepsy and therefore unable to react as strongly to it. Indeed, 'If we could have spoken at that moment, I believe we should both have said, "Thank God, she is blind!"'²⁸⁵ Ironically, through her blindness, Lucilla is aware that circumstances have been irrevocably altered, which is an example of her heightened sense of awareness. She states: 'Farewell... To his happiness and to mine...The dark days are coming for Oscar and for me',²⁸⁶ and this intuition is developed, in a typically sensationalist manner, through her foreboding:

'I believe the fit will be followed by some next event springing out of it. Something else is coming to darken his life and to darken mine. There is no wedding-day near for *us*. The obstacles are rising in front of him and in front of me. The next misfortune is very near us. You will see! You will see!'²⁸⁷

Oscar's initiation into the realm of the disabled is fraught. 'He shrank from new faces and new scenes',²⁸⁸ as if he does not see himself fit for society as he once was. Indeed, the tone is altered with the temporary absence of Madame Pratolungo, who leaves to attend to her own familial affairs and her eccentric father, in the grasp of what we may today call a humorous midlife crisis, of whom she states: 'I declared I hardly knew him again, he was so outrageously and unnaturally young'.²⁸⁹ Interestingly, upon her departure from the South Down Hills, she states: 'I don't think I really knew how fond I had grown of Lucilla,

²⁸⁵ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 96.

²⁸⁶ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 98.

²⁸⁷ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 99.

²⁸⁸ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 100.

²⁸⁹ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 106.

until I lost sight of the rectory at the turn in the road'.²⁹⁰ This suggests that Lucilla is able to give those who surround her a new sight; a deeper, inward sight that she herself possesses and in turn, cure them of the inward disabilities, such as prejudice, that plague them. Indeed, 'her chief importance in the plot is to generate emotion and moral development in others by being innocent and saintly, surprisingly cheerful, justifiably melancholy'.²⁹¹

This prejudice is tested in Lucilla, however, as her fear of darkness is realised. Oscar 'was hideously distinguished by a superhuman - I had almost said a devilish - colouring of livid blackish *blue*!'.²⁹² This is due to his internal consumption of Nitrate of Silver, the medicine prescribed to sufferers of epilepsy in order to control their fits. Keeping Lucilla in ignorance of this is seemingly Oscar's only chance of ensuring the pair remain tied to each other, and yet this deception is ironic as it is what she fears. Madame Pratolungo states: 'I had never yet taken the slightest advantage of my poor Lucilla's blindness. And yet here was her promised husband - of all the people in the world - proposing to me to keep her in the dark'.²⁹³ However, as Holmes suggests: 'Lucilla Finch is a radical character precisely because she is normalised',²⁹⁴ and this normalisation is at its most apparent in her nursing of Oscar.

Lucilla views the darkness 'as a kind of monster in human form',²⁹⁵ which is suggestive of an outward embodiment of human sin. Applying this to Oscar, Collins is able to go some way in removing the element of fear, as his audience

²⁹⁰ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 106.

²⁹¹ Flint, 'Difference and Disability', p. 155.

²⁹² Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 107.

²⁹³ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 111.

²⁹⁴ Holmes, "Bolder with her Lover in the Dark", p. 78.

²⁹⁵ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 120.

has witnessed the events leading to his malady and can understand it from a more informed point of view. The nightmarish description of Lucilla's encounter with the dark-skinned visitor reflects the views and fears of society:

The instant I felt him approaching, my darkness was peopled with brown demons. He took my hand. I tried hard to control myself - but I really could not help shuddering and starting back when he touched me...In five minutes I had long, lean, black-eyed beings all around me; perpetually growing in numbers, and pressing closer and closer to me as they grew.²⁹⁶

Yet by darkening the skin of Oscar, Collins introduces both Lucilla and his audience to the reality, which is inevitably much less hellish than the scenes created in the darkness of imagination. Indeed, ignorant of the alteration in pigment of Oscar's skin, she does not feel this encompassing fear which highlights this somewhat irrational fear of the unknown. It falls to Nugent Dubourg, the twin brother of Oscar, to communicate this, and invite an element of psychology into Collins' sensationalist narrative. He states:

‘So far as I can see, she fails to discover intuitively the presence of dark people in a room, or of dark colours in the ornaments of a room. It is only when *she is told* that such persons or such things are present that her prejudice declares itself. In what state of mind does such a strange feeling as this take its rise? It seems impossible that she can have any conscious associations with colours, pleasant or painful- if it is true that she was blind at a year old. How do you account for it? Can there be such a thing as a purely instinctive antipathy; remaining passive until external influences rouse it; and resting on no sort of practical experience whatever?’²⁹⁷

The arrival of Nugent further explores the line between reality and idealism, as well as the traditionally-held importance of family. As Mintz argues: ‘The importance attached to the family rested on the perceived weakness of other

²⁹⁶ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, pp. 120-1.

²⁹⁷ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 155.

social controls and authorities',²⁹⁸ and yet here Collins is portraying such weakness as evident within the familial sphere. It seems that Oscar is the embodiment of a 'broken' society and yet ironically, his able-bodied brother, in every physical sense 'perfect', is the one who bears this weakness, in a moral capacity. In one sense, Lucilla represents innocence as she is 'physically incapable of detecting - the terrible contrast of colour between the brother who bore the blue disfigurement of the drug, and the brother who was left as Nature had made him'.²⁹⁹ Oscar is representative of the physical embodiment of an intrusion of the respect for nature, and his face bears the consequences of the eager and inquisitive minds of his generation.

The act of childish impudence that informs Lucilla of the presence of the dark-skinned man sees the return of her nightmarish imaginations. She states: 'The air is full of him. I am in a forest of heaving figures, with faces of black-blue',³⁰⁰ and yet, she suspects the dark-skinned man to be Nugent. Of Oscar, and the chance given to her by Herr Grosse to return her sight, she responds excitedly: 'I ask you to think of the years I have lost, I ask you to think of the exquisite happiness I shall feel, when Oscar and I are standing at the altar, if I can see my husband to whom I am giving myself for life!'³⁰¹

Only when Lucilla is given a chance of relief from her disability does she react as a caged bird longing for freedom from her limitations. There is a distinct sense of a lack of control and trust, and her outcry of: 'Oh, my blindness! My blindness! Oh, God, of all your creatures, the most helpless, the most miserable, is

²⁹⁸ Mintz, *A Prison of Expectations*, p. 28

²⁹⁹ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 138.

³⁰⁰ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 163.

³⁰¹ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 215.

the creature who can't see!',³⁰² is a sharp contrast to the lack of self-pity she expresses in previous chapters. The chance to release herself from her prison of disability is a scene of juxtaposition. Collins states:

It was beautiful to see her. It was awful to see her. A mute ecstasy of hope transfigured her face; a heavenly smile played serenely on her lips. She was among us, and yet apart from us. In the still light of evening, shining in on her from the window, she stood absorbed in her own rapture - the silent creature of another sphere.³⁰³

Collins suggests that she has transcended into the realm of possibility and can enter, as a conscious adult, into the sphere of society, fully integrated into the domestic realm and the empire of her family. With this chance, she is overcome with dissatisfaction at the affliction she has accepted throughout her life.

It is Herr Grosse, the German oculist who 'held the key which was to open for my blind Lucilla the gates of a new life',³⁰⁴ linking directly to 'the heavy oaken door at the further end of the passage'³⁰⁵ behind which she was previously condemned to live. Faced with the chance to rejoin her family and be a member of an able-bodied society, her motivation is ironic. She states: 'Until I knew Oscar, I don't think I ever honestly envied any of you the use of your eyes',³⁰⁶ and yet each step she takes down the road of the able-bodied emphasises her blindness towards him. Indeed, the very nature of romantic love is called into question here, as Lucilla suggests:

'Herr Grosse is going to 'cut into my cataracts,' as he calls it- because I am going to be married to a man I love; and I fancy, like a fool, I may love

³⁰² Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 184.

³⁰³ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 186.

³⁰⁴ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 209.

³⁰⁵ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 13.

³⁰⁶ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 225.

him better still , if I can see him. I may be quite wrong...It may end in my not loving him half as well as I do now!’³⁰⁷

This is also reflected in the action of Nugent, who acts as if he has been blinded against familial duty and responsibility of self. On leading Lucilla to believe that he is Oscar, he states:

‘I was indulging the passion that consumed me! I longed to feel the luxury of her touching me and being familiar with me, under the impression that I was Oscar. Worse even than that, I wanted to try how completely I could impose on her - how easily I might marry her, if I could only deceive you all, and take her away somewhere by herself. The devil was in possession of me...Blame the passion that has got me body and soul: don’t blame me!’³⁰⁸

which directly echoes Lucilla’s plea: ‘Blame my blindness, dear, don’t blame me’.³⁰⁹ Collins, unlike Dickens and Craik, often gives the exploration of blindness an erotic inflection, focusing on how it shapes experiences of courtship, romance, marriage and sexual desire, for both the blind and the sighted partner. The sense of touch is heightened, of which excessive and intimate displays went against societal propriety. In this way, we see through both of Collins’ texts discussed here, that blindness is not a form of imprisonment, shutting its afflicted out of romantic and sexual union, but instead provides liberation to explore erotic and sensual avenues.

However, Collins explores this imprisonment associated with disability as Lucilla undergoes her recovery from the operation. He states:

Changing from bed-room to sitting-room, from sitting-room back to bed-room; with the daylight always shut out; with the bandages always on, except when the surgeon looked at her eyes; Lucilla bore the imprisonment- and worse than the imprisonment, the uncertainty - of her

³⁰⁷ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 225.

³⁰⁸ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, pp. 291-2.

³⁰⁹ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 163.

period of probation, with the courage that can endure anything, the courage sustained by Hope,³¹⁰

suggesting that her daylight comes in the form of anticipation and expectation.

This imprisonment is not exclusive to Collins' protagonist, instead it extends to those around her, whom Collins describes as being 'like two animals in a cage'.³¹¹

It falls to Oscar to repay Lucilla for her nursing attempts when he was attacked, and he does so. Indeed, 'he never once failed her',³¹² as ignorant of the consequences of the events as Lucilla was when the roles were reversed.

The 'darkened room',³¹³ that houses Lucilla in her transition of recovery is reflective of the state of affairs also. It represents the inevitable discovery of truth and, in particular, Madame Pratolungo's state of mind as her responsibility to Lucilla and involvement in the deception against her mount. She acts not only as a mother to Lucilla, but also fulfils the roles of nurse, governess, sister and friend and as she is pulled deeper into the novel's narrative she enters the realm of disability in her close contact with Collins' afflicted protagonist. Indeed, she is the matriarch of the narrative, highlighted through her motherly bond to Oscar. She states: 'I took his hand- I felt for the poor disfigured, rejected man as his mother might have felt for him - I gave him a mother's kiss'.³¹⁴ She later admits that 'The people about said to each other compassionately, "It's the blue man's mother!"'³¹⁵ The self-made familial bond between these two characters is a sharp contrast to the relationship between Oscar and his twin, Nugent, who betrays him and takes his place in Lucilla's eyes. In this way, the focus of the texts is successfully led

³¹⁰ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 237.

³¹¹ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 236.

³¹² Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 237.

³¹³ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 244.

³¹⁴ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 261.

³¹⁵ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 387.

away from heredity and congenital disease. This also allows Collins to suggest that the scientific explanations for affliction are of little importance in comparison to social understanding and treatment of blindness in the nineteenth century.

In Lucilla entering the realm of the able-bodied, her place amongst the disabled has been taken by Oscar. He writes to Madame Pratolungo:

After inspiring her with terror and disgust at the moment when her eyes first looked at me; after seeing her innocently happy in Nugent's arms-how, in God's name, can I claim her as mine? Our marriage had become an impossibility. For her own sake, I cannot, I dare not, appeal to our engagement. The wreck of *my* happiness is nothing. The wreck of *her* happiness would be a crime. I absolve her from her engagement. She is free,³¹⁶

suggesting that he feels he cannot keep her in her prison of disability, and she, like a bird released from its cage, had fluttered into the light that will inevitably blind her once more. It seems that Lucilla, following a life of blindness, is ill-equipped to fulfil a sighted role within society, and through Madame Pratolungo's utterance to Nugent: 'I would rather see Lucilla blind again than see her your wife',³¹⁷

Collins is able to pass judgement on a society that enters blindly into such social conventions as marriage and a conservative familial mode. That is, marriage to a handsome, physically healthy, wealthy, male was widely viewed as the pinnacle of achievement for the Victorian woman. However, through this narrative, Collins shows the morally superior blue-faced brother to be the superior marriage prospect.

With restored sight, Lucilla is plunged once again into darkness through the deception of those she trusts, those who have acted as her eyes. Collins

³¹⁶ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 275.

³¹⁷ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 285.

suggests that this fate is decidedly worse than her previous affliction. With her sight, Lucilla is required to stand independently, and learn the associated skills of sight. Whereas ‘the blind girl distinguishes the twin she loves by the touch of his hand, which gives her a thrill that the touch of the other brother does not’,³¹⁸ the Lucilla who is able to see is using her eyes instead, and realising the lack of emotional attachment involved in it. By blinding his protagonist, Collins is able to sexualise her, and as Flint suggests: ‘Touch is the most intimate of the senses, and the emphasis on her possession of this ability is highly appropriate’.³¹⁹ Although Collins does use blindness to stimulate sexual desire, he also employs it to provide commentary on social limitations. He bravely makes an important social case for women’s capacity for sexual desire; both Lucilla and *The Dead Secret*’s Rosamond indulge in the tactile erotics that allow blindness to be an emphasis of, and not hindrance to, sexual desire.

Indeed, Madame Pratolungo suggests that it is not disability that creates a childlike state for its afflicted, but rather the restrictions of society and having to learn how to adhere to them:

Like all other people, knowing no more of the subject than I knew, I had no idea of the pitifully helpless manner in which the restored sight struggles to assert itself, in persons who have been blind for life. In such cases, the effort of the eyes that are first learning to see, is like the effort of the limbs when a child is first learning to walk.³²⁰

In the aptly titled chapter ‘She Learns to See’, Lucilla undoubtedly recognises this, as she pleads with Herr Grosse to ‘Teach me to be something better than an

³¹⁸ Francis Galton, ‘The History of Twins, as a Criterion of the Relative Powers of Nature and Nurture’, *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 5 (1876), 391-406 (pp. 394-5).

³¹⁹ Flint, ‘Disability and Difference’, p. 160.

³²⁰ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 301-2.

idiot – or put the bandage on, and blind me again’,³²¹ suggesting that she is more comfortable as leader of her own world in her blindness, than adhering to the requirements of the able-bodied. Herr Grosse had effectively played the ultimate father-figure, the role of God, to Collins’ protagonist, and this is highlighted as she regresses into the role of a child around him. She addresses him: ‘Come here, papa. You have been very good to me to-day. I will give you a kiss’,³²² which is the language expected of a favourite daughter to a much loved father. The bond between the giver and receiver of sight is significant, as they are familiar with each other. In this way, there is a sense of a reworking of hereditary transmission present through the medical intervention of this ‘papa’ surgeon.

Through the replenishment of her sight, Lucilla is able to overcome her fear of the unknown. In a sharp contrast to her initial reaction to the blue-faced man, she states: ‘the blue face startled me when I saw it, I know. But I have quite got over that. I feel none of the absurd terror of the poor man which I felt when I was blind’,³²³ going on to add: ‘Now that I have seen for myself what he is really like, I can feel for him’.³²⁴

Collins includes a change in the narration of *Poor Miss Finch*, and once his readers have adjusted to a novel concerning the placement of disability within the domestic sphere, and Lucilla has sufficiently left the disabled sphere, he is able to speak through Lucilla herself. Learning how to ‘write with her eyes instead of her finger’,³²⁵ Collins offers his audience an insight into a new dawn, as if watching a child take those elusive first few steps. This new existence is

³²¹ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 305.

³²² Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 308.

³²³ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 311.

³²⁴ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 311.

³²⁵ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 326.

absolutely in its infancy, as Lucilla openly states: 'Am I quite as happy as I expected to be when I recovered my sight? Not yet!'³²⁶ which suggests a state of anticipation and yet as her narrative progresses, it become apparent that the reinstatement of her sight has not been the miracle she was expectant of. Openly admitting:

The restoration of my sight has made a new creature of me. I have gained a sense - I am no longer the same woman. This great change must have had some influence over me that I never suspected until Oscar came here. Can the loss of my sense of feeling be the price that I have paid for the recovery of my sight?³²⁷

Lucilla soon loses faith in her new self, acknowledging: 'I don't trust my eyes!'³²⁸ She wishes to regress to the safety of her disability, wherein she is able to 'dwell unremittingly on the ideal creature of her own dream'.³²⁹

Both armed and blinkered by her physical sight, Lucilla is unable to view things as they really are. Associating Madame Pratolungo with 'nothing but plots and lies, cruelty, ingratitude and deceit',³³⁰ she is blindly accepting of her engagement to the man who is not Oscar. Of Madame Pratolungo, Lucilla states:

My last faint hope of renewal of my once-pleasant intimacy with Madame Pratolungo was at an end. She stood revealed to me now as a woman whom I ought never to have known - a woman with whom I could never again exchange a friendly word. I had lost the companion with whom I had once been so happy.³³¹

It is only in her return to a state of blindness that she is sheltered and protected from such treacherous attempts of sabotage and can once again see clearly. This childlike state is clearly where she is most comfortable, and she confides in her

³²⁶ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 328.

³²⁷ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 334.

³²⁸ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 339.

³²⁹ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 34.

³³⁰ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 350.

³³¹ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 363.

‘Papa-Grosse’³³² that she ‘used to enjoy...the old days before you cured me - the happy days, Papa-Grosse, when I was an object of pity, and when all the people spoke of me as Poor Miss Finch’.³³³

It is here that the physical re-blinding takes place, and as soon as Lucilla admits her concerns about her sight, she acknowledges: ‘My eyes are beginning to ache; and strange to say, I have hardly been able to see the last two or three lines I have written. They look as if the ink was fading from them’,³³⁴ just as the initial response to her sight is fading from her. It seems that the trials of an able-bodied existence are of detriment to her very self, as she states: ‘My eyes are burning. I know it does them harm to cry. How can I help crying?’³³⁵ suggesting that the vicious cycle had now come full circle and her eyes, and thus herself, are giving up and returning to the state she wishes for. It falls to Madame Pratolungo to conclude:

The mischief done to her eyes by her reckless use of them, by her fits of crying, by her disturbed nights, by the long-continued strain on her of agitation and suspense, has evidently justified the worst of those unacknowledged forebodings which Grosse felt when he saw her. The last lines of the Journal are, as writing, actually inferior to her worst penmanship when she was blind.³³⁶

Collins bestows upon his protagonist enough maturity and independence of thought to understand her condition. Lucilla is at peace with her restored disability and openly states to Madame Pratolungo: ‘Don’t cry about my blindness...The days when I had my sight have been the unhappiest days of my

³³² Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 367.

³³³ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 367.

³³⁴ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 368.

³³⁵ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 378.

³³⁶ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 380.

life'.³³⁷ As Flint suggests; 'While *Poor Miss Finch* presents a highly sympathetic view of blindness as such, its metaphorical extension, when it is used to amplify a circumspect world-view, reinforces the equation of physical condition with social limitations in a broader sense',³³⁸ and it is Lucilla's unhappiness with the social order she enters in her sight that is the reason for her return to blindness. Lucilla admits to her friend, sister, mother and confidante that: 'When the blindness came back, I could keep it up no longer. Little by little, as the light dried out, my heart would return to you again'.³³⁹ This suggests that as Lucilla's sight fades, she requires the care of Madame Pratolungo, who has consistently been Lucilla's source of sight. Ironically, however, Collins suggests that Lucilla has always been her own source of light and enables her to acknowledge that: 'You people who can see, attach such an absurd importance to your eyes!'.³⁴⁰ Indeed: 'Her rejection of a second operation that promises to restore her sight reminds us that, as she insists earlier in the novel, Lucilla has seen too much, that only blindness guarantees her happiness'.³⁴¹

Lucilla's depth of intuition has not failed her, and Collins returns it to her in place of her sight. She has no emotion for the man she perceives to be Oscar, and scarcely believes it is him at all: 'I have so little feeling for him, that I sometimes find it hard to persuade myself that he really *is* Oscar'.³⁴² The world which she creates for herself is of a much higher quality and in her blindness, Collins' audience recognise the headstrong and defiant character to which they

³³⁷ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 417.

³³⁸ Flint, 'Difference and Disability', p. 160.

³³⁹ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 418.

³⁴⁰ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 419.

³⁴¹ Gladden, 'Spectacular Deceptions', p. 483.

³⁴² Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 421.

were first introduced. She states: 'Thank God, I am blind',³⁴³ which directly mimics the reaction of Madame Pratolungo upon the first instance of Oscar's epilepsy. Lucilla candidly admits:

'Do you think I wish to see him disfigured as he is now? No! I wish to see him - and I *do* see him! - as my fancy drew his picture in the first days of our love. My blindness is my blessing. It has given me back my old delightful sensation when I touch him; it keeps my own beloved image of him- the one image I care for - unchanged and unchangeable. You *will* persist in thinking that my happiness depends on my sight. I look back with horror at what I suffered when I had my sight - my one effort is to forget that miserable time. Oh, how little you know of me! Oh, what a shock it would be to me, if I saw him as you see him! Try to understand me, and you won't talk of my loss - you will talk of my gain',³⁴⁴

which sees her overcome her fear of darkness; both of dark colours and the unchangeable darkness to which she is subject.

The narrative reaches its culmination with a scene of serene domesticity, and so Collins offers a direct challenge to the field of genetics and hereditary theories in concluding his disability narrative with a contented and fruitful union between a blind woman and a blue faced man, even bestowing upon them two children. Stoddard Holmes argues that: 'Lucilla's marriage and motherhood are completely normalised',³⁴⁵ and this is particularly apparent in the lack of allusion towards the physical condition of their offspring. Holmes continues to suggest:

Blindness and blueness notwithstanding, the most sensational aspect of this novel may be how conventional a heroine Lucilla Finch finally is. In fact, it is their conventionality, *not* their sexualisation, that is most notable about... Collins's disabled heroines, who are ultimately contained within stories more domestic than sensational,³⁴⁶

³⁴³ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 423.

³⁴⁴ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. 423.

³⁴⁵ Holmes, "Bolder with her Lover in the Dark", p. 77.

³⁴⁶ Stoddard Holmes, "Bolder with her Lover in the Dark", p. 77.

a notion that enables Collins to adhere to the continuing trend in nineteenth-century disability plots that places the disabled heroine very much in front of the hearth.

Poor Miss Finch is concerned primarily with the issue of female identity, using themes of disability and family in order to explore how a woman's sense of self can be improved or worsened within the domestic sphere. He appears to conclude that disability should not be viewed as an outright disadvantage, and should instead be incorporated into identity. Indeed, as Collins tries so desperately to prove within *Poor Miss Finch*, 'it is even possible for bodily affliction itself to take its place among the ingredients of happiness'.³⁴⁷

Poor Miss Finch was not the first exploration by Collins into blindness. In 1857, he published his mystery novel *The Dead Secret*, first serialised in Dickens' periodical *Household Words*, which ran from 1850 to 1859. The novel follows protagonist Rosamond as she uncovers the truth concerning her parentage and lineage. Much focus is placed upon the blindness of Rosamond's husband, Leonard, in a stark contrast to Collins' depiction of blind protagonist Lucilla in *Poor Miss Finch*. In actuality, much of the focus of the novel is placed upon suffering and affliction, and the physical embodiment of it, seen also in the character of Sarah Leeson, who is eventually revealed to be Rosamond's birth mother. Collins states of her, 'Whatever the nature of the affliction she had suffered, the traces it had left were deeply and strikingly visible in every part of her face',³⁴⁸ continuing to explain: '...the marks which sorrow or sickness had set on her, were the marks common to most victims of mental or physical

³⁴⁷ Collins, *Poor Miss Finch*, p. x.

³⁴⁸ Wilkie Collins, *The Dead Secret* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 11.

suffering'.³⁴⁹ From the outset, the concept of the sick-room is alluded to, as well as the physical embodiment of sickness, through both sombre representations in the characters of Mrs Treverton and Sarah Leeson, and the comedic representation of illness in the character of Mr Phippen. It seems telling, then, that Collins should include a blind character, seemingly ignorant of such outward embodiment and thus significant clues leading to the uncovering of the novel's mystery. Blind Leonard stands as a figure of dignity and propriety, remaining stoic even when his blindness affects his ability to offer assistance in Rosamond's plight of discovery of her biological lineage; he remains her pillar of reliability and strength. This is symptomatic of Collins' affinity with the blind, explored further in *Poor Miss Finch*.

Leonard is first introduced along with Rosamond on their wedding day, the first act of this couple exposing Leonard's vulnerability at the hands of his disability. Collins states:

Instead of holding the gate open for the lady to pass through, he hung back, allowed her to open it for herself, waited till she had got to the churchyard side, and then, stretching out his hand over the gate, allowed her to lead him through the entrance, as if he had suddenly changed from a grown man to a helpless little child.³⁵⁰

This suggests the vulnerability of the blind, regardless of gender. Both are infantilised and males often feminised, and Collins uses both *The Dead Secret* and *Poor Miss Finch* to dispel this school of thought, allowing his readership to view the blind as fully functioning members of society.

Leonard is not blind from birth but instead the victim of a degenerative condition. Collins uses Leonard's situation in a similar way to that of Lucilla

³⁴⁹ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 11.

³⁵⁰ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 39.

Finch, voicing his own judgment on medical intervention. Of Leonard's descent into blindness, he states:

‘they sent for doctors from London, and blistered him behind the ears and between the shoulders, and drenched the lad in mercury, and moped him up in a dark room. No use. The sight got worse and worse, flickered and flickered, and went out at last like the flame of a candle. His mother died - luckily for her, poor soul - before that happened. His father was half out of his mind: took him to oculists in London, and oculists in Paris. All they did was to call the blindness by a long Latin name, and to say that it was hopeless and useless to try an operation. Some of them said it was the result of the long weaknesses from which he had twice suffered after illness. Some said it was an apoplectic effusion in his brain. All of them shook their heads when they heard of the watchmaking. So they brought him back home, blind; blind he is now; and blind he will remain, poor dear fellow, for the rest of his life’.³⁵¹

Tabitha Sparks suggests that, ‘Literature of this era often depicts the surgeon as immoderately attempting to correct nature’.³⁵² Sparks continues to argue that ‘Collins represents surgery as a destructive practice’,³⁵³ and during an era wherein science was juxtaposed with nature and religious thought, Collins uses his authoritative platform in order to suggest caution towards an unquestioning acceptance of reliance upon scientific and medical influence.

Leonard's union to Rosamond is widely seen as consolation for his blindness, and she is seen as angelic and altruistic in her marriage choice. Collins states that their engagement was arranged prior to Leonard's affliction taking hold, and as such, Collins is commenting that little domestic importance should be placed upon Leonard's blindness. Indeed, he states of the couple: ‘Did you ever hear of a bride and bridegroom who started with fairer prospects in life than our

³⁵¹ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 48.

³⁵² Tabitha Sparks, ‘Surgical Injury and Narrative Cure in Wilkie Collins’ *Poor Miss Finch and Heart and Science*, *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 32:1 (Winter 2002) 1-31 (p. 1).

³⁵³ Sparks, ‘Surgical Injury and Narrative Cure’, p. 2.

bride and bridegroom of to-day?’³⁵⁴ However, Collins’ treatment of Leonard does adhere to that of his contemporaries in Leonard’s infantilisation. Rosamond’s admission of ‘how very much like a child you are still, in some of your ways!’³⁵⁵ emphasises this, and she is viewed as the stronger of the two; Leonard is seemingly unable to exist without her. She states: ‘My eyes serve for both of us now, don’t they? You depend on me for all that your touch fails to tell you’,³⁵⁶ which emasculates the new bridegroom and highlights the way in which disability, particularly the predominantly feminine affliction of blindness as it is depicted in literary representations, affects expected social roles. This is also seen in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*; Mr Rochester’s loss of sight sufficiently alters the power imbalance between himself and Jane Eyre, allowing for a marital union. Although acknowledging the unusually gendered power balance in Leonard’s and Rosamond’s marriage, Collins is quick to highlight the normality of those afflicted, arguing that:

We have all got the same number of arms and legs; we are all hungry and thirsty, and hot in summer and cold in winter; we all laugh when we are pleased, and cry when we are distressed; and, surely, we have all got very much the same feelings, whether we are high or whether we are low.³⁵⁷

Throughout the text, Collins represents Leonard as being of sound mind, and he is the stabilising and rational force for Rosamond as she uncovers the secret of her parentage. Their child also emphasises the normalcy of Leonard, who is shown to be able to produce offspring, a son and heir, as well as providing a masculine physical presence for his wife as she ‘seated herself on a low stool at

³⁵⁴ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 60.

³⁵⁵ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 72.

³⁵⁶ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 66.

³⁵⁷ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 73.

his knees'.³⁵⁸ In fact, Leonard's blindness enriches the couple's domestic arrangement as she states: 'I might have had my own little harmless secrets, dear, with another husband; but, with you, to have even so much as a thought in secret, seems like taking the basest, the cruellest advantage of your blindness'.³⁵⁹ In this way, Leonard adheres to Lynda Nead's representation of 'the image of the blind man as a visionary, devoid of sight, but possessing true knowledge and understanding'.³⁶⁰ Collins equalises the two in the discovery scene, Rosamond also blind to the reality she faces. Leonard's logical reasoning, compared to the flighty and erratic Rosamond, means Collins is able to present him as a customary male in mid-Victorian society, diminishing his blindness, representing this through such language as: 'I don't like the idea of sitting here, and leaving you to open those doors by yourself'.³⁶¹

During this discovery scene, however, Collins highlights Leonard's blindness in his discomfort. Rosamond 'lead[s] her husband along the passages',³⁶² 'his face, so quiet and composed at other times, express[ing] doubt and uneasiness now'.³⁶³ He strikes his knee against the furniture in the unfamiliar room, a physical embodiment of the often harsh reality that existed for the afflicted. The scene, and its setting, exposes the vulnerability of the affliction of blindness, candidly expressed through Leonard's admission: 'I feel as if the night that is always before my eyes was darker to me in this place than any other',³⁶⁴ and yet, through this statement, Collins also recognises the heightening of other

³⁵⁸ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 250.

³⁵⁹ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 251.

³⁶⁰ Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (Singapore: Library of Congress, 2000), p. 61.

³⁶¹ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 267.

³⁶² Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 260.

³⁶³ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 262.

³⁶⁴ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 263.

senses that often occurs as a result of the loss of one particular sense. Leonard is able to see deeper into this situation than Rosamond, not just regardless of his blindness, but because of it. Seemingly relatively adjusted to and unconcerned by his blindness, Collins uses the ominous setting of the Myrtle Room to push Leonard to his limits in his blindness, most likely in order to convey to his readership the realities of it: “Let me try, for once, if I can’t make a discovery for myself,” he said, a little impatiently’,³⁶⁵ with Collins continuing to admit: ‘A momentary shade of vexation passed across his face’.³⁶⁶ Paul Marchbanks argues that ‘blindness - real or figurative - denotes an unhealthy ignorance of important knowledge’,³⁶⁷ and Leonard’s limitations in his blindness adheres to this school of thought. He is unable to interact with his unfamiliar surroundings, and is, initially at least, uninformed of the significant uncovering of the mystery surrounding his wife.

Rosamond’s discovery of her lineage, and the revelation that she is not, as previously thought, of noble birth, balances the union between the young couple. Leonard’s steadfast acceptance of this appears to repay Rosamond for her sacrifice in her marriage to a blind husband, and the two are made stronger because of the revelation. His blind confidence in the exposure of his wife’s parentage suggests that he recognises this, as he states:

‘From the hour when you first devoted your life to your blind husband - from the hour when you won all his gratitude, as you already won all his love, you took a place in his heart, Rosamond, from which nothing, not even such a shock as has now assailed us, can move you! High as I have

³⁶⁵ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 271.

³⁶⁶ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 271.

³⁶⁷ Paul Marchbank, ‘A Space, a Place: Visions of a Disabled Community in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*’, in *Demons of the Body and Mind: Essays on Disability in Gothic Literature*, ed. by Anolik (North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2010), pp. 21-34 (p. 28).

always held the worth of rank in my estimation, I have learnt, even before the event of yesterday, to hold the worth of my wife, let her parentage be what it may, higher still.³⁶⁸

Leonard's blindness allows him to see past the boundaries of propriety and uncover new depths in both his personal relationships and public persona. As Andrew Scahill suggests: 'Physical blindness lead[s] to a more powerful 'second-sight',³⁶⁹ and Leonard's logical and perceptive insights into Rosamond's situation recognise this. His overcoming of his affliction is sincerely portrayed as the narrative reaches its culmination, as Collins states:

Both these people...are, to all outward appearance, human beings. They walk on their hind legs, they express ideas readily by uttering articulate sounds, they have the usual allowance of features, and in respect of weight, height, and size, they appear to me to be mere average human creatures of the regular civilised sort.³⁷⁰

Collins' depiction of a blind man, in a successful marriage, with a healthy son and heir, and in control of his faculties portrays a view of male blindness that goes beyond the feminisation and infantilisation of disabled males in the nineteenth century. Leonard is able to fulfil and adhere to the social roles expected of a Victorian male, and yet is furnished with a deeper level of understanding and acceptance that is heightened by the absence of his sight. He represents what Nead recognises as an 'interest [in blindness] as part of a structural relationship in the period between visibility and invisibility, illumination and obscurity'³⁷¹ in that he bridges the gap between male roles in the public sphere and their domestic arrangements.

³⁶⁸ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 290.

³⁶⁹ Andrew Scahill, 'Deviled Eggs: Teratogenesis and the Gynaecological Gothic in the Cinema of Monstrous Birth', in *Demons of the Body and Mind: Essays on Disability in Gothic Literature*, ed. by Anolik (North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2010), pp. 197-216 (p. 197).

³⁷⁰ Collins, *The Dead Secret*, p. 357.

³⁷¹ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, p. 61.

All four texts discussed in this chapter - Dickens' 'The Cricket on the Hearth', Craik's *Olive*, Collins' *Poor Miss Finch* and Collins' *The Dead Secret* - depict their blind characters with a differing backstory. Bertha has been blind since birth, Sybilla becomes blind in adulthood, Lucilla has been blind since early childhood, and Leonard enters into blindness as a young man. Of all of these depictions, only one allows for genetic consideration, and this is the Christmas Story, designed around sentimentality. In this way, Dickens, Craik and Collins have a shared agenda in that they allow for a broader consideration of hereditary complications as well as social understanding. Each text exists in differing genres, which again highlights the widespread nature of the notion that disability, in this case blindness, can actually be a fulfilling and enabling condition. Blind Bertha is able to live in her blindness in the knowledge that she has in some way overcome the belittling treatment she once received, Sybilla Rothesay is resigned to a purer existence in her affliction, Lucilla Finch is no longer the bird in a cage of disability, and Leonard Franklin is able to model a new masculine identity.

Throughout each of the texts considered, each author expresses and explores concerns regarding gendered domestic roles. Through the exploration of the roles of wife, mother, daughter, and finally husband, the shared agenda of Dickens, Craik and Collins is apparent. In mutually highlighting the importance of the integration of the blind into the family and society, these texts incorporate elements of the gothic, sensation fiction, and the domestic novel in order to project the affliction of blindness as something that can overcome expected domestic arrangements and allow room for the humanity of the characters to be portrayed and developed.

In Dickens' depiction of blindness, influenced by Howe and his pioneering views, we see a call for sincerity and frankness in the treatment of the afflicted. Craik's *Olive* confronts the expected roles of women, particularly of 'superior' stock, portraying a serenity that can seemingly only occur when released from the prison of expectation. Through Collins' portrayals of blindness, female sexuality and erotic agency are powerfully emphasised.

Each individual text works to remove the fear of the 'other' that was present in both literature and society during the mid-century. Although the specific implications and arguments of each narrative may differ, we see a shared social case that would permeate the social sphere and go some way, at least, to alter the perceptions of a fearful society. This opportunity to spy on the day-to-day occurrences of the blind in domestic settings works to encourage the mid-century public not only to recognise and acknowledge blindness as a liberating and often beneficial affliction, but also to confront the gendered social roles present in Victorian society.

Chapter Two

Hear No Evil: Deafness in Nineteenth-century Literature

‘I want her, sir, to be cut off from the world
as little as can be, considering her deprivations,
and therefore to be able to read whatever is wrote
with perfect ease and pleasure’³⁷²

Of the affliction of deafness, leading disability scholar Lennard J. Davis suggests: ‘Deafness itself has been a more excluded term than blindness.’³⁷³ He suggests:

More often than not, representatives of marginalised discourses will speak of being ‘silenced’ or of being empowered to ‘speak’ or ‘give voice’. These statements place a negative connotation on the non-normatively linguistic and a positive spin on speech and vocalisation.³⁷⁴

Here Davis recognises the focus placed upon verbal communication within nineteenth-century culture, and how the metaphorical aspects of speech permeate society’s view, and management, of the deaf. In turn, this raises questions about the identity given to the deaf, and the identity they wished to create for themselves.

This chapter focuses on three main texts that depict deafness in the nineteenth century: Harriet Martineau’s ‘The Deaf Playmate’s Story’ (1853), Charles Dickens’ ‘Dr Marigold’s Prescriptions’ (1865), and Wilkie Collins’ *Hide and Seek* (1854). Although these texts are relatively close in date, they still depict the radical shift in deaf issues such as education and social placement that took

³⁷²Charles Dickens, ‘Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions’, in *Christmas Stories* (Edinburgh: T. Nelson & Sons, 1925), pp. 373-401 (p. 389).

³⁷³Lennard J. Davis, ‘Deafness and Insight: the Deafened Moment as a Critical Modality’, *College English*, 57:8 (Dec. 1995), 881-900 (p. 885).

³⁷⁴Davis, ‘Deafness and Insight’, p. 882.

place in the mid-century. 'The Deaf Playmate's Story' depicts a failure in educating the deaf within normal society, and recognises the difference in educational needs. As a primarily sentimental narrative, it places the social issues that faced the deaf within a local framework of household and school, so as to explore the effects of exclusion amongst the deaf. Wilkie Collins' *Hide and Seek* does not focus on this arena of education, and instead looks at the role of the disabled woman. There are many parallels between this text and Martineau's *Life in the Sick Room*, in that it recognises the superior level of social understanding that was often afforded to the afflicted, and depicts a depth of other senses such as sight and emotional intelligence in the deaf protagonist. Both Collins and Martineau depict this superiority within their narratives in order to portray the liberating and emancipating facets of such an affliction as deafness; marking a new understanding that overrides the previously adhered to notion of unrivalled misery and lack in disability, and instead championing the belief that affliction, in this case deafness, can instead work as an aid to happiness.

Charles Dickens' 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions' sees a return to the issue of deaf education, and yet deals with it in a noticeably different manner. Depicting the education of a deaf girl as opposed to a deaf boy (as in Martineau's tale), it engages directly with the deaf institutions and allows for a more radical portrayal of deaf education. Between 1853 and 1865, deaf education had accelerated, as had society's view of the deaf and their management, and Dickens also includes issues of heredity and the chosen family in his narrative. There is also a shared emphasis on adoption in Dickens' and Collins' plots.

Although the three main texts are closer in date than those of the previous chapter, they too span a period within which great acceleration in treatment of, and attitudes to, the deaf took place. This alludes to the more complicated affliction of deafness and the difficulties that surrounded society's perceived need to manage them, which is imperative in discussing the importance of depictions of the deaf in nineteenth-century literature. That is, deafness in the nineteenth century was perceived as a more complicated and troubling condition than blindness, particularly through social interaction and questions surrounding the capability of morality of the afflicted. The main argument here is that although ostracised to a higher degree than the blind, the deaf were actually in an enviable position in that they were able, as far as they were allowed, to create their own identity and their own system of communication, enabling them to become social commentators. With this in mind, the movement towards Oralism, a method for educating the deaf that was heavily reliant on lip-reading and sign language, shows a fear of the deaf in mainstream society, leading to the breaking down of deaf communities and the attempt to normalise the afflicted and integrate them into mainstream society.

Deafness as an affliction, then, was not usually afforded sympathetic and compassionate reactions. It was not only the hearing of the afflicted that was found lacking, but also the general progression and nature of their character, and an 1839 article published in *The Lancet* suggests:

It unfortunately happens that a very strong prejudice is entertained by the non-professional public against having recourse to professional assistance for the cure of deafness, a complaint, which is, in general, looked upon,

when commencing, as trivial, and, when established, as beyond the powers of art to remove.³⁷⁵

Medically also, deafness was largely overlooked and by the 1840s, physicians such as Isaac Harrinson were noting: ‘It is somewhat curious to observe the way in which surgeons and physicians of the highest eminence, in their recent works, have treated or rather passed over the subject of aural diseases’, continuing to cite a Professor Linton and noting ‘diseases of the eye in his surgery, occupy sixty-four pages, while those of the ear barely engage six’.³⁷⁶ Those who studied it found the causes to be not dissimilar to that of blindness; aside from outside influences such as blows to the head and excessive exposure to noise, deafness was attributed to causes such as deficiency of secretion, colds, scarlatina, measles, dyspepsia, or ‘a morbid affection of the mucous membrane lining the throat, nose and ear’.³⁷⁷

Medical professionals working within this field were, however, quick to acknowledge their lack of understanding of the causes of deafness, many arguing that without the due care and attention to the affliction, such knowledge of, and thus the way the affliction was perceived, would remain rudimentary. Even as the mid-century was drawing to a close, physicians were accepting their unawareness of the disability, with one article from 1872 stating: ‘We must be content at present to admit our ignorance of the cause, consoling ourselves with the reflection that the confession of ignorance is the first step to knowledge’,³⁷⁸ a

³⁷⁵ J. Harrison Curtis, ‘Employment of Creosote in Deafness’, *The Lancet*, 1 (1839), 328-330 (p. 329).

³⁷⁶ Isaac Harrinson, ‘A Statistical Summary, with Remarks, of One Hundred and Ninety Cases of Aural Disease’ *Prov Med Surg J*, 1:9 (1845), 449-452 (p. 449).

³⁷⁷ James Yearsley, ‘Deafness practically illustrated: being an Exposition of Original Views as to the Causes and Treatment of Diseases of the Ear’, *Prov Med Surg J*, 1:12 (1848), 234-235 (p. 235).

³⁷⁸ W. B Dalby, ‘Diseases and Injuries of the Ear’, *The Lancet*, 2 (1872), 873-875 (p. 873).

sentiment echoing an earlier case study which concludes: 'In more than two-fifths of the cases, no probable cause could be assigned'.³⁷⁹

As with blindness, the congenital concerns of deafness were not as prevalent as we might first assume. An 1882 study suggests: 'Not every case of deafness occurring in a deaf family is necessarily an incurable case, or necessarily, indeed, of that nature which has been generally associated with hereditary deafness',³⁸⁰ although this concern had inevitably made its way into medical discourse upon deafness, emphasised through a striking commentary made in an article published in the *British Medical Journal* in 1877 wherein the author states: 'In remarking on the causes of total deafness, he rightly lays very great stress on the sad results of the congenitally deaf intermarrying, as so many of their children are born deaf'.³⁸¹

Through their portrayals of deaf protagonists, Dickens, Martineau and Collins explore the placement of the deaf in conventional society. Seemingly unable to exist without society's charitable input, the protagonists and the portion of society they represent, are little more than inconveniences, or at best, charity cases. Yet, through their triumphant conclusions, each author works to allow their protagonists to exist, at least in some part, within a society ostensibly so antagonistic towards them. The treatment of the deaf in the nineteenth century differs greatly from the treatment of those afflicted by other disabilities, specifically blindness and physical abnormality, in that the debates surrounding their management and place within the social order were more thoroughly

³⁷⁹ Harrinson, 'A Statistical Summary', p. 450.

³⁸⁰ Lennox Browne, 'The Connection Between Diseases of the Ear and General Medicine', *BMJ*, 2 (1882), 418-420 (p. 418).

³⁸¹ B. St. J. Ackers, 'Deaf, not Dumb', *BMJ*, 2 (1877), p. 481.

discussed and contested. Some parties championed an inclusive treatment, moulding the deaf into 'normative' identities, whereas others recognised the need for specific, tailor-made treatment.

'Forcing Them into Each Other's Society': A History of Deafness

Since the very beginnings of social civilisation, deaf individuals have faced discrimination. This inequity has been recorded as far back as the Ancient Greeks, with Aristotle claiming that it was impossible for deaf people to be educated, as hearing was an imperative aspect, indeed even the only way, for communication and education in a society that saw many inhabitants unable to read or write. As the pillars of society were generally deemed to be communication, education and religion, deaf people were perceived to have very little to contribute or extract from the early social orders and this is perhaps why they often were ostracised so severely, with their lack of communication outlets often misinterpreted as savagery.

The dissemination of religion to the deaf was a particular concern as they were, to all intents and purposes, excluded from this central feature of societies that were so concerned with, and reliant upon, religious instruction for moral education and even social and personal advancement. Deaf people were often, therefore, denied religious teaching; something deemed to be essential for personal growth as well as social inclusion, and as a result of this they were viewed as a lower class for their inability to hear religious instruction. While the blind were denied a vision of the future, the deaf were disjointed from the most established tradition of the past, which was religion. Ironically, however, sign language in its most primitive form was introduced around 400 A.D by

Benedictine monks who required a way of communicating throughout their vows of silence, which they adapted and later taught to people who were deaf from birth. As time progressed and civilisations became more advanced, society began to accommodate such disability and the 1500s saw Renaissance Italy make headway in experimentation with education for the deaf,³⁸² and by the nineteenth century, many specialised schools were appearing in France, America, England, Scotland and Wales. With education starting to become more widely available, the increase in the written word meant that there was indeed a way in which deaf people could be included in aspects of society that had previously been wholly reliant on an oral transmission of instruction.

This grouping together of disabled people was not a Victorian invention, and had seen positive results. Colonies of the deaf had been recorded as early as the 1600s, with institutions existing in England and Scotland from the 1790s. The first recorded modern institution appeared in Paris, France in 1783, and sought to offer not only refuge but an introduction of social skill sets to allow its pupils a path from which to integrate into society at large. A similar school was opened in Liverpool in 1793, and another in London in 1800. This new, more civilised society was not wholly accepting of individuals disabled in this way, however, and was far from ushering the deaf into the mainstream. The deaf were notoriously misunderstood, and as such, became a portion of society that had the notion of self-improvement thrust onto them. Gordon Ashton Phillips observes: ‘They [Deaf and Dumb Institutions] were designed not just to remove such deviants from the community but also to impose upon them a regime of

³⁸² See *The Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language, and Education*, ed. by Mark Marschark and Patricia Elizabeth Spencer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)

disciplinary and improving treatment to instil virtuous habits and to correct aberrations'³⁸³ and so, by viewing such individuals as deprived and disadvantaged, Victorian Britain was able to create a system that was two-fold; to guard against deviation from propriety, while embarking the deaf on a journey of self-improvement. This treatment incorporated the beginnings of a vision of social acceptance, in that the deaf were able to adopt practical skills and learn where they could exist comfortably within mainstream society. Although such Institutions were of arguably questionable motives, they benefited their inhabitants greatly in that they provided them with not only comfortable boarding but also tailored education. This acceptance was in its infancy, however, and contradictorily, to gain approval the deaf were required to mimic behaviour widely acceptable in the public sphere, as closely as possible. Little support was given in integrating them as they were into society at large and instead the focus was placed upon creating an existence for them so that, in turn, they would become their own society. As Susan Birch suggests: 'Deaf residential schools offered Deaf people a "place of their own", a separate world where deafness was the norm',³⁸⁴ which serves to magnify the sense of segregation that was surrounding these individuals.

One solution to the inherent difference between the deaf and the hearing in the nineteenth century was to create a community that housed only deaf people. This colonisation was seen in the American 'Martha's Vineyard'; an Island in New England that flourished throughout the nineteenth century and at its peak

³⁸³ Phillips, *The Blind in British Society*, p. 18.

³⁸⁴ Susan Birch, 'Double Jeopardy: Women, Deafness and Deaf Education', in *Literacy and Deaf People: Cultural and Contextual Perspectives* ed. by Brenda Jo Brueggeman (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 2004), pp. 59-72 (p. 59).

housed between 200 and 250 people, most of whom were related. One in 155 people on the vineyard were born deaf, which contrasted to the wider community, within which one in 1,273 were born with the affliction. This, of course, lends substantial support to theories of influence of heredity in such affliction, and the Vineyard itself attracted Alexander Graham Bell's attention in the 1880s. Life in the Vineyard provided deaf individuals with a relatively comfortable existence, as they were cosseted from hearing society. Nora Ellen Groce states that the Vineyard saw 73 percent of its population married, often at a younger age than their hearing contemporaries, and high fertility rates. She observes that divorce on the Vineyard was much more sporadic than on the mainland, and this is in part due to the lack of social pressure in an environment specifically tailored to a deaf community.³⁸⁵ This colony-based existence was not exclusive to America and was also seen in other parts of the world in the nineteenth century, including France, Spain and Australia.

In England, early-nineteenth century charitable organisations for the deaf had a definite religious leaning. In 1841, the 'Institution of Providing Employment, Relief, and Religious Instruction for the Adult Deaf and Dumb' was established in London, aiming to provide its beneficiaries with both spiritual and social improvement; emphasis was placed upon training the individuals in a particular skill so that they had the chance to exist in society without having to resort to the workhouse. The organisation sought to bring religion to the deaf, who had previously been distinctly separated from it and from the 1860s, church services for deaf people were offered periodically, although this movement faced

³⁸⁵ For more on Martha's Vineyard, see, for example, Nora Ellen Groce, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985).

much opposition. The charity gained Royal Patronage in 1876 and the name of the establishment was changed to the 'Royal Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb' and still exists today, under the name of the 'Royal Association for Deaf People'.³⁸⁶

Similarly, an organization called the 'British Deaf Association' was established in 1890 by Francis Maginn, an Irish missionary who fought to defend the deaf and their rights, including their use of sign language as well as their right to marry and create offspring. This was met with much opposition, most notably in the form of the Oralist Movement. The American Oralist Movement of the latter part of the century, led by the evolutionist Alexander Graham Bell, attempted to eradicate the use of sign language, likening its usage to savagery. Bell himself was familiar with the deaf, having both a deaf mother and wife. Although his wife, Mabel Hubbard, was deaf, Bell was acutely aware of the hereditary implications of affliction and what social critics were calling the "degeneration of the race" and as such, he was strongly opposed to disabled people entering into the marriage union and producing offspring. This is, of course, entirely contradictory to his own domestic situation, as Hubbard delivered to him two daughters, showing a striking conflict in Bell's own theory and practice.

In his 1883 lecture to the National Academy of Sciences, entitled *Memoirs Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race*, Bell presents a comprehensive account of both the reality and outcomes of 'undesirable'³⁸⁷ deaf

³⁸⁶ For a starting point on these and similar specialised establishments, see Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood* (Clevedon: Cromwell Press, 2003).

³⁸⁷ Alexander Graham Bell, *Memoir Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race* (Washington: National Academy of Sciences, 1883), p. 46.

people joining in marital union and producing congenitally blighted offspring. He states: 'We have good reason, therefore, to fear that the intermarriage of congenital deaf-mutes, even though the deafness in both cases might be sporadic, would result in many cases in the production of deaf offspring',³⁸⁸ and his use of the term 'fear' here suggests a very real anxiety for what Bell perceives as 'the formation of a deaf variety of the human race'.³⁸⁹ Bell's eugenic influences are strikingly apparent within this lecture, as he refers to the dystopian future he foresees as a 'calamity to the world',³⁹⁰ arguing that the preferred method of communication for the deaf 'interferes with the mastery of the English language'.³⁹¹ In his personal life, however, there is no indication that Hubbard's deafness was hereditarily transmitted to the children.

Bell's father also worked with the deaf and Bell himself taught deaf pupils at variety of schools, both in England and America. Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School from 1828 to 1841 was another teacher of the deaf and an English champion of the 'pure oral method', as was Bell, validating his reasoning for the movement thus:

Speech was superior to signs because it made the deaf more like 'ourselves', normal hearing people... and speech was superior to signs because signs were 'of no value for social intercourse', as only the deaf and their teachers could understand them. Signs were 'a dead language'.³⁹²

The language of exclusion used here points to an astonishing appeal to a consensus amongst his readership, questioning what is to be considered 'normal' and creating a definite 'us and them' mentality.

³⁸⁸ Bell, *Memoir*, p. 12.

³⁸⁹ Bell, *Memoir*, p. 4.

³⁹⁰ Bell, *Memoir*, p. 41.

³⁹¹ Bell, *Memoir*, p. 42.

³⁹² Carpenter, *Health, Medicine, and Society*, p. 117.

Prior to the 1860s, deaf education had been driven by the use of sign language, and yet following this shift in what experts viewed as educational achievement, the deaf community faced intervention from the hearing community once more. As such: ‘Deaf teachers of the deaf were likewise increasingly excluded from education, because their deafness made it impossible for them to teach oral speech’.³⁹³ As a result of evolutionary theory, debates were occurring concerning the ‘attitudes towards language - specifically, the relative status and worth of spoken versus gestured language’.³⁹⁴ Gestured language as a widespread and accepted use of communication had died out with primitive beings; its use was viewed as such, and ‘became firmly associated with a lower stage of evolution’.³⁹⁵

In 1846, J. Kitto stated in *The Westminster Review*: ‘The blind and deaf are more numerous in every community than is usually proposed’.³⁹⁶ Although such affliction was documented and known about, Kitto goes on to suggest: ‘Their privation keeps them out of society, and they would hardly be known to exist, if it were not found that, when institutions are established for their relief or instruction, patients and pupils, to overflowing, are always forthcoming’.³⁹⁷ However, there was also much publication in the form of newspapers and periodicals to bring information about the deaf and their education into the public sphere, including titles specific to the deaf community such as the *Deaf and Dumb Times* which ran from 1889 to 1891, *The Deaf Chronicle* running from 1891 to 1892, the *British*

³⁹³ Carpenter, *Health, Medicine, and Society*, p. 117.

³⁹⁴ Baynton, “‘Savages and Deaf-Mutes’”, p. 96.

³⁹⁵ Baynton, “‘Savages and Deaf-Mutes’”, p. 99.

³⁹⁶ J. Kitto, ‘The Lost Senses’, *The Westminster Review*, 45-46 (1846), 183-189 (p. 184).

³⁹⁷ Kitto, ‘The Lost Senses’, p. 184.

Deaf-Mute from 1892 to 1895, and the *British Deaf Monthly* which was in publication between 1896 and 1903.

Carpenter suggests: 'The infirmity or affliction of deafness, especially of the deaf and dumb, is represented as a new scientific discovery in the Victorian World, one that is as sensational as tragic'.³⁹⁸ This is an observation that is seen in Charles Dickens' coverage of the plight of the deaf and the establishments devoted to them published in both *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. Both periodicals took a particular interest in the plight of the deaf and each publication included many allusions to it, in both journalism and fiction.³⁹⁹ Dickens was heavily involved in the construction and editing of material in both these publications, and so these journals' emphasis upon literature regarding the deaf can be attributed, at least in part, to him. It is fruitful to cite a number of examples here; Volume IX, published in 1854, includes a journalistic article entitled 'Deaf Mutes' authored by Harriet Martineau (discussed in more detail later in the chapter), within which it is stated: 'If there is reason to fear hereditary deafness, or if there is already a deaf child in the family, how anxiously the parents watch the newborn infant, and make all sorts of noises to ascertain whether it is startled by it or not!'⁴⁰⁰ This places the publication, and those involved in it, at the heart of debates concerning hereditary transmission occurring around the mid-century. In Volume XX of the periodical, for example, eight pieces include detailed reference to the deaf. Examples of these pieces are 'Conscript Sons', 'Numbers of People' and 'A Little More Harmony'.

³⁹⁸ Carpenter, *Health, Medicine, and Society in Victorian England*, p. 121.

³⁹⁹ See *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (London: British Library Press, 2009).

⁴⁰⁰ Harriet Martineau, 'Deaf Mutes', *Household Words*, 9 (1854), 134-138 (p. 135).

All the Year Round continued this trend. Volume IV sees a short story entitled 'Up a Step-ladder' and details deafness brought on by social reasons as opposed to any congenital fault. Volume X includes a story, 'Tipping the Teapot', which includes a deaf man, Admiral Groggen. Periodicals were an important aspect of Victorian culture, as Laurel Brake argues they 'routinely published whole books serially and disseminated news, and advertising, thereby playing a vital role in the economy'.⁴⁰¹ Through such serialisation and projection of knowledge, periodicals such as *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* 'played a significant part in fostering many of the learned, social and political discourses of the century'.⁴⁰² In this way, they both entertained and educated a Victorian public in issues that they may not have been versed in or familiar with.

'The Handicap of Deafness is not in the Ear; it is in the Mind': Harriet Martineau and Deaf Identity

Dickens employed Harriet Martineau, a deaf woman, with *Household Words*, who contributed over 40 articles to the periodical. Martineau had received an impressive education and was held in particularly high regard amongst her acquaintances, following her move to London in 1832, at the age of 30. Martineau is a figure of particular significance in her involvement with Dickens' publication, as she represented an afflicted woman who contributed to society in a significant manner. Shelagh Hunter recognises Martineau as 'a woman who made herself noteworthy by singularity but is now more significant for being representative',⁴⁰³ and this is largely due to the inclusive nature of her writing; she provided a 'call to

⁴⁰¹ *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor, (London: Academia Press, 2009), p. v.

⁴⁰² *DNJC*, ed. by Brake and Demoor, p. v.

⁴⁰³ Shelagh Hunter, *Harriet Martineau: The Poetics of Moralism* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), p. 1.

arms' that renders her representative of a woman fighting for social inclusion against the odds.

In March 1834, Martineau published her 'Letter to the Deaf', in an attempt to share her struggle with other afflicted persons and give guidance on the management of the deaf. She had gradually become deaf between the ages of twelve and sixteen, and of this transitional period, she states:

The first distinct recognition of my being deaf more or less was... when I was about twelve years old. It was a very slight, scarcely-perceptible hardness of hearing at that time; and the recognition was merely this;- that in that great vaulted school-room... where there was a large space between the class and the master's desk or the fire, I was excused from taking place in class, and desired to sit always at the top, because it was somewhat nearer the master, whom I could not always hear further off. When Mr. Perry [Martineau's schoolmaster] changed his abode and we were in a smaller school-room, I again took places with the rest. I remember no other difficulty about hearing at that time.⁴⁰⁴

By the time she was sixteen, however, she states that her affliction had become 'very noticeable, very inconvenient, and excessively painful to myself'.⁴⁰⁵

In writing her 'Letter to the Deaf', at the age of thirty-two, Martineau is adequately equipped to stand as social observer; even, as Shelagh Hunter suggests, as Governess to the Nation. The tone of the piece is particularly upbeat and self-sufficient, providing her deaf contemporaries with both practical suggestions and a welcome sense of camaraderie. Speaking as something of a veteran, she addresses her audience directly: 'I have often of late longed to communicate with my fellow-sufferers, in the hope of benefiting, by my experience, some to whom the discipline, is newer than to myself',⁴⁰⁶ which

⁴⁰⁴ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, ed. by Linda H. Peterson (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2007), pp. 80-81.

⁴⁰⁵ Martineau, *Autobiography*, p. 81.

⁴⁰⁶ Harriet Martineau, 'Letter to the Deaf', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, 1 (1834), 174-179 (p. 174).

immediately excites the faith of her new followers. Her sense of obligation and responsibility to act as social leader for the deaf is emphasised through her further explanation: 'It was lately not only suggested to me, but urged upon me as a duty'.⁴⁰⁷

Martineau recognises that no two experiences of deafness are the same, and yet she is expert at binding together the experiences of the afflicted to create a metaphorical version of Martha's Vineyard. The management of the deaf played a large part in the experience of the individual, and through this letter, Martineau urges her followers to reclaim their disability. She states: 'we are but too apt to shrink from regularly taking in hand our own case',⁴⁰⁸ continuing to assess the management of the deaf at the hands of the able-bodied thus:

I only mean that this very tenderness is hurtful to us in as far as it encourages us to evade our enemy, instead of grappling with it; to forget our infirmity from hour to hour, if we can, and to get over the present occasion somehow, without thinking of the next. This would be considered a strange way of meeting any other kind of evil; and its consequences in our case are most deplorable. If we see that the partially deaf are often unscrupulous about truth, inquisitive, irritable, or morose; suspicious, low-spirited, or ill-mannered, it is owing to this.⁴⁰⁹

She argues for a place for the deaf not at the fringes of society, silently observing a life in which they can never take part, but instead in the midst of it, and blames the well-meaning but ultimately flawed supervision of the able-bodied as counter-productive.

Rather than presenting an idyllic version of deaf individuals, Martineau gives a critical, realistic account of their ranging abilities:

If we are dull and slow of observation, and indolent in thought, there is little chance of our being much wiser than infants; whereas, if we are acute and quick of observation (and for us there is no medium) and disposed for

⁴⁰⁷ Martineau, 'Letter to the Deaf', p. 174.

⁴⁰⁸ Martineau, 'Letter to the Deaf', p. 174.

⁴⁰⁹ Martineau, 'Letter to the Deaf', p. 174.

thought, nothing is likely to prevent our going on to be wiser continually.⁴¹⁰

Elaborating on these positive attributes, Martineau acknowledges that:

We *have* some accomplishments which we may gratefully acknowledge, while the means by which we gain them must prevent our being proud of them. We are good physiognomists- good perceivers in every way, and have (if we are not idle) rather the advantage over others in the power of abstract reasoning.⁴¹¹

Although Martineau recognises that the afflicted have to work harder in order to integrate themselves into mainstream society than the able-bodied, she argues that the deaf are in possession of a deeper understanding and invaluable observation skills.

Ever the realist, however, Martineau does allude to the period of unrest and dissatisfaction that must be overcome should the deaf individual take their rightful place within the social sphere, stating: ‘we must submit to be usually insignificant, and sometimes ridiculous... Those who have strength of mind to seek society under this humiliation, and to keep their tempers through it, cannot remain insignificant there’.⁴¹² Martineau herself was familiar with the friendly ridicule and amusement of her able-bodied peers, as she used a trumpet to aid her hearing. Wholly embracing this, and even revelling in her ability to overhear the conversations of others with the hearing aid, she ultimately maintains: ‘we must bravely go on taking our place in society’,⁴¹³ insisting upon a movement of courageous reclamation through such language as: ‘We must destroy the sacredness of the subject, by speaking of it ourselves; not perpetually and

⁴¹⁰ Martineau, ‘Letter to the Deaf’, p. 179.

⁴¹¹ Martineau, ‘Letter to the Deaf’, p. 179.

⁴¹² Martineau, ‘Letter to the Deaf’, p. 176.

⁴¹³ Martineau, ‘Letter to the Deaf’, p. 176.

sentimentally, but, when occasion arises, boldly, cheerfully, and as a plain matter of fact'.⁴¹⁴

Martineau's publications went some way in paving a new road of acceptance and a repossession of the self for the deaf, and the widespread distribution of her writing meant that many were given new hope in, and a new understanding of, their affliction. Martineau's 'The Deaf Playmate's Story' was published in 1853 as part of *A Round of Stories by the Fire* in *Household Words*, and the piece also appeared in America in *Harper's Magazine* in the same year. It depicts a young boy blighted with progressive deafness and explores the impact this has upon his social condition at the boarding school he inhabits, particularly with his close friend Charley Felkin. Given the details of Martineau's own experience of deafness, and her committed and unfaltering views on the need for deaf-specific education, the tale can be read as highly autobiographical. The narrative also serves as a sentimentalising of a life story that Martineau otherwise tried hard not to romanticise. Indeed, as Alison Winter suggests, 'The purpose of this ministry was to describe the invalid's world'.⁴¹⁵

Charley is at first portrayed as the protagonist's protégé, and yet, as his condition worsens, the roles are reversed. No name is given to the protagonist, and yet his status within his particular social hierarchy is highlighted from the outset: 'You know Charley is a year younger than I am, and I had been at Dr. Owen's a year when he came. He was to be in my room; and he did not know anything about school; and he was younger and uncomfortable at first; and altogether, he

⁴¹⁴ Martineau, 'Letter to the Deaf', p. 175.

⁴¹⁵ Alison Winter, 'Harriet Martineau and the Reform of the Invalid in Victorian England', *The Historical Journal*, 38:3 (1995), 597-616 (p. 604).

fell to my share'.⁴¹⁶ A particularly poignant aspect of this introduction is this admission:

Our best talks, though, were after we were gone to bed. I was not deaf then; and we used to have such talks about home, and ghosts, and all sorts of things; and nobody ever overheard us that we knew of, but once; and then we got nothing worse than a tremendous rap at the door, and the Doctor bidding us to go to sleep directly.⁴¹⁷

The bonds forged in such education establishments are widely accepted as being of particular importance, as is also seen in Dickens' 1850 novel, *David Copperfield*. In their togetherness, the two friends give a sense of union and attachment against the outside, adult world that, in their minds, complicates each aspect of life. This makes the child's deafness particularly harrowing, as it takes away his ability to communicate and thus, his bond with others against the outside world.

The creeping notion of the deafness and the child's slow descent into it is symptomatic of growing up; becoming hardened to the innocent joviality that once ensued and finding himself stuck between two worlds. He states:

At first, Charley was very kind to me. I remember his asking me, once, to lean my head on his shoulder, and his keeping my head warm till the pain got better; and he sat quite still the whole time. But perhaps he grew tired; or - I don't know - perhaps I grew cross. I used to try not to but sometimes the pain was so bad, and lasted so long, that I used to wish I was dead; and I dare say I might be cross enough then, or dismal, which boys like worse.⁴¹⁸

This highlights the lack of understanding of both parties. Indeed, the protagonist's hindsight leads him to suggest: 'we never explained. If we had, we might have

⁴¹⁶ Harriet Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', in *Household Words: A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire*, ed. by Charles Dickens (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1853), pp 35-39 (p. 34).

⁴¹⁷ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 34.

⁴¹⁸ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 35.

saved a great deal that happens afterwards. I am sure I wish we had'.⁴¹⁹ He goes on to state of his childhood circumstance: 'Charley used to seem not to believe there was anything the matter with me',⁴²⁰ and in that short sentence, Martineau encapsulates the extreme discontent that a lack of understanding added to such a disability.

Should the child have been afflicted with a broken arm, or a crippled leg, his classmates, and therefore society at large, would have grasped the situation and made suitable allowances for him. It is only when the child's academic standards deteriorate that help is sought, and yet the damage has already been done to the child's strongest bonds and the very foundations of his existence shattered. In his confusion, he states:

I used to think I could keep a-head of all but three boys in my class; and I used to try, hard, to keep a-head of them. But after a while, I began to go down. I used to learn my lessons as hard as ever; still, somehow the boys were quicker in answering, and half-dozen of them used to get my place, before I knew what it was all about.⁴²¹

This confusion is then transferred from boyhood alterations in character and intellect into the adult realm. The accusations of idleness and stupidity lead the child to admit: 'I even thought so myself, too, and I was very miserable'.⁴²² Martineau's portrait concentrates the attention of the public on the social difficulty the afflicted faced in finding an identity, associated with this particular affliction.

The solitude brought about by this level of misunderstanding has a

⁴¹⁹ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 35.

⁴²⁰ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 35.

⁴²¹ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 35.

⁴²² Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 35.

profound effect upon the protagonist and the relationship he has with Charley. In the darkness, the child is devoid of not only his hearing but also his sight, much like the condition of Madonna in Collins' *Hide and Seek* (which will be considered later in this chapter). Indeed, as the child sleepwalks later in the narrative, he admits: 'They say I stared at the candles the whole time'.⁴²³ In this image, the fragility of the candle is directly paralleled to the delicateness and vulnerability of the child himself. The bond between the two friends that was born of the camaraderie of whisperings in the night has been banished with the child's impending deafness, and the loss of this sense signifies the loss of the old existence he lived. He states:

So we used to go to bed without speaking. One morning, Charley said when we got up, that I was the most sulky fellow he ever saw. I had been afraid, lately, that I *was* growing rather sulky, but I did not know of any particular reason he had for saying so just then.⁴²⁴

The deaf narrator explains: 'The thing was, he had felt uncomfortable, the night before, about something in his behaviour to me, and he had whispered to me, to ask me to forgive him. It was quite dark, and I never heard him; and he asked me to turn and speak to him; but I never stirred, of course'.⁴²⁵ The idea of deaf communication through gesture is lost here, as each child knows not how to communicate with the other. Davis suggests of Martineau's wider use of gesture: [she] places it at the centre of the text - silent gesture becomes the truth of the text',⁴²⁶ and yet that same truth is lost, or not yet realised, at this point. This allows Martineau to wholly portray the cost of ignorance towards such disability,

⁴²³ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 37.

⁴²⁴ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 35.

⁴²⁵ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 35.

⁴²⁶ Davis, 'Deafness and Insight', p. 898.

thus magnifying the harm that occurs to both parties. The loss of ability in communication is depicted as the downfall in not only the friendship between the two boys, but also between an individual and their ability to commune with the outside world.

With the diagnosis of the child's deafness comes a new era of uncertainty for him. He admits: 'But, somehow, everything seemed to go wrong and be uncomfortable, wherever I might be, and I was always longing to be somewhere else',⁴²⁷ and Martineau uses the lack of any comforting sounds such as the chirp of the birds to further convey the darkness of the situation. The allusion to the lack of religious influence is also apparent: 'Even the church bell seemed as if it was muffled; and when the organ played, there were great gaps in the music, which was so spoiled that I used to think I had rather there had been no music at all'.⁴²⁸ The nightmarish sequence of the child's previous life fading in and out of earshot is reminiscent of the transitional period in each child's adolescence, and yet the added affliction of deafness highlights the difficulty of both shifts in existence. The child states: 'I was never so uncomfortable in my life. I did not hear what they said to each other',⁴²⁹ and this period proves itself to be so unbearable that he: 'did not see any use in staying longer, just to be pitied and laughed at, without doing any good to anybody',⁴³⁰ as he attempts to fit in to the hearing world. Paul K. Longmore argues: 'the struggle for disabled people seems always to have been a struggle for both self-determination and self-definition',⁴³¹ and the child's

⁴²⁷ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 35.

⁴²⁸ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 36.

⁴²⁹ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 36.

⁴³⁰ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 36.

⁴³¹ Paul K. Longmore, *Why I Burned my Book and other Essays on Disability* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2003), p. 8.

search for classification and meaning in his relatively small social circle allows Martineau to approach this situation in a particularly personal way. This idea of transition is present within the larger social realm also, as ‘the old notion that deaf people were uneducable had passed’,⁴³² as argued by Trenton Batson and Eugene Bergman, and yet ‘it is also apparent the potential for education to bring deaf people into society was not yet grasped’.⁴³³ In this way, both the protagonist’s age and current educational situation serve to ensure this transition has great impact within the narrative.

Away from the relative safety of the school, Charley and the protagonist’s relationship cannot thrive. The solidarity between Charley and his family increases the segregation of the deaf protagonist, as he takes drastic measures to ‘escape’ the situation and return to his own family. And yet, the child is unable to find anywhere where he is entirely comfortable and satisfied, as was the case for many afflicted individuals which led to the social aspects of the Deaf and Dumb Establishments of the nineteenth century becoming as important, if not more so, than the education and life training they offered. At his own home, amongst his own family, Martineau’s protagonist states:

I had been vexed that the Felkins had called me deaf; and now I was hurt at the way in which my brothers and sisters used to find fault with me for not hearing things. Ned said once “none are so deaf as those that won’t hear;” and my mother told me, every day, that it was inattention; that if I were not so absent, I should hear as much as anybody else.⁴³⁴

Martineau transfers the sense of confinement felt by the deaf child into a wider social setting, emphasising the afflicted’s desperate, and often futile, wish

⁴³² *Angels and Outcasts: An Anthology of Deaf Characters in Literature*, ed. by Trenton B. Batson and Eugene Bergman (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 1985), p. 3.

⁴³³ *Angels and Outcasts*, ed. by Batson and Bergman, p. 3.

⁴³⁴ Martineau, ‘The Deaf Playmate’s Story’, p. 36.

for inclusion in the death of the child's beloved turtle-dove. Desperate to engage with the creature, and thus a hearing society, once more, he states:

I could not hear it at all, unless I put my head against the cage... One day I took one of them out of the cage, and coaxed her at first, and tried every way; and at last I squeezed her throat a little. I suppose I got desperate because she would not coo as I wanted; and I killed her - broke her neck.⁴³⁵

Yet, in removing the bird from its cage, the child has endangered it and damaged it beyond repair in attempting to mould it into what he expects of his childhood pet. The child then becomes a figure to be feared, a creature no longer belonging in the 'bright, and distinct, and cheerful'⁴³⁶ family home, frightened that he will become a burden to his personal society, and thus, society at large. 'By the nineteenth century... the deaf began to be perceived as foreign, alien, other'⁴³⁷ as Davis suggests, and Martineau is expert in applying this public notion to her protagonist following the death of the turtle-dove.

The child drifts into absolute solitude, and the segregation between him and his hearing counterparts is almost painful to witness. He admits: 'I had to get on all alone. I used to read in a corner, a great part of the day; and I used to walk by myself - long walks over the common, while the others used to go together to the meadows, or through the lanes'.⁴³⁸ The school establishment becomes a much brighter prospect for the child, and one in which particular attention could be paid to his affliction. The child admits: 'I suppose everybody is always hoping for something or other - and I did not know what else to hope'.⁴³⁹ This correlates to the nationwide idea of self-improvement epitomised in Samuel Smiles' *Self Help*,

⁴³⁵ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 36-7.

⁴³⁶ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 36.

⁴³⁷ Davis, 'Deafness and Insight', p. 891.

⁴³⁸ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 37.

⁴³⁹ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 37.

published a mere six years later than 'The Deaf Playmate's Story' in 1859, reflecting the spirit of its age. The protagonist's drive to overcome the condition is admirable, and yet puts him in further isolation from his peers, as he states:

I had a chance in things that were not done in class, - such as the Latin essay for a prize, for instance. Charley was bent upon getting that prize, and he thought he should, because, though he was younger than I, he was a good deal before me in school. However, I got the prize; and some of the boys said it was a shame. They thought it was through favor, because I had grown stupid. They said so, and Charley said so.⁴⁴⁰

Batson and Bergman suggest: 'Because they [the deaf] are outside of society, they have not imbibed of the evil within society, so are superior to their hearing counterparts',⁴⁴¹ and the abuse, both verbal and otherwise, suffered at the hands of the child's peers supports this claim.

It is here that the narrative shifts, and the child is bestowed with acceptance and much sought-after understanding as he is taken for a drive by 'the dear, considerate, wise Doctor'.⁴⁴² With this journey comes the form of education deemed most influential and important, and the child states: 'He told me what a hopeless case he believed mine to be, and what it would cut me off from: but he said nothing of the sort could cut a person off from being a hero, and here was the way wide open for me'.⁴⁴³ He continues: 'I wondered that I had never thought of all that before; but I don't think that I shall ever forget it',⁴⁴⁴ and the child is now seemingly equipped with the tools to not only understand his condition, but to accept it as his own. This period of transition is nearing its completion, and although 'He thought that deafness and blindness were harder to bear than almost

⁴⁴⁰ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 37-38.

⁴⁴¹ *Angels and Outcasts*, ed. by Batson and Bergman, p. 3.

⁴⁴² Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 38.

⁴⁴³ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 38.

⁴⁴⁴ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 38.

anything. He called them calamities',⁴⁴⁵ the child is able to regain his bonds with Charley, and as such, society at large. Their friendship now exists on a more established and mature level, even as the protagonist leaves the establishment. A particularly interesting aspect of the narrative is the lack of any notable medical influence such as scientific means of diagnosis or the use of sign language. With the fleeting exception of: 'Mr Pratt found out I was deaf, though he could not tell what was the matter with my ears. He would have put on blisters, I don't know what else; but the Doctor said it was so near the holidays, I had better wait till I got home',⁴⁴⁶ the narrative is devoid of detail and the audience does not learn if the child does indeed progress to a Deaf Establishment or not. Yet, this lack of specific factual inclusion does little to tamper with the moralistic element of the text and instead serves to emphasise it further, ensuring an affectionate conclusion. Batson and Bergman suggest: 'as long as deafness is viewed as a curse, those who are afflicted by it will view themselves as victims and, as such, more likely to accept the pity of hearing people, such pity, in the end, proving a more debilitating curse than the handicap itself',⁴⁴⁷ and the child escapes this with the final lines of the narrative: 'I shall not run away from that house again- nor from any other house. It is so much better to look things in the face! How you all nod, and agree with me!'⁴⁴⁸

Following this publication, Martineau contributed to *Household Words* in 1854, with an article entitled 'Deaf Mutes'. She uses the article to reinforce her arguments for specialised deaf education that we see in 'The Deaf Playmate's Story'. From the outset, she recognises the vast existence of the afflicted: 'We

⁴⁴⁵ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 38.

⁴⁴⁶ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 35.

⁴⁴⁷ *Angels and Outcasts*, ed. by Batson and Bergman, p. 58.

⁴⁴⁸ Martineau, 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', p. 38.

have in our own country about fourteen thousand deaf and dumb persons',⁴⁴⁹ and identifies the lack of attention given to them within the arena of education, stating:

These books conclude all children to have four limbs, and (according to popular notion) five senses, and a straight spine, and a perfectly formed brain. Of the great multitude who are blind, deaf, deformed, lame, defective in intellect - who have, in short, some natural infirmity - we hear nothing, in an educational sense.⁴⁵⁰

That Martineau extends the blanket of affliction outward to include other disabilities at the beginning of the article is indicative of the identity of the disabled she champions. It is interesting that she, as a woman writing in the nineteenth century, retains a sense of distance within this journalistic piece, preferring to remain detached from demonstrative feeling. However, it is clearly a matter close to her heart as a disabled individual with the affliction of deafness, as her emotional attachment to the case is clear within her fictional account of the deaf boy and his pursuit of both identity and happiness in 'The Deaf Playmate's Story'.

This article reads much like her *Life in the Sick-room*, published a year prior to 'Deaf Mutes'. It is instructive and shows command, as a leader issuing a call for arms for a new army. Martineau is certainly well-informed about different approaches to her affliction, using medical failings to underline the treatment of the deaf in other arenas, such as education:

There is no part of the human body about which we are so helpless as the ear. So very little is known of its interior structure, and it is so very easy to do mischief, that medical men do not much like to be consulted in cases of deafness; and the wisest of them say candidly that the cases are extremely rare in which they can do any good. These, the wisest of their class, can

⁴⁴⁹ Martineau, 'Deaf Mutes', p. 135.

⁴⁵⁰ Martineau, 'Deaf Mutes', p. 135.

usually tell where the mischief resides, and whether there is any hope of benefit from medical or surgical skill.⁴⁵¹

There is reconciliation, even accomplishment, in her acknowledgement of the lack of medical knowledge regarding the affliction, suggesting that Martineau fully accepts her disability and the form of identity it affords her. Her difference is what allows her to exist; she benefits from the affliction financially in her publications on the subject, she detaches herself from the 'Angel of the House' ideal, and removes herself from the hearth and home in order to fulfil her own desires of social observation and commentary. She is able to use her deafness to develop a professional identity, and to evade domestic expectations.

There is unquestionable authority in the article's voice, particularly with regard to the management of deaf children. Although Martineau was childless herself, she took an active interest in institutions for deaf education, and uses this article to champion them. The issue of deaf education is not centred on education in terms of adhering to a curriculum of mathematical and literary knowledge for example, then, but rather how to live as a deaf individual in a predominantly hearing society. As we have seen in Martineau's *Autobiography*, the formative years of a deaf child are particularly important. As every child needs to learn how to walk and talk, so a deaf child needs also to learn how to *be* deaf, and Martineau states: 'the child must be brought up as if destined (as it really is) to a life with four senses instead of five', continuing to suggest 'The question is, how to enable him to manage best with four senses instead of five'.⁴⁵² There is no further mention of education in terms of schooling within 'Deaf Mutes', but rather

⁴⁵¹ Martineau, 'Deaf Mutes', p. 135.

⁴⁵² Martineau, 'Deaf Mutes', p. 135.

instruction on how to shape both the individual's existence and identity. We can liken this to the format of Martha's Vineyard, and Martineau suggests:

It is clear that, as far as happiness is concerned, he will be far better off among those who are like himself, than in a world where he is on equal terms with nobody... The difficulty is only how to bring him away when he can remain there no longer.⁴⁵³

While the able-bodied can seemingly only recognise the deaf as an undifferentiated portion of society, Martineau's expertise and first-hand experience enable her to separate even those afflicted with deafness into two parties; the deaf, and, like her, the partially deaf. This suggests a microcosm of society within the deaf community, both signifying and emphasising the need for their own society. It is here that the able-bodied supplied with the task of deaf management fail, as they are insensitive to this separation and differences in need between the deaf. Martineau argues that: 'For the same reason that the totally deaf should go to school, the partially deaf should remain at home',⁴⁵⁴ and this alludes to the importance of key relationships and interactions with others in terms of an individual's happiness. Martineau is arguing here that the deaf and partially deaf are as different from each other as a deaf and hearing person in terms of their requirements. Whereas a wholly deaf individual benefits from segregation, indeed, 'There can be no doubt of the immense advantage of training in a deaf and dumb school',⁴⁵⁵ for the partially deaf, led by Martineau, it is more difficult. They essentially exist in two worlds, with one leg on each side of both disability and health. For Martineau herself, this enables her the authority she requires to legitimately comment on both existences; she is neither oblivious to a normative

⁴⁵³ Martineau, 'Deaf Mutes', p. 135.

⁴⁵⁴ Martineau, 'Deaf Mutes', p. 137.

⁴⁵⁵ Martineau, 'Deaf Mutes', p. 135.

existence, nor wholly experiencing it.

Read alongside 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', then, 'Deaf Mutes' takes on new importance. It is the evidence and structured argument behind the emotion and sentiment of the fictional narrative, giving indication of the hardships that deaf individuals faced, particularly with finding their own identity and place within the wider social structure. Martineau writes about deafness in a number of genres, and the journalistic elements present in her work show an individual who studies the affliction as well as experiencing it first-hand. Winters proposes that 'Martineau's work could rightly be considered 'domestic', because it was philanthropic, and because her audience was [mainstream society] rather than the political economists and politicians.' Winters goes on to argue that she was 'established... among the middle class audiences as a model of observational precision and reliable reporting',⁴⁵⁶ suggesting that the hardship she endures in the search for her identity as either deaf or not deaf, allows her to carve out a new identity, built on her experience as a member of both hearing and deaf communities.

Martineau argues that such hardship can indeed be overcome by social comprehension and wills her public to fight against the ignorance that was so often attached to deafness in the nineteenth century. As Davis suggests, 'disabled characters are usually villains or outcasts, but when they are not they are glorified and held up as testaments to the human spirit',⁴⁵⁷ and this human spirit captured Charles Dickens' imagination in the form of Laura Bridgman.

⁴⁵⁶ Winter, 'Harriet Martineau and the Reform of the Invalid in Victorian England', p. 601.

⁴⁵⁷ Davis, 'Deafness and Insight', p. 898.

Dickens and Laura Bridgman

In Boston, America in 1837, eight year old Bridgman entered the Perkins Institution for the Blind, under the guidance of Dr. Samuel Howe, as we have seen in chapter one. Sally Hobart Alexander and Robert Alexander observe: 'In the early 1800s people who were "just" deaf or "just" blind were considered impossible to educate. Somebody like Laura, who was doubly disabled, was considered absolutely hopeless',⁴⁵⁸ and Howe, who was primarily familiar with working with the blind, was to face a particularly demanding challenge. As stated in the *British Medical Journal* in 1841, it was 'one of the most interesting cases that has ever been recorded'.⁴⁵⁹

Laura's story was brought to the attention of Victorian Britain through Charles Dickens and his study of the Perkins Institution of the Blind in his 1842 travelogue, *American Notes*. His apparent empathy for the afflicted bordered on envy for the freedom from artifice and expected propriety that such disability allowed:

It is strange to watch the faces of the blind, and see how free they are from all concealment of what is passing through their thoughts; observing which, a man with eyes may blush to contemplate the mask he wears. Allowing for one shade of anxious expression which is never absent from their countenances, and the like of which we may readily detect in our own faces if we try to feel our way in the dark, every idea, as it rises within them, is expressed with the lightning's speed and nature's truth. If the company at a rout, or drawing-room at court, could only for one time be as unconscious of the eyes upon them as blind men and women are, what secrets would come out, and what a worker of hypocrisy this sight, the loss of which we so much pity, would appear to be.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ Sally Hobart Alexander & Robert Alexander, *She Touched the World: Laura Bridgman, Deaf-Blind Pioneer* (New York: Clarion Books, No Date), p. 16.

⁴⁵⁹ Anonymous, 'Case of Laura Bridgman' *Prov Med Surg J*, 2:32 (1841), 116-118 (p. 116).

⁴⁶⁰ Charles Dickens, *American Notes*, (Hungary: Konemann Travel Classics, 2000), p. 43.

During this visit, Dickens paid special attention to Laura and the work of Howe, and yet describes the teaching as ‘mechanical’,⁴⁶¹ ‘the success about as great as teaching a very knowing dog a variety of tricks’.⁴⁶² Although Dickens’ tone is hopeful, he looks to the humanity of such disabled individuals and the extent to which such institutions cultivated it. Deafness and blindness were commonly depicted as forms of imprisonment, and Dickens’ first encounter with Laura mirrors this: ‘There she was... before me; built up, as it were, in a marble cell, impervious to any ray of light, or particle of sound; with her poor white hand peeping through a chink in the wall, beckoning to some good man for help, that an Immortal soul might be awakened’.⁴⁶³ The passage reads as an introduction for a beggar or a prisoner, identities incurring a stigma which was difficult to escape. He continues: ‘But what a situation was hers! The darkness and the silence of the tomb were around her’,⁴⁶⁴ alluding to her moral state: ‘the moral effects of her wretched state soon appear. Those who cannot be enlightened by reason, can only be controlled by force’.⁴⁶⁵ However, Laura’s celebrity soon went some way in proving otherwise. Ernest Freeberg suggests: ‘The child’s handicaps had transformed her into a prototype, a pure example of the innate potential of all children’,⁴⁶⁶ even stating of Dr Howe: ‘Howe claimed that he would provide his society with scientific evidence to confirm a new, romantic theory of human nature’.⁴⁶⁷

Laura’s education is set out by Freeberg thus:

⁴⁶¹ Dickens, *American Notes*, p. 47.

⁴⁶² Dickens, *American Notes*, p. 47.

⁴⁶³ Dickens, *American Notes*, p. 44.

⁴⁶⁴ Dickens, *American Notes*, p. 44-5.

⁴⁶⁵ Dickens, *American Notes*, p. 46.

⁴⁶⁶ Ernest Freeberg, “‘More Important than a Rabble of Common Kings’: Dr Howe’s Education of Laura Bridgman”, *History of Education Quarterly*, 34:3 (Autumn 1994), 305-327 (p. 307).

⁴⁶⁷ Freeberg, “‘More Important than a Rabble of Common Kings’”, p. 307.

Howe began Laura's education by introducing her to common house-hold objects, on which he had attached paper labels printed with raised letters. After she had come to associate these patterns with their corresponding objects, he asked her to arrange loose letters herself, forming the words to match each object. Laura proved to be an eager student, but for weeks she arranged her letters in mechanical fashion.⁴⁶⁸

It took a few years of patient and relentless educational effort to increase Laura's language skills. Howe used a Finger Alphabet to communicate with Laura, and was conscious to create a curriculum as opposed to creating a means of communicating specifically with her. Indeed, he wanted to create an 'intellectual resurrection'.⁴⁶⁹

The problem for individuals disabled in this way, particularly children, was their apparent lack of ability to maintain emotional attachments with their deafness. This is seen in Laura's case, as the expressive affection towards her parental unit shifted from her biological parents to her 'adoptive' parent, Dr. Howe. Of Laura, Dickens states: 'It has been ascertained beyond the possibility of doubt, that she cannot see a ray of light, cannot hear the least sound, and never exercises her sense of smell, if she has any. Thus her mind dwells in darkness and stillness, as profound as that of a closed tomb at midnight',⁴⁷⁰ suggesting that she is unable to express, or indeed feel, a sense of emotional attachment and this is highlighted most intensely in her lack of innate connection with her biological mother. This gothic language of a life akin to premature burial in a 'closed tomb at midnight' provides a sense of shocking mystery, as Laura becomes the 'other', unable to act in the way expected of her. Dickens states:

⁴⁶⁸ Freeberg, "More Important than a Rabble of Common Kings", p. 309.

⁴⁶⁹ Freeberg, "More Important than a Rabble of Common Kings", p. 309.

⁴⁷⁰ Dickens, *American Notes*, p. 49.

The mother stood some time, gazing with overflowing eyes upon her unfortunate child, who, all unconscious of her presence, was playing about the room. Presently Laura ran against her, and at once began feeling her hands, examining her dress, and trying to find out if she knew her; but not succeeding in this, she turned away as from a stranger, and the poor woman could not conceal the pang she felt, at finding that her beloved child did not know her... The distress of the mother was now painful to behold; for, although she had feared that she should not be recognised, the painful reality of being treated with cold indifference by a darling child, was too much for a woman's nature to bear.⁴⁷¹

Klages recognises that Laura was 'unable to perceive, and hence respond to, the signs that would normally arouse her sympathies, [and] could not develop the capacities which would enable her to forget her self in the active service of others'.⁴⁷² Laura is defying the convention of the angelic and dutiful daughter, a convention that has seemingly been stripped away with her sight and hearing, and redirected through her teaching at the school. The school is Laura's only option, as specific treatment was required in cases such as this; those disabled in this way were unable to have the same experiences as their able-bodied counterparts. Indeed, as the *Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal* reported of her case in 1841, a year before Dickens' account in *American Notes*: 'although she received all the aid that a kind mother could bestow, she soon began to give proof of the importance of language in the development of her character... and by the time Laura was seven years old, the moral effects of her privation began to appear'.⁴⁷³

The literary realm was much like an institution working to understand and educate these individuals. As Carpenter suggests: 'Everywhere in Victorian literature in which the experience of deafness is described, one finds this sense of

⁴⁷¹ Dickens, *American Notes*, p. 51.

⁴⁷² Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, p. 137.

⁴⁷³ Anon, 'Case of Laura Bridgman', p. 116.

the newness of the subject, and also of the urgency of informing the hearing reader, as well as the deaf”.⁴⁷⁴ Such works of fiction were becoming more frequent as the century progressed, and in this respect, can be seen as similarly culturally significant to a scientific recording or medical hypothesis.

Institutions for the deaf, as well as the literature considering the condition, had detrimental aspects as well as positive ones. Deaf institutions offered their inhabitants a chance of social acceptance (ironically through separating them from society) and bestowed upon them such education that would simply be unavailable through any other means. The institution often became the family, as is the case with Laura and her lifelong devotion to the school following the death of Howe. At the age of twenty-two, Laura returned to her family home, the farm in New Hampshire and struggled with these surroundings. Howe’s children, Maud and Florence Howe Hall stated in 1904: ‘The withdrawal of the personal attentions with which at the Perkins Institution she had been so lovingly surrounded, the loss of the thousand communications which had fed her mental being daily came near costing the sensitive creature her life,’⁴⁷⁵ adding that ‘no one could give time to the formidably tiresome task of manual alphabet conversation with Laura’.⁴⁷⁶ This isolation was both symptomatic of the isolation felt socially by such afflicted individuals, and a recommencement of the isolation of Laura herself, who, as a child, would often spend hours by herself while her family members were occupied with manual tasks around the farm. Such affiliation with the afflicted’s institution was in fact encouraged, as one such

⁴⁷⁴ Carpenter, *Health, Medicine, and Society*, p. 121.

⁴⁷⁵ Maud Howe & Florence Howe Hall, ‘Laura Bridgman’, in *Essays, Comments and Reviews*, ed. by William James (Massachusetts: Harvard Press, 1987), pp. 545-549 (p. 547).

⁴⁷⁶ Howe & Hall, ‘Laura Bridgman’, p. 547.

proprietor states: 'Be thankful for the directors in particular, who were like fathers of yours.'⁴⁷⁷ Many authors were using adoption and the chosen family as a plot device frequently in their works citing disability and heredity, often to counteract scientific debates that gave little attention to the importance of nurture. The positive consequence of this treatment, and of the 'adoption' of Laura by Howe astounded the medical field. Both Howe and the medical press were concerned with Laura's moral condition as much as her physical health, and this application of her management from a purely scientific and medical position to a more social one, concerned with character, as outlined in the *Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal*:

In her intellectual character, it is pleasing to observe an insatiable thirst for knowledge, and a quick perception of the relations of things. In her moral character, it is beautiful to behold her continual gladness- her keen enjoyment of existence- her expansive love- her unhesitating confidence- her sympathy with suffering- her conscientiousness, truthfulness, and hopefulness.⁴⁷⁸

This emphasis on Laura's 'moral character' suggests that the medical implications of disability upon society were of particular importance, highlighting the notion that biological ties held little importance in the development and improvement of these individuals for society.

The idea of the chosen family in terms of the creation of the familiar, seen in the colonial community of Martha's Vineyard, is mimicked in Laura herself, suggesting an innate need for the recognisable and familiar in many disabled people. Dickens, in his case study of Laura in *American Notes* observes her

⁴⁷⁷ Christopher Krentz, *Writing Deafness: The Hearing Line in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, (North Carolina: North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 150.

⁴⁷⁸ Anon, 'Case of Laura Bridgman', p. 118.

interacting with her doll: ‘A doll she had dressed up lay near upon the ground. I took it up, and saw that she had made a green fillet such as she wore herself, and fastened it about its mimic eyes’,⁴⁷⁹ which gives Laura a creation of her own. She is choosing to make her creation disabled, just as she is, and this is her example of reproduction. Depicting the innate desire for the familiar, this simple action encapsulates the anxieties around hereditary transmission. James Watson, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, observes: ‘under the conditions of modern civilisation there is a tendency for the race to degenerate... under modern conditions the weak are protected as far as possible’,⁴⁸⁰ which, with the increase in charity and social contribution to such causes, was certainly the case. Indeed, ‘natural selection has nearly ceased to operate.’⁴⁸¹ With this, however, came an increase in the exploration and focus upon what this meant for the race, and theories of heredity assumed a new significance.

‘Charles Dickens was fascinated by heredity’,⁴⁸² and in his 1865 narrative, ‘Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions’, he shows a direct correlation with his case study of Laura. Confronting the challenging issues of child abuse, parenting and heredity, he presents his protagonist as a ‘Cheap Jack’ who lost one daughter to violence at the hands of the child’s mother in a plot that makes some reparation for his failure to protect his daughter. Doctor Marigold saves his adoptive expert care and attention. Viewing this as his chance at redemption, he wholly occupies himself with the role of parenting and in turn, is ultimately repaid with a family, albeit non-biological, of his own. The influence of the Perkins Institution for the

⁴⁷⁹ Dickens, *American Notes*, p. 44.

⁴⁸⁰ James Watson, *Heredity: A Study*, (T.C & E.C Jack: London, No Date), pp. 87-88.

⁴⁸¹ Watson, *Heredity*, p. 88.

⁴⁸² Goldie Morgentaler, *Dickens and Heredity: When Like Begets Like* (London: Macmillan, 2000) p. ix.

Blind and Laura Bridgman are present in the young daughter being deaf-mute. Dickens uses his narrative to engage in the debates concerning hereditary transmission, familial modes and the place for blind and deaf individuals within society. He focuses on the ability to connect on an emotional level, with Doctor Marigold's adoptive daughter Sophy becoming a romanticised version of 'a figure who can model for others what is ideally associated with a disabled person who is also a child - a girl - and of pleasing appearance'.⁴⁸³ However, this becomes problematic when teamed with the character's gender, as the only other depiction of women in the text is Sophy's biological mother, who is far from idealised. As the narrative shows depictions of women that fall short of their maternal duties, both the biological and adopted Sophy stand out against this backdrop, allowing their angelic qualities and innocence to become fully emphasised while highlighting the vulnerability of both children and the disabled. The afflicted child extends her femininity through her disability, as it preserves her in a permanent state of virtuous admiration. As Holmes suggests:

deafness, otherwise unneeded in the story, works as both a metaphor and realist plot trope to code, conceal, and soothe the story's more authentic zones of pathos, which are first catalysed by a disturbed mother's chronic beating of her non-disabled daughter.⁴⁸⁴

Lynn Cain observes: 'Most often [in Dickens' work], the focus is on the dynamic between father and child... [with] idealized daughters supplying a seemingly endless stream of unconditional love'.⁴⁸⁵ To include a biological mother that beats her daughter, and is ultimately responsible for her child's death is a great deviation from the accounts of passionate maternal protection that a

⁴⁸³ Klages, *Woeful Afflictions*, p. 138.

⁴⁸⁴ Holmes, "'Happy and Yet Pitying Tears'", p. 54.

⁴⁸⁵ Lynn Cain, *Dickens, Family, Authorship: Psychoanalytical Perspectives on Kinship* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) p. 1.

mother is often depicted as having for her child. Yet, there is no overbearing sense of disgust in Doctor Marigold as he recalls the relationship between wife and daughter; merely a sense of shock and deep reverence for his young daughter. He states: ‘Little Sophy was such a brave child!’⁴⁸⁶ and continues, admitting his own failings at protecting her: ‘She grew to be quite devoted to her poor father, though he could do so little to help her’.⁴⁸⁷ There are distinct parallels between Doctor Marigold’s wife, seemingly undeserving of self-definition, and the protagonist’s sister Mrs Joe in *Great Expectations*, which was originally published in weekly parts between late-1860 and mid-1861. Mrs Joe is also deemed undeserving of self-definition, and given that *Great Expectations* was published four years prior to ‘Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions’, it would appear that Dickens uses his shorter narrative to further chastise such women. Dickens appears sympathetic to the idea that ‘Victorian motherhood was an ideological minefield’,⁴⁸⁸ and so includes a sense of redemption; as Doctor Marigold’s wife, deeply affected by her actions, shows unremitting guilt, to the point where she ‘ran away like a wild thing, and the next day she was found in the river’.⁴⁸⁹ This has parallels with Mrs Joe’s untimely death in *Great Expectations*, and the overly pious Joanna Grice in Collins’ *Hide and Seek*, who had a life-long existence of static purity. Joanna, along with Mrs Joe and Doctor Marigold’s wife, is punished for her lack of maternal instinct, a characteristic that is celebrated in the other female characters of the novel. The placement of women in the maternal sphere is often rife with

⁴⁸⁶ Charles Dickens, ‘Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions’, in *Christmas Stories* (Edinburgh: T. Nelson & Sons, 1925) pp. 373-401 (p. 381).

⁴⁸⁷ Dickens, ‘Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions’, p. 381.

⁴⁸⁸ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 209.

⁴⁸⁹ Dickens, ‘Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions’, p. 381.

unease, as some women were deemed unable to perform maternal duties through their physical disabilities and others deemed psychologically unable to do so. This challenges the widely held idea that motherhood in a physical sense, as well as the ability to be a maternal figure, was a natural aspect of femininity and womanhood. The bodily portion of maternity suggests this innate nurture, as the female's body feeds that of the infant.

However, both ideal and monstrous examples of women are created by their society, and as Joan Manheimer suggests:

These women [Terrible Mothers] reveal terrible failings in their world... The sense of tremendous power, tramped down or twisted, which is implicit in the most destructive of their activities complicates our response to them beyond a simple moral judgement. Even the murder of the child can articulate a protest against an intolerable existence.⁴⁹⁰

In Dickens' well documented dealings with women, often not the virtuous 'Angel in the House', there is a sense of social reaction, as if it was acknowledged that such women were often unable to exist within such a sphere. Urania Cottage, a home for fallen women, was set up in 1846 to cater originally for the salvation and recovery of prostitutes and other homeless women, a project first put forward by Angela Burdett-Coutts. Coutts was practical in her convictions, much like Dickens, and he joined her in this venture. The mission statement for the endeavour alludes to women 'who, without such help, are lost for ever', imploring them to: 'have the strength to leave behind you, all old habits', and to 'resolve to set a watch upon yourself, and to be firm in your control over yourself'.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁹⁰ Joan Manheimer, 'Murderous Mothers: The Problem of Parenting in the Victorian Novel', *Toward a New Feminism for the Eighties*, 5:3 (Autumn 1979), 530-546 (p. 545).

⁴⁹¹ Hartley, *Charles Dickens*, p. 255.

Dickens was acutely aware of the failings that often occurred in the pursuit of the perfect feminine model, as well as recognising its often impractical and idealistic nature. Indeed, as Holly Furneaux suggests: ‘the flexibility of Dickens’ vision of what constitutes family is clear in his imagining of the ‘fallen’ women residents of Urania Cottage’,⁴⁹² as these residents were described in familial terms, and provided Dickens with templates for many of his literary characters. Indeed, as Karen Chase and Michael Levenson argue: ‘An eagerness to display home virtue fed an appetite for domestic failure’.⁴⁹³

For Doctor Marigold, the deaf and dumb child he adopts as his own ‘was just the same age that my own daughter had been’,⁴⁹⁴ and the child is herein known as ‘Sophy’, the same name as Doctor Marigold’s deceased daughter. There is very little evidence of the child’s previous identity prior to her being saved by Dickens’ protagonist, only that her mother had died and she belonged to her step-father, and Doctor Marigold bestows upon her the same reception and emotion that he held for his biological daughter. He states: ‘I at once give her the name of Sophy to put her ever towards me in the attitude of my own daughter’.⁴⁹⁵ Such identity issues are present within Wilkie Collins’ *Hide and Seek*, although Dickens does not include Collins’ trademark sensationalist element of the child’s past coming to light; instead he concentrates on the familial tie of the non-biological.

⁴⁹² Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 24.

⁴⁹³ Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 12.

⁴⁹⁴ Dickens, ‘Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions’, p. 387.

⁴⁹⁵ Dickens, ‘Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions’, p. 387.

Dickens adheres to what Catherine Robson observes as an ‘investment in the figure of the little girl’.⁴⁹⁶ There are often angelic, pure and untainted, emphasising their circumstance and evoking deeper levels of emotion including sentimentality, unease, pity, and even anger at the treatment of the child being portrayed. Robson suggests that:

The idealization and idolization of little girls, long acknowledged figures of the Victorian era, cannot be thought of without reference to a pervasive fantasy of male development in which men become masculine only after an initial feminine stage. In this light, little girls represent not just the true essence of childhood, but an adult male’s best opportunity of reconnecting with his own lost self.⁴⁹⁷

Dickens showcases his knowledge of Deaf Institutions in his decision to allow Sophy a more rounded and established education, and his protagonist rationalises his decision in a way that goes against much critical opinion of the establishments. Instead of choosing to remove Sophy from mainstream society by sending her away to the Institution, he cites his reasons for his resolution as creating a superior existence for Sophy in the long-term, recognising the specialised care and attention such establishments may provide. Dickens is campaigning for independence for disabled individuals, and, although embodied through a more direct parent-child relationship, ‘the parent-child metaphor was fitting, for with hearing guidance, the deaf community gradually matured and became more autonomous’.⁴⁹⁸ The moral virtuousness of Dickens’ protagonist allows for this realisation, and he states:

I began to feel not satisfied that I had done my whole duty by her, and to consider that she ought to have better teaching than I could give her. It drew a many tears on both sides when I commenced explaining my views

⁴⁹⁶ Catherine Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 3.

⁴⁹⁷ Robson, *Men in Wonderland*, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁸ Krentz, *Writing Deafness*, p. 151.

to her; but what's right is right, and you can't neither by tears or laughter do away with its character.⁴⁹⁹

The 'Cheap Jack' spares no expense for his adoptive daughter's education at the Deaf and Dumb Establishment in London. The establishment itself was described in an 1844 article in this way:

The Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, in the Kent Road, is a handsome brick building. This institution was first formed in 1792; but the present edifice was not completed till 1806. Here these unfortunates are not only taught to speak, read, write and cipher, but also various mechanic arts, to enable them to obtain subsistence when discharged from the establishment.⁵⁰⁰

The schools, of which The Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb was an example:

did more than simply impose the values of one group on another. They had a complex effect, promoting new awareness and exchange on all sides. Along with enabling deaf people to become educated, Christian, and literate in English, the schools allowed them to develop their own language and communal identity, and made them more visible and likely to be heard in society.⁵⁰¹

Adhering to this interpretation of the institutions, Doctor Marigold wishes Sophy to be free from any affliction, be it due to class or, as is prevalent in this case, disability. Establishments such as this were part of the 'meaning of deafness [that] changed during the course of the nineteenth century for educators of the deaf, and the kind of education deaf people received [that] changed along with it',⁵⁰² and points to the argument that 'Deafness is a cultural construction as well as a physical phenomenon'.⁵⁰³

⁴⁹⁹ Dickens, 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', p. 388-389,

⁵⁰⁰ Anonymous, *Mogg's New Picture of London and Visitor's Guide to the Sights*, 1844 (<http://www.victorianlondon.org/charities/deafanddumbasylum.htm>)

⁵⁰¹ Krentz, *Writing Deafness*, p. 47.

⁵⁰² Baynton, "'A Silent Exile on This Earth'", p. 33.

⁵⁰³ Baynton, "'A Silent Exile on This Earth'", p. 33.

Doctor Marigold's 'Prescriptions', the book the Doctor creates for Sophy in her absence, is suggestive of his wish to write a history for them both; of creating an irreversible bond, or at least fortifying their existing bond materialistically which magnifies the mutual appreciation of the relationship to both parties. The use of medical language suggests that Doctor Marigold views their absence as a remedial necessity, as well as citing the healing connotations of social acceptance and understanding. As Dickens' protagonist suggests of Sophy: 'She belonged to me and I belonged to her',⁵⁰⁴ and the creation of the 'prescriptions' ensures that the child's place remains, even in physical absence. It is interesting to note Sue Lonoff's observation that: 'Dickens seems to have been incapable of giving his children understanding and sympathy once they were out of the nursery',⁵⁰⁵ here, which translates to this narrative, as the death of the biological child at such a young age, and the absence of the adoptive Sophy during her pivotal years suggest that Dickens wishes to avoid challenging and utilising such formative years. Instead, he merely refers to them, emphasising their importance to familial modes.

The time must come when Dickens confronts the sexual and romantic implications of an adult Sophy, and Doctor Marigold states:

I had left something out of my calculations. Now, what had I left out? To help you guess I'll say, a figure... I'll say it's another sort of figure altogether. There. Why then, says you, it's a mortal figure. By which means you got yourself penned into a corner, and you can't help guessing a *immortal* figure. That's about it.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁴ Dickens, 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', p. 390.

⁵⁰⁵ Sue Lonoff, 'Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35:2, Sep. 1980, pp. 150-170, p. 159.

⁵⁰⁶ Dickens, 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', p. 395.

This calculation is also indicative of a future for Sophy that had previously escaped Doctor Marigold's vision of her future; a 'strange young man',⁵⁰⁷ also deaf and dumb and the chance to participate in a marital union. Doctor Marigold's allusion to the 'sparrow with my bow and arrow',⁵⁰⁸ conjures up images of cupid, and also of sexual reproduction. As Dickens' protagonist has previously admitted, 'I like to be the owner of things',⁵⁰⁹ and at the thought of his sparrow spreading her wings and flying from the nest, fortified with the condition of the strange young man who has seemingly stolen Sophy's heart, Doctor Marigold's protective fatherly instinct has been roused more fiercely at his adoptive daughter's blossoming femininity. He states: 'If she favours him, where am I? and where is all that I planned for?',⁵¹⁰ even admitting his perceived selfishness; 'that she might *not* favour him',⁵¹¹ and it takes a display of outright selflessness from his adoptive daughter to awaken the same in him once more. Dickens states of Sophy: 'Yes, she loved him dearly, deeply; but she could never disappoint her beloved, good, noble, generous, and I-don't-know-what-all father... though it was to break her heart'.⁵¹² With this, the unique bond between father and child, perhaps only available through the lack of a biological tie, wins out once more; by removing this often fraught biological aspect, each member of this makeshift, chosen family is able to exert a more open and considerate view of the other. Indeed, Doctor Marigold admits his own sacrifice: 'I brought her young husband in, and I put her hand in his, and my only farther words to both of them were these: "Doctor

⁵⁰⁷ Dickens, 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', p. 396.

⁵⁰⁸ Dickens, 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', p. 395.

⁵⁰⁹ Dickens, 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', p. 397.

⁵¹⁰ Dickens, 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', p. 397.

⁵¹¹ Dickens, 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', p. 397.

⁵¹² Dickens, 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', p. 398.

Marigold's last Prescription. To be taken for life." After which I bolted'.⁵¹³

Dickens incorporates a play on words here with the use of 'farther', as Doctor Marigold is to be a father figure to this young man also. A study into deaf marriages in America by Edward Allen Fay towards the end of the century argued that the union of two deaf individuals could not possibly be automatically seen to produce such afflicted offspring. Fay viewed such marriages as unions that greatly increased marital harmony, and as John V. Van Cleve paraphrases:

Fay concluded that deaf adults who married other deaf people were happier, on the average, than those who married hearing persons, due to 'the strong bond of mutual fellowship growing out of their similar condition, the ease and freedom with which they communicate with each other, and the identity of their social relations and sympathies outside the domestic circle',⁵¹⁴

which certainly is the case for Sophy and her chosen husband.

As he was 'fascinated by heredity', to the point where Goldie Morgentaler observes: 'There is not a single one of his novels which does not carry some statement, no matter how playful or incidental',⁵¹⁵ Dickens employs his fascination and knowledge to allude to the future potential of this field and the implications such findings would have upon his society at large, using his fiction as a vehicle for such visions. Catherine Waters argues that: 'His novels record a historical shift in the notions of family away from an earlier stress upon the importance of lineage and blood towards a new ideal of domesticity assumed to be the natural form of the family',⁵¹⁶ a theme particularly evident within 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions'. Frederick B. Churchill, in his discussion of the mid-

⁵¹³ Dickens, 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', p. 399.

⁵¹⁴ John Vickery Van Cleve & Barry A. Crouch, *A Place of their Own: Creating the Deaf Community in America*, (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 1989), p. 152.

⁵¹⁵ Morgentaler, *Dickens and Heredity*, p. ix.

century traditions in biology, argues that the difference between the two traditions is only that 'The physicians, instead of performing hybridization experiments, studied family lineages',⁵¹⁷ which suggests that for nineteenth-century society, lineage held as much importance as other contributing factors to a person's genetic and biological makeup. Heredity meant constancy and permanence, ideals that were felt to be lacking in an ever-changing society such as Victorian England, and the idea that individuals could control this aspect of race and society must have been particularly appealing. In 1850, Robert Knox stated that: 'heredity descent, is everything; it stamps the man',⁵¹⁸ and his racism provides much discomfort in a current light. Yet, his work emphasises the focus placed upon the issue of heredity at this relatively early point, prior to Darwin's and Galton's findings permeating society. The connection between biological families, even in the 1850s, secured the future of the race.

Sophy repays her chosen father in full with her own daughter, which again highlights the mutual appreciation between the non-biological father and daughter. Doctor Marigold states: 'I had started at a real sound, and the sound was on the steps of the cart. It was the light hurried tread of a child, coming clambering up. That tread of a child had once been so familiar to me, that for half a moment I believed I was a-going to see a little ghost',⁵¹⁹ which points to the biological Sophy being ever-present. In this way, Dickens suggests that his protagonist had lost a child he was seemingly undeserving of, or at least incapable

⁵¹⁶ Catherine Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 27.

⁵¹⁷ Frederick Churchill, 'From Heredity Theory to Vererbung: The Transmission problem, 1850-1915'. *Isis* 78, 1987, pp. 337-365, p. 339.

⁵¹⁸ Robert Knox, *The Races of Man: A Fragment* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1850) p. 13.

⁵¹⁹ Dickens, 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', p. 400.

of parenting; and yet following a term of redemption through his treatment and understanding of his adoptive daughter, he has been rewarded with a healthy granddaughter, albeit non-biological, that closely resembles his own lost daughter.

Immediately, this child throws off all fear and expectation of a child born of biologically blighted parents, and her first word to Doctor Marigold: ‘Grandfather!’⁵²⁰ is a simple yet highly significant aspect of the narrative that highlights Dickens’ own attitude towards the contextual climate surrounding disability, heredity and family. ‘She can speak!’⁵²¹ Doctor Marigold exclaims, and the child’s utterance of ‘Yes, dear grandfather. And I am to ask you whether there was ever anyone that I remind you of’⁵²² shows a level of intelligence and perception in the child, despite the perceived expectations of her biological parentage and the transmission of the condition present in both parents. The reunion between the long-parted Doctor Marigold and Sophy is a heady mix of relief, familial emotion and mutual support, pointing to and idealizing a need for wider acceptance of the issues surrounding disability, heredity and alternative familial modes. The tie between this particular alternative family is cemented through Doctor Marigold’s: ‘I saw the pretty child a-talking, pleased and quick and eager and busy, to her mother, in the signs that I had first taught her mother’,⁵²³ in the sense that his teaching has been passed down through the generations as an alternative to a biological and genetic influence. The ‘happy and yet pitying tears [that] fell rolling down [Doctor Marigold’s] face’⁵²⁴ portray Dickens’ protagonist foreseeing trouble in the little family. It is likely that he

⁵²⁰ Dickens, ‘Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions’, p. 401.

⁵²¹ Dickens, ‘Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions’, p. 401.

⁵²² Dickens, ‘Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions’, p. 401.

⁵²³ Dickens, ‘Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions’, p. 401.

⁵²⁴ Dickens, ‘Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions’, p. 401.

questions his place in their biological unit, and yet it also points to the contextual climate in terms of the levels of comprehension that were attached to such afflictions.

Holmes recognises that:

The degree to which nineteenth century people created lives that were not only satisfactory but even highly rewarding - without widespread awareness of the minority status of 'afflicted' people, and often without communities of other people with disabilities to support them in this awareness - makes them important artefacts of the historical strength of people with physical impairments,⁵²⁵

and Sophy is Dickens' portrayal of one such artefact. However, the long-standing segregation which existed between the disabled and the able-bodied is ever present, taking this further in her rebuking Victorian society for a purely sentimental reading of 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions.' She states:

In accepting deafness as the site of this story's pathos, and 'happy yet pitying tears' as the appropriate affect, readers and audiences ironically modelled themselves after the earlier Doctor Marigold, who could do nothing but weep; their weeping may have indeed precluded their taking any action in response to any of the compelling social issues the story rouses - child abuse, the likelihood of disabled children being abused, or the need for deaf education and social access... in accepting deafness as the objective correlative for happy and yet pitying tears, readers and audiences lost out on one of the story's best offerings, a happy and not pitying narrative of deafness and the family.⁵²⁶

In terms of social inclusion, however, the disabled community were finding themselves facing the largest threat to their functioning position in society. Women in particular were seen as the most important factor in the carrying on, and the betterment of, the race and, blighted by disability, they could not hope to join their able-bodied peers in this quest. While previously, affliction was seen as

⁵²⁵ Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 189.

⁵²⁶ Holmes, "'Happy and Yet Pitying Tears'", p. 64.

being as transmitted through a number of avenues, including frights of the mother during her pregnancy, heredity transmission and the betterment of the race were slowly becoming one and the same. Although not fully realised or understood, scientists were becoming aware of some level of correlation between disabled parents and their disabled offspring, and Holmes suggests:

Not only physical traits such as hair colour and height but also diseases such as syphilis and addictions such as alcoholism were considered truly hereditary in the nineteenth century; an ill parent would produce a vitiated sperm or ovum and finally offspring with defective constitutions, if not the parent's particular illness.⁵²⁷

While it was generally accepted that outside conditions were as important to an offspring's state, disability, as opposed to illness, posed a problem. She continues: 'As a Victorian cultural sign, then, disability pointed not only backward, to parental transgression and defect, but even more urgently forward, to future generations. Victorian medical and social science reshaped the biblical category of 'unclean' into the social-scientific category of the dysgenic or degenerative'.⁵²⁸

What many Victorian authors sought to portray, however, was the humanity and emotional capacity of disabled characters. As Laura Cartron suggests:

The concern with genealogy was replaced with a pre-occupation with heredity. In marriages, it became necessary to consider not only the rules of social homogeneity and the wedding patrimony; but the prospects and risks of heredity. The question was no longer whether the parents had transmitted a disease or disability to their children but, more importantly, whether these children in turn would transmit the disease or disability to their offspring.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁷ Holmes, "'Bolder with her Lover in the Dark'", p. 80.

⁵²⁸ Holmes, "'Bolder with her Lover in the Dark'", p. 80.

⁵²⁹ Laura Cartron, 'Degeneration and "Alienism" in Early Nineteenth-century France' in *Heredity Produced*, ed. by Muller-Wille and Rheinberger (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007) pp. 155-174 (p.168).

Although heredity placed itself firmly in the concern with genealogy, adoption provided an alternative mode of familial existence. The deviation from the previous norms of the past generations placed increasing focus on both of these schools of thought.

Dickens' interest in heredity and its connotations, both medically and socially, undoubtedly plays a large part in his deaf narratives, in varying degrees. 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions' is a predominantly moralistic tale, and Dickens' use of children to depict disability allows him to give particular emphasis to the innocence and vulnerability of such conditions. Through this didactic prominence, Dickens draws attention not only to the physical condition itself, but also to the effects it has upon the victim's experience of life within the social realm. As Davis suggests: 'They [the deaf] see their state as being defined not medically but socially and politically'.⁵³⁰

'Silence is Safe': Wilkie Collins and the Disabled Family

Hide and Seek follows the rescue and subsequent nurture of a circus child who becomes deaf and dumb following an accident at the hands of the villainous circus-master. The text is filled with Collins' attempts to: 'displace the biological family as a natural given and demand a further debunking of the fantasy that the Victorian era enshrined a narrowly conceived of family',⁵³¹ as Furneaux notes. Collins strives to deviate his disability and adoption narrative from contextual debates surrounding the importance of heredity. However, he includes sensational aspects of Madonna's childhood and family lineage to avoid disregarding it

⁵³⁰ Davis, 'Deafness and Insight', p. 882.

⁵³¹ Furneaux, *Queer Dickens*, p. 22.

completely. Instead, *Hide and Seek* is an example of a narrative that refuses to 'automatically instate marriage or biology as the central determinant',⁵³² to a successful familial model.

This deviation from previously held ideals is included in the introduction of Collins' protagonist, Mr Valentine Blyth. He is immediately looked to for explanation and, to a certain extent, moral guidance within the narrative, as he deviates so spectacularly from the ideal held of his own social circle, but without any particularly negative results: 'They [any relation of his] were all respectable commercial people who lived exclusively within their own circle'.⁵³³ In daring to exhibit his own artistic desire, he had left his father 'seriously disappointed',⁵³⁴ and so is an appropriate character in standing against the previously held traditions that Collins has formerly described in the narrative. Mr Blyth does not readily fit into any one facet of society and as a result of this, the events of the novel have been bestowed upon him in order to emphasise the deviation from the contextual norm. In using able-bodied members of society in the same vein as disabled individuals, Collins can recognise the often insular view that some Victorians held of such disability.

Mr Blyth's demeanour and artistic desires are troubling to his family, and 'No one could ever trace them back to any recognisable source',⁵³⁵ which highlights the preoccupation with tracing characteristics back to a recognised source, and emphasises Collins' concern with ideas of hereditary transmission within this novel. Although prior to Galton's idea of nature and nurture, this is an

⁵³² Furneaux, *Queer Dickens*, p. 27.

⁵³³ Wilkie Collins, *Hide and Seek* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 31.

⁵³⁴ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 31.

⁵³⁵ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 31.

example of Victorian ideas on the passing down of characteristics through generations. The adoption plot here presents a counter to an emphasis on biological inheritance, and provides Collins with a platform from which to explore the effects of nurture within the realm of the chosen family. Madonna invites paternal concern in each character that possesses the ability to nurture it, and Mr Blyth's reaction to the story of 'Madonna's Misfortune' is significant because it is twofold. His protective instinct has been awakened and is motivated by his desire to satisfy his disabled wife, over whom he is protective also, as he reaches a conclusion that he believes to be beneficial to all parties. He states:

I *must* take the child home with me... I'll make her as happy as the day is long. I've no child of my own: I'll watch her, and love her, and teach her all my life. I've got a poor, suffering, bed-ridden wife at home, who would think such a companion as little Mary the greatest blessing God could send her,⁵³⁶

highlighting not only what a parental act can do for a child, but also the influence a child can have upon its protectors.

Disability allows the depiction of the child to remain vulnerable and exposed and widens the scope for non-biological parent figures to realise their parental ability. Mr Blyth is overcome by intuition, later perceived to be an innate parental instinct, to attend the showcase of the 'mysterious foundling',⁵³⁷ but as Collins insists:

Most assuredly, Valentine's resolution did not proceed from that dastard insensibility to all decent respect for human suffering which could feast itself on the spectacle of calamity for hire, in the person of a deaf and dumb child of ten years old. His motives for going to the circus were stained by no trace of such degradation as this.⁵³⁸

Indeed, there is an unspeakable connection between the foundling child

⁵³⁶ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 101.

⁵³⁷ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 56.

⁵³⁸ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 58.

and Mr Blyth, and each appears to see in the other what seems to be missing in their prospective lives. As Mr Blyth admits, 'I only wish from the bottom of my heart that I could do something to make her happy'.⁵³⁹ Collins leaves his audience in no doubt as to Mr Blyth's immediate involvement with the child, as he states: 'If ever a man was in love with a child at first sight, he was that man. As an artist, as a gentleman of refined tastes, and as the softest-hearted of male human beings, in all capacities, he was enslaved by that little innocent, sad face'.⁵⁴⁰ Collins is insistent in his portrayal of a male figure's desire to parent, and *Hide and Seek* understands the 'false logic of the biological mechanism'.⁵⁴¹ Furneaux suggests that: 'domestic units bonded through neither blood nor marriage are so numerous... they outweigh depictions of what we have come to describe as the 'nuclear' family of married parents and offspring',⁵⁴² which was previously seen in Dickens' texts amongst others, and this is implicative of the pseudo parent-child relationship seen in the generally accepted relationship between Dickens and Collins. The relationship between Dickens and Collins has long been held as one of the most significant in literary history, and yet it is often steeped in mystery. It is commonly suggested that Dickens provided a fatherly role-model for Collins, who in turn acted as Dickens' protégé.

It may be at first suspected that the foundling child, who knew little else of life, was at peace with her lot and her role within the circus, and yet Collins is dissatisfied with this explanation. The circus is responsible for her disability and yet continues to capitalise upon it, much like the Victorian society that provides

⁵³⁹ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 63.

⁵⁴⁰ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 64.

⁵⁴¹ Furneaux, *Queer Dickens*, p. 30.

⁵⁴² Furneaux, *Queer Dickens*, p. 22.

the backdrop for the narrative. Collins deafens the child against the roar and applause of the crowd to highlight the futility of the situation and remarks that ‘there was terror in her eyes’,⁵⁴³ serving to emphasise her complete vulnerability and lack of means which invokes Mr Blyth to become her protector and saviour. Madonna’s surroundings are deemed a world away from the comfortable and respectable studio belonging to Mr Blyth that showcases works of Art, and he feels that Madonna is a work of art herself, seeing her to be at home amongst the picturesque depictions of both landscape and people that adorn his studio. Her innocence and charm are emphasised through her disability, as if it makes her pure and untainted, a vision of childhood virtue ‘dressed in a white silk frock’.⁵⁴⁴ The link between childhood and disability cannot be overlooked, as the early terms of childhood are characterized as ‘a time of ‘softness’, and ‘vulnerability’, requiring ‘gentleness’ and ‘protection’,⁵⁴⁵ and these are characteristics that Madonna, and other such disabled individuals, will be unable to escape as their childhood fades and gives way to adulthood. She is, in essence, trapped forever in childhood by her disability. The introduction of the disabled child, Madonna, whose ‘own English name of Mary had been, from the first, altered and Italianized by Mr and Mrs Blyth’,⁵⁴⁶ portrays an ideal in Victorian femininity which is somewhat difficult to digest. Suggestive of a bitter commentary upon this ideal, she is prevented from permeating society in any real way by her disability of deafness. She is angelic and virginal, simply dressed and ‘deliciously soft,

⁵⁴³ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 67.

⁵⁴⁴ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 74.

⁵⁴⁵ Robson, *Men in Wonderland*, p. 4.

⁵⁴⁶ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 51.

bright, fresh, pure and delicate'.⁵⁴⁷ Her infirmity is translated, as Elizabeth Gitter suggests, into 'the speechlessness of the angelic type of mid-century heroine',⁵⁴⁸ which is seen also in the figure of Sophy in Dickens' 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions'.

In this way, Madonna is able to enrich the lives of those around her in an almost religious way, and has a special connection to the downtrodden and afflicted. In her relationship with Mr Blyth's wife, Lavinia, who had 'suffered long and severely... from a bad spinal malady',⁵⁴⁹ Madonna creates an asylum for them both. Collins states of Lavinia's impact upon Madonna:

The perfect gentleness with which the painter's wife bore her incurable malady, seemed to impress the child in a very remarkable manner from the first. The sight of that frail, wasted life, which they had told her, by writing, had been shut up so long in the same room, and had been condemned to the same weary inaction for so many years past, struck at once to Mary's heart and filled her with one of those new and mysterious sensations which mark epochs in the growth of a child's moral nature.⁵⁵⁰

The relationship between Mary and Mrs Blyth differs greatly from any other within the novel, and they act as equals. Bound by their respective disabilities, they are able to connect on a level deemed inaccessible to other characters without affliction, creating a bond of such strength that it allows them both to rely on each other and go some way in overcoming the outcomes of their disabilities. Collins states:

her [Madonna's] love for her new mother, which testified itself thus strongly and sincerely, was returned by that mother with equal fervour... Brighter hopes, better health, calmer resignation, and purer peace seemed

⁵⁴⁷ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 48.

⁵⁴⁸ Flint, 'Disability and Difference', p. 155.

⁵⁴⁹ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 35.

⁵⁵⁰ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 117.

to follow the child's footsteps and be always inherent in her very presence, as she moved to and fro in the sick room.⁵⁵¹

Together they are a stronger unit and Collins uses their relationship and bond to recognise the constructive aspects of grouping disabled people together. Mrs Blyth is able to act as Madonna's ears and communicate her speech, and Madonna becomes a vessel for Mrs Blyth's imagined mobility. Madonna 'had succeeded in endowing Mrs Blyth with a new life',⁵⁵² as she does also to the able-bodied Mr Blyth, who 'skipped out of the room as if he had been fifteen instead of fifty'.⁵⁵³

Collins reacts against the supposed obscurity of such disabled individuals and depicts Madonna's disability to be an assistance to her, as her limited use of her senses allows her to rely on her remaining senses of touch and sight in a deeper manner. With this heightened ability of remaining senses, Collins can suggest to his audience that disabled individuals, in this instance deaf people, held a particularly important place within society. This place need not be removed along with their respective senses and indeed, the afflicted were often able to judge people in a more complex manner with the removal of superficial, exterior character facades. In much the same way as a person with a sixth sense, Madonna 'liked or disliked people heartily; estimating them apparently from considerations entirely irrespective of age, or sex, or personal appearance'.⁵⁵⁴ Here Collins challenges, as Flint has argued: 'This assumption that the appearance of bodies revealed the truth about the person who inhabited it',⁵⁵⁵ by disenabling characters steeped in pretence and charade through speech to fool Madonna. Instead of

⁵⁵¹ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 118.

⁵⁵² Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 118.

⁵⁵³ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 145.

⁵⁵⁴ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 118.

⁵⁵⁵ Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, p. 17.

condemning her to a life of isolation and self-pity, Collins is able to bestow upon Madonna a great gift, in that her disability had served to 'sharpen her faculties of observation and her powers of analysis to such a remarkable degree'.⁵⁵⁶ In this way, he is able to ensure that Madonna is more than a plot device; she is not simply a character representative of disabled Victorians, but a character in her own right. Her involvement with the Blyths breathes new life into Madonna, as well as the Blyths themselves, and her trust in humanity, especially in men, is restored. Blighted by the circus master Mr Jubber, who was responsible for the accident through which she lost her hearing, Madonna is able to be compensated through Mr Blyth. As Collins states:

All the riches and honours which this world can afford, would not have added to her existence a tithe of that pleasure which Valentine easily conferred on her, by teaching her to draw; he might almost be said to have given her a new sense in exchange for the senses that she had lost.⁵⁵⁷

Madonna's treacherous past, however, can never be erased, as: 'Whenever, by any accident, she happened to be left in the dark, she was overcome by the most violent terror',⁵⁵⁸ as she admits to losing 'all my senses together in the dark'.⁵⁵⁹ This serves to reiterate her vulnerability and child-like state, as her maturity often overshadows her youth, innocence, and even her disability. As Holmes suggests of this pivotal scene: 'The transformation of a logical aversion to darkness into a scene in which a young woman is not only [trounced by fright]... but also watched over by an ominous stranger melodramatises disability by putting the helpless and unfriended in danger'.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁶ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 120.

⁵⁵⁷ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 120.

⁵⁵⁸ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 120.

⁵⁵⁹ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 121.

⁵⁶⁰ Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 82.

This melodrama in Collins' development of the sensation plot is taken further in Mr Blyth's call for secrecy in dealings with Madonna's past and wish to eradicate any clues to her heredity, which leads to him controlling the whereabouts of the two items that must be kept for her; a pocket handkerchief and hair bracelet, which he had strict instructions to keep safe. He locks the items away, and 'always kept [the key] attached to his own watch chain',⁵⁶¹ which is symbolic as it suggests he is conscious of a time when Madonna's controversial start in life may be discovered and her biological relatives may lay claim to her. Mrs Peckover's musing of: 'In my time, sir, it used always to take two parties to play a game of Hide and Seek. Who in the world is seeking after little Mary, I should like to know?',⁵⁶² underlines Mr Blyth's concerns and the sensational element of the novel dictates that the game of 'Hide and Seek' must come to an end eventually.

The paternal care that Mr Blyth bestows upon his protégé Zack is emphasised by the biological relationship between Zack and Madonna. Collins hints at a romantic attachment between the two young characters and yet this is short-lived as they learn they are half-brother and sister to each other. *Hide and Seek* is of particular importance for disabled literature, which was fast becoming a genre of literature in itself. Holmes states:

In his earliest representation of female disability, *Hide and Seek*'s deaf heroine Madonna Blyth, Collins collapses two conventional and usually mutually exclusive roles for disabled women in melodrama by constructing Madonna as an object of both pity and desire. More significantly, Collins constructs Madonna as not only a sexual object, but also a desiring subject.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶¹ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 122.

⁵⁶² Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 123.

⁵⁶³ Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 76.

She is adored, even likened to a timeless piece of art, which adds to her angelic representation. At the same time, though, this implication of chaste saintliness is challenged by Madonna's desire for Zack and the connotations of a deaf female character indulging in romantic adventures and even a suggestion of her continuing her hereditary line, which is crucial in considering the impact of such disability on the domestic sphere. Collins uses this:

revelation of Madonna's and Zack's consanguinity [as] not so much an act of protoeugenics, a keeping apart of the healthily-bodied and the disabled (a feature of certain fictions that appeared after Galton had proposed his theory of eugenics later in the century), as it is a means of emphasising the continuum between the fully able and the impaired,⁵⁶⁴

and they are both deemed to be afflicted with some sort of defect, physical or otherwise. Flint goes on to suggest that, 'In Collins' fiction, the 'abnormal' and the 'normal' are not made clearly distinct from one another',⁵⁶⁵ which enables Collins to portray the emotional and intellectual disability of his other characters, and indeed the society who were the first to receive his narrative. It also allows him to adhere to his sensationalist reputation and explore the sexual implications of an individual disabled in such a way. Her outward beauty is not marred, much the same as Sophy within Dickens' 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', and yet both texts deal with implied sexual feeling and even, in the case of 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', applied sexuality. In doing so, both authors are not only championing the normality of the deaf and dumb, but adding another dimension to their representations of them; depicting them as emotional, expressive individuals capable of feeling the same human stirrings felt by the able-bodied. These characters are capable of marital union and even reproduction, and their liberal

⁵⁶⁴ Flint, 'Disability and Difference', p. 159.

⁵⁶⁵ Flint, 'Disability and Difference', p. 165.

representation within such literature encouraged society to accept afflicted individuals within the social order, in the same way as they are acknowledged in the idealised field of the novel.

The use of art is particularly important within Collins' narrative, as it allows Madonna's strongest sense to be utilised to its full potential. It suggests a level of culture and civilisation that was in danger of being overlooked with the introduction of industrialisation and economic concern, providing a more constant, secure and comfortable backdrop than that of the ever expanding industrialisation of Victorian Britain. As an artist, Blyth is able to create his own landscape and Collins uses his art to communicate the progression of the novel and comment upon the events within it. Mr Blyth's exhibition is loaded with implication as to the state of events, and the state of adoption itself. His paintings, labelled 'The Golden Age' and 'Columbus in sight of the New World' suggest the impending end to his own Golden Age in his possession of Madonna and the quiet familial life with his wife and adopted daughter that is clothed in secrecy, and the New World that is in sight, threatening to bring an end to his own world as he knows it, which directly correlates to the themes and issues present in Victorian society. Collins chooses to include discussion of the juxtaposition of scientific and artistic worlds also, as if suggesting that the world he has painted and created for himself will come under close scrutiny when placed within society.

Madonna has become a work of art herself, as Mr Blyth first saw her to be. The 'other people, to whom the deaf and dumb girl was a much more interesting

sight than ‘Columbus’ or the ‘Golden Age’, crowded around her’,⁵⁶⁶ suggesting that society is intrinsically drawn to novelty, calamity, and, in this vein, disability. Collins is arguing that it makes little difference whether this takes place in the respectable studio of a middle class painter or against the rather more vulgar backdrop of a circus; the prey will still stand ‘shy and confused under the eager eyes that were all gazing on her’,⁵⁶⁷ vulnerable to those who do not possess the instinct to protect. The attraction of Madonna and other characters like her, is ‘clearly the combination of the child’s beauty and her affliction’,⁵⁶⁸ which is arguably what ensures that disabled fiction featuring female characters held such power both as fictional narrative and contextual social discourse.

As society went about creating its own solutions to the perceived predicament of disability existing in the core of the public order, authors were generating a different level of asylum. In creating deaf protagonists, Martineau, Dickens and Collins are able to rebel outwardly against the social order and literally deafen against the disturbance the ears of the most vulnerable. Each text works to demonstrate ‘how disability has been drawn and redrawn as an emotionally resonant social identity’.⁵⁶⁹

In teaming their disability plots with adoption plots, the increasing magnitude of heredity is overlooked in favour of focus upon the human condition and transferring the cutting edge of medical and scientific discourse into domesticity. It is, in one sense, a clever plot device that allows authors to sidestep delving into the murky waters of what was understood to ‘be’ heredity. However,

⁵⁶⁶ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 249.

⁵⁶⁷ Collins, *Hide and Seek*, p. 250.

⁵⁶⁸ Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 78.

⁵⁶⁹ Holmes, “‘Happy and Yet Pitying Tears’”, p. 54.

the use of adoption does not eradicate such issues entirely, as the protagonists in both Dickens' 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions' and Collins' *Hide and Seek*, are both presented as sexual beings, with Dickens taking this even further in the marital union and maternity of Sophy with a similarly-abled man.

Each aspect of Martineau's 'The Deaf Playmate's Story', Dickens' 'Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions', and Wilkie Collins' *Hide and Seek* works to remove the expectation of isolation attached to the deaf, as they are often able to connect themselves wholly within the social normality from which they were once excluded. To base this within the self-made familial realm not only emphasises the suggestion of a family unit being representative of a wider community, but also allows the audience to see how and where deaf people could fit into this social order. Heredity, in its differing levels of inclusion between the texts, is shown to be overcome by a more moralistic and inclusive understanding of kin, with scientific findings often being displaced. In entwining each plot device, Martineau, Dickens and Collins are each able to create a makeshift society in their texts that sees disability, heredity and the chosen family co-exist, thus exemplifying that this can indeed be achieved.

Many authors were using adoption and the chosen family as a plot device frequently in their works citing disability and heredity, often to counteract the scientific debates that repeatedly played down the importance of nurture in a non-physical sense. Although this literary technique is seen in many examples of disability plots, its placement amongst deaf narratives is particularly complex. Are the deaf better off locked away with a makeshift family that attends to their social as well as educational needs? Integrated into society by mimicking the able-

bodied regardless of their particular requirements? Or do they require a period of incubation, as a caterpillar in a cocoon before emerging a butterfly? As we have seen, familial bonds can be forged amongst the non-biological; even encouraged in terms of counteracting heredity debates.

Certainly, deafness was seen as more of a social handicap than many other afflictions. The debates that surrounded their hereditary beginnings, social treatment and lifelong management testify to a society that was simply incredibly unsure of this portion of society, to the point of fearing the deaf. Seemingly failing to meet the idealised criteria of Victorian Britain, the deaf were assigned whole charitable institutions that ultimately served to heighten the sense of difference and otherness they faced, and those concerned with the plight of deafness faced a long and formidable journey in their seeking of a steadfast model of appropriate treatment of the deaf. However, literature strewn with portrayals of deaf characters put forward a more sentimentalised, domestic depiction of the plight of the deaf, serving to humanise the affliction and emphasise the humanity and normalisation of the deaf.

Do No Evil: Physical Abnormality in Nineteenth-century Literature

‘You and I, and our fellow-sufferers,
see differently,
whether or not we see further’⁵⁷⁰

Throughout the mid-century, the understanding of heredity was incomplete. As early as 1840, as recorded in *The Lancet*, we see that: ‘All these hypotheses [the hereditary transmission of ‘monsters’], the product of the darkness of the middle ages, have long since ceased to have any influence’.⁵⁷¹ Of these ‘whimsical and absurd hypotheses’, the article states the following of the perceived monsters:

Monsters being, in their belief, entirely out of the pale of the general plan and ordinary rules of nature... Hence those extraordinary births which were attributed to the adulterous connexion between men and beasts, from which deplorable and absurd prejudices some paid the price of their liberty, and others their lives. Hence also the supposed intervention of the Deity, by the singular consent of the gross superstition of the people, most of the ecclesiastics, and even the philosophers of various sects.⁵⁷²

Although understanding of heredity descent had progressed from previous centuries, then, it is not until after the decades of the mid-century that we see a trend for what we understand today to be accuracy in discussion of heredity. Indeed, as stated in 1887: ‘Recorded instances of hereditary influence are

⁵⁷⁰ Harriet Martineau, *Life in the Sick-room*, ed. by Maria H. Frawley (Ontario: Broadview, 2003), pp. 41, 112, 143.

⁵⁷¹ John North, ‘A Lecture on Monstrosities’ *The Lancet*, 1 (1840), 913-919 (p. 918).

⁵⁷² North, ‘A Lecture on Monstrosities’, p. 918.

numerous, but yet are insufficient to enable us to form a sufficiently accurate opinion on the subject'.⁵⁷³

Physical abnormality, as an outward embodiment of wrongness and the questioning of the foundations of this deviance from social acceptance posed more of a social phenomenon than a medical problem. Between 1840 and 1870, very little medical literature is available that focuses upon the subject of the hereditary nature of physical disabilities. For example, the earliest allusions to heredity in the *British Medical Journal* occur from 1861, and these allusions are hazy at best. It is not until the decade of 1870 that detailed consideration is given to this topic. From the 1870s to the end of the nineteenth century then, this area of study expands and flourishes, and yet its agenda does not appear to have its roots solely in medical progression. Whereas congenital influence had always been noted, heredity could be used here to represent its social application. Heredity increases the importance of congenital dynamics in order to give influence to the arguments surrounding the perceived importance of creating superior generations, a practical philosophy that would be titled 'eugenics.'

With the exception of a case study featuring a young woman who suffered a fatal blood clot in her brain, a circumstance directly echoing the same cause of death in her sister 3 years earlier,⁵⁷⁴ almost all allusions to heredity in the *British Medical Journal* from 1870 to 1880 are primarily concerned with the social implications of the transmission of 'undesirable' traits. Although these concerns may not be directly voiced, its application to a social framework is evident, through such statements upon existing material: 'The chapter on the "Causes of

⁵⁷³ Fletcher Beach, 'A Lecture on the Influence of Hereditary Predisposition in the Production of Imbecility', *BMJ*, 1 (1887), 1147-1148 (p. 1147).

⁵⁷⁴ Anonymous, 'The Influence of Heredity on Disease', *BMJ*, 2 (1877), p. 601.

Idiocy” is an important one. Dr Ireland mentions those usually given, viz., heredity, consanguine marriages, scrofula, drunkenness in the parents, and fright or other painful emotion to the mother during pregnancy’,⁵⁷⁵ and ‘There are a few diseases in which *heredity* is a more important etiological condition’.⁵⁷⁶ The latter article goes on to list epilepsy, insanity and hysteria amongst these conditions, suggesting that during this period, heredity was used to explain away undesirable behaviour and place a higher importance on moral stature, as behaviours such as this were more heavily associated with the poor, the destitute and the generally objectionable.

Although mid-century medical material did not yet relate physical abnormality to heredity, conditions such as spinal irritation, paralysis and scoliosis were being discussed during this period. Generally, it was accepted in the early-mid century that the causes of these afflictions were ambiguous, with an 1843 article in the *British Medical Journal*, entitled ‘Observations on Spinal Irritation’, stating: ‘With regard to the morbid appearances presented in this disease there is but little known, as patients so rarely die of it, and, therefore, the opportunity of obtaining a post-mortem inspection but seldom occurs’.⁵⁷⁷ It seems expected, then, that medical opinion concerning this particular theme of disability would depend on outside influences, such as accidental blows to the body, and even in 1868, F. LE Gros Clark recognises:

how powerful an influence emotional shock or physical concussion may exercise on organic vitality; and I think it not inconsistent with acknowledged facts, to affirm that protracted functional disturbance, or

⁵⁷⁵ Anonymous, ‘On Idiocy and Imbecility’, *Br Med J*, 2 (1877), 480-481 (pp. 480-481).

⁵⁷⁶ W. R. Gowers, ‘The Gulstonian Lectures on Epilepsy’, *BMJ*, 1 (1880), 353-357 (p. 353).

⁵⁷⁷ Beverly R. Morris, ‘Observations on Spinal Irritation’, *Prov Med Surg J*, 1 (1843), 487-490 (p. 487).

even fatal disease, may be the consequence of a rude shock,
simultaneously, to the nerve-centres of the emotions, of organic and
animal life,⁵⁷⁸

with the reference to emotional shock alluding to more antiquated understandings
of physical difference.

This ambiguity as to the basis of spinal malady, which afflicts the
protagonists of Craik's work discussed in this chapter, is continued in medical
discussions of paralysis, an affliction affecting both *The Earl of A Noble Life* and
Prince Dolor of *The Little Lame Prince*. Clark continues to propose: 'spinal
concussion may be immediate and well-marked; or the indications of spinal
mischief may not supervene until after the lapse of some time',⁵⁷⁹ suggesting that
this particular form of disability cannot be contained by any universal diagnosis.
An 1870 entry in the same journal two years later, entitled 'On Paralysis in
Relation to Treatment' hypothesises that: 'The medical treatment of a disease
whose precise conditions are still imperfectly ascertained must necessarily partake
of the same imperfect character'.⁵⁸⁰

Of scoliosis, a curvature of the spine affecting its sufferers to different
degrees, there was a great deal more understanding, and given the limited detail
given by Craik concerning Olive's malady, we can assume Olive suffered from a
mild form of this. By 1863, some level of knowledge was accepted upon the
causes of scoliosis: 'The causes of scoliosis are various. They are debility, general
or local, rachitis, thoracic disease, obliquity of the pelvis, etc. Debility is, without
doubt, the most common cause of this affection',⁵⁸¹ and yet the individuality of

⁵⁷⁸ F. LE Gros Clark, 'Lectures on the Principles of Surgical Diagnosis', *BMJ*, 2 (1868) 353-358 (p. 355).

⁵⁷⁹ Clark, 'Lectures', p. 355.

⁵⁸⁰ D. DE Berdt Hovell, 'On Paralysis in Relation to Treatment', *BMJ*, 2 (1870) 627-629 (p. 627).

⁵⁸¹ Bernard E. Brodhurst, 'Lectures on Orthopaedic Surgery', *BMJ*, 2 (1863), 655-658 (p. 655).

the affliction is not disregarded, as the same article continues to suggest: ‘the particular form of distortion depends on the habits of the individual’.⁵⁸² This individual responsibility makes fertile ground for discussion on how medical affliction and social placement are related, as the personal circumstances of the sufferer are reflected physically.

The lack of medical understanding of physical debility meant that authors such as Craik and Martineau saw a responsibility in informing their readers about the experience of disability, if not the causes. In 1844, social commentator Harriet Martineau released her musings *Life in the Sick-room*, as a way of communicating to the able-bodied the plight of the invalid. Written during a phase in Martineau’s life, when she was bed-ridden, the text is particularly important when considering attitudes towards the afflicted. Figuratively, disabled individuals were expected to view life from a sick-bed as opposed to actively participating in it, and physical abnormality affected society’s ability to admit the afflicted into the public sphere. Martineau recognises the limitations imposed upon the disabled, and encourages fellow-sufferers to embrace the often liberating role of social observer. Although referring to the infirm on several occasions throughout the text as ‘sick prisoners’,⁵⁸³ the narrative actually portrays the physically disabled in a predominantly positive light. As a self-identified invalid, Martineau is able to provide us with an insight into how identity was shaped by the sick-room; how cultural and social roles revolved around the sense of difference present in the sick-room and through physical deformity. The aspect of the ‘other’, a common theme in disability studies, is particularly present within Dinah Craik’s narratives

⁵⁸² Brodhurst, ‘Lectures’, p. 655.

⁵⁸³ Martineau, *Life in the Sick-room*, p. 41.

discussed in this chapter also, as the disability itself is representative of a portion of society that was unable in some way to exist within the socially acceptable spheres mapped out for it. Both Martineau and Craik are demonstrating that, contrary to popular belief, the physically disabled are indeed able to participate in the public sphere from both their literal and figurative sick-rooms.

Martineau takes on roles of both the nurse and the invalid in *Life in the Sick-room*, offering ‘new insight’⁵⁸⁴ into what the sick-room was actually like in nineteenth-century Britain. She accepts sympathy, and yet is adamant that she should not invite it, as she refers to: ‘Your sympathy - confidently reckoned on, though never asked’.⁵⁸⁵ Valerie Sanders argues that Martineau ‘began to see her work[s] as... ways of improving society’s moral condition’,⁵⁸⁶ and this is certainly true of *Life in the Sick-room*. Martineau presented herself as a teacher, a matriarch, to those who were differently-abled, enabling them to view their disabilities in an altogether different light. Sanders suggests that Martineau’s ‘displacement from a conventional role propelled her into a more stimulating life’.⁵⁸⁷ Given the marital and maternal roles that society placed on women, and the stoicism expected of their men, disability might become an escape, and indeed a passport, into a more invigorating existence that was not under the constant scrutiny of propriety in nineteenth-century Britain. In this way, disabled individuals were free to pursue other interests and ways of life; for example, Olive’s interest in art in Craik’s *Olive*, as they were not necessarily expected to marry and produce children in the same way as their able-bodied counterparts.

⁵⁸⁴ Martineau, *Life in the Sick-room*, p. 41.

⁵⁸⁵ Martineau, *Life in the Sick-room*, p. 39.

⁵⁸⁶ Valerie Sanders, *Reason Over Passion: Harriet Martineau and the Victorian Novel* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986) p. 2.

⁵⁸⁷ Sanders, *Reason Over Passion*, p. 152.

Whether biologically unable to have children or prevented from doing so by social ostracism and censure, such individuals were given access to a different existence that was not ruled by social expectation.

However, Martineau's *Life in the Sick-room* strives for complete honesty, and so is far from a wholly positive representation of affliction. Martineau 'regarded herself very much as a pioneer in the recording of certain human experiences',⁵⁸⁸ and as such, is not afraid to lament the human condition of disability. She states, 'The mind, meantime, though clear and active, has been so far affected by the bodily state to lose all its gaiety, and, by disuse, almost to forget its sense of enjoyment',⁵⁸⁹ continuing to suggest:

Why, one of the most painful trials of long sickness and seclusion is, that all old pains, all past moral sufferings, are renewed and magnified; that in sleepless nights, and especially on waking in the morning, every old sin and folly, and even the most trifling error, rises up anew, however long ago repented and forgiven, and, in the activity of ordinary life, forgotten.⁵⁹⁰

In her attempt to educate, 'as forcefully, and even as imaginatively as possible',⁵⁹¹

Martineau allows herself to delve into each corner of the experience of the disabled,

accepting the deeply negative connotations as well as consistently returning to a

more positive outlook, through such language as 'Yes, even the quick bursts of

sunshine are still mine'.⁵⁹² Her influence within her impressive social circle as well

as society at large (indeed, Martineau was 'very well educated by early nineteenth-

⁵⁸⁸ Sanders, *Reason Over Passion*, p. 166.

⁵⁸⁹ Martineau, *Life in the Sick-room*, p. 44.

⁵⁹⁰ Martineau, *Life in the Sick-room*, p. 54.

⁵⁹¹ Sanders, *Reason Over Passion*, p. 1.

⁵⁹² Martineau, *Life in the Sick-room*, p. 54.

century standards for women⁵⁹³) should not be understated. Her instruction on conduct and attitude on numerous subjects was both widely and well received, enabling her to interrogate economic and political attitudes, and even indirectly helping work such as fellow woman writer Craik's narratives participate on a greater level through the acceptance of a woman's contribution to wider debates she helped to create. Sanders suggests that: 'No woman writer, since Fanny Burney published *Evelina*, had been the focus of so much wonder and admiration, or such a rapid success'.⁵⁹⁴ Martineau stood out in the field of nineteenth-century writing for her participation in the public sphere, and her constant challenging of gender norms. Specifically, her writing an autobiography, which 'most Victorian women saw... as a forbidden area',⁵⁹⁵ caused controversy. Published posthumously in 1877, her *Autobiography* 'revised the genre',⁵⁹⁶ and highlighted the miseries of her own childhood, as she descended into affliction and deafness. Sanders recognises the negative female role models available to Martineau, and states:

Harriet Martineau insert[s] childhood memories into what are ostensibly domestic manuals. Under cover of advising parents how to deal humanely with nervous children, [she] reveal[s] the traumas of [her] own upbringing, especially the fears which [she was] afraid to confess and the reveries [she] indulged.⁵⁹⁷

Of course, Martineau was not without her critics. Sanders recognises that Martineau's 'rise to literary stardom attracted many gibes at her prudishness,

⁵⁹³ Sanders, *Reason Over Passion*, p. 7.

⁵⁹⁴ Sanders, *Reason Over Passion*, p. 150.

⁵⁹⁵ Valerie Sanders, *The Private Lives of Victorian Women: Autobiography in Nineteenth-century England* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 5.

⁵⁹⁶ Sanders, *The Private Lives of Victorian Women*, p. 130.

⁵⁹⁷ Sanders, *The Private Lives of Victorian Women*, p. 15.

angularity and unfeminine looks',⁵⁹⁸ largely brought about by her unconventional life choices. She offered a window into another life, accepting and understanding the 'limitations of women's lives, and the options available to those who wanted to make something more of their existence than idling and chatting through the day'.⁵⁹⁹ Martineau is suggesting that the disabled were often placed in a particularly positive position concerning this lifting of limitation and expectation, their lives often open to experiencing life without the confines of social structure and what was traditionally expected of women, particularly. In this way, 'The sick-room becomes the scene of intense convictions',⁶⁰⁰ where the invalid is free from both bodily and societal expectations to pursue other lines of daily activity. Through both this text and her presence within these debates, Martineau presents herself as a leading character in the challenging of both the roles of women and the afflicted. Even the most insignificant of physical abnormalities, as we see in Dinah Craik's protagonist and the namesake of her second novel, *Olive*, directly comments upon the social inequality and discrimination faced by both women and the disabled. Although Martineau omits, undoubtedly on purpose, ideals of maternity and heredity in *Life in the Sick-room*, she lays the groundwork for writers such as Craik to explore the connotations of such standards against a more liberated and enlightened backdrop. We can assume Craik was familiar with Martineau, at least on a literary level, as Craik's husband's uncle, publisher George Lillie Craik, was closely linked with Martineau and her work and

⁵⁹⁸ Valerie Sanders, *Eve's Renegades: Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Novelists* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), p. 24.

⁵⁹⁹ Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 45.

⁶⁰⁰ Martineau, *Life in the Sick-room*, p. 42.

Martineau mentions him on several occasions in her letters, dating from 1844 to 1863.

A 'slight curve at the upper part of the spine': *Olive* and the Portrayal of Female Physical Disability

Craik's *Olive*, as we have seen in Chapter One as part of a discussion of blindness, depicts a physically disabled young girl as she overcomes the prejudice that is attached to her disability. Olive's immediate rejection at the hands of her mother relates to an increasing interest in ideas of heredity and genetic propriety, and yet her ability to overcome this and even become a mother herself, albeit non-biologically, goes some way to soothe a troubled audience increasingly aware of debates on such issues, and their impact upon the domestic sphere and domestic ideology itself. Olive's mother is at first desperately concerned with the social standing of the family, and as such, rejects her physically flawed daughter. This increases Olive's triumph over the prejudice she faces from the outset, even at the hands of her mother against the backdrop of the idealised hearth. Olive is, in some ways, a representative character as opposed to a leading personality, and in this way, Craik is able to invite her audience to witness the positive outcome of the prejudice surrounding disabled women and their ability to fulfil traditional social roles. Although a primarily domestic and conservative author,⁶⁰¹ through this narrative Craik is able to make her contribution to wider debates and can even be seen as radical when the date of publication is taken into account, as she is a woman writing predominantly for women upon a subject that deviates from the

⁶⁰¹ See Sally Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983) and Monica Correa Fryckstedt, 'Defining the Domestic Genre: English Women Novelists of the 1850s', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 6:1 (1987), 9-25 for more on Craik's reputation as a novelist. Craik was particularly successful, appearing in numerous periodicals and catalogues. For example, in 1875 alone, she had 17 pieces listed in Charles Edward Mudie's catalogue.

prevailing domestic ideology. As J. Russell Perkin suggests: 'During the early part of her career, Mulock was treated seriously: she was reviewed in major periodicals and compared to other women writers, like Charlotte Bronte'.⁶⁰² However, as Perkin goes on to recognise, 'she became progressively more identified with the category of 'lady novelist', and she lost the audience who would have ensured her a more distinguished status'.⁶⁰³

Craik's protagonist is first introduced as 'then entitled neither a heroine, nor even Olive Rothesay'.⁶⁰⁴ Craik is quick to recognise her protagonist's vulnerability in infancy, presenting the child as just like 'you and I, reader'.⁶⁰⁵ in order to emphasise the universal and defenceless state of babyhood. However, due to the 'slight curve at the upper part of the spine, between the shoulder and neck',⁶⁰⁶ medical influence disregards this sense of inclusion through the conclusion of the Doctor, as he states: 'the child is deformed - born so - and will remain so for life'.⁶⁰⁷ In fact, it is this disability that Showalter recognises as 'represent[ing] her very womanhood',⁶⁰⁸ suggesting that women in the nineteenth century were in some way innately immobilized by their sex as a result of the predominantly patriarchal society they inhabited. This utterance of the Doctor awakens the family's nurse Elspie's innate fervour for familial lines and heredity, as she states: 'How daur ye speak so of one o' the Rothesays- frae whase blud

⁶⁰² J. Russell Perkin, 'Narrative Voice and the "Feminine" Novelist: Dinah Craik and George Eliot', *Victorian Review*, 18:1 (1992), 24-42 (p. 26).

⁶⁰³ Perkin, 'Narrative Voice and the "Feminine" Novelist', p. 27.

⁶⁰⁴ Craik, *Olive*, p. 3.

⁶⁰⁵ Craik, *Olive*, p. 3.

⁶⁰⁶ Craik, *Olive*, p. 6.

⁶⁰⁷ Craik, *Olive*, p. 6.

⁶⁰⁸ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (London: Virago Press, 1978), p. 28.

cam the tallest men an' the bonniest leddies'.⁶⁰⁹ A deeper consideration and expectation has immediately been placed upon this child, the daughter of a family held in high regard, whose mother, Sybilla Rothesay, is celebrated in her community. It is decided that Sybilla should be protected from the news of her disabled and deformed child, and the Doctor is quick to confirm this strategy: 'She does not, and she must not, know of this... what a blessing that I told her the child was a fine and perfect child'.⁶¹⁰ The doctor's interference removes the chance for a bond between parent and child that does not concern itself with the physical condition of either party. As Olive's mother is initially kept in ignorance of her infant's condition, the 'womanly compassion',⁶¹¹ expected as a response is awakened in Elspie only, and yet it is fuelled by pity, and pity alone. Indeed, Sally Mitchell suggests that this level of sympathy for Olive will follow her throughout the novel, stating 'relationships will be maintained only by pity on the other side'.⁶¹²

Elspie muses: 'Puir hapless bairne, ye little ken what ye're coming to! Lack o' kinsman's love, and lack o' silver, and lack o' beauty. God forgive me- but why did He send ye into the woeful woefu' world at a'?'⁶¹³ As she voices these sentiments, Elspie becomes representative of wider attitudes concerning the value of disabled lives. Craik recognises this, and shows her intervention in the continuing debates of the century, stating that this very question 'has perplexed theologians, philosophers, and metaphysicians, in every age, and will perplex them all to the end of time'.⁶¹⁴ Here Craik is offering her disability narrative, 'A

⁶⁰⁹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 6.

⁶¹⁰ Craik, *Olive*, p. 6.

⁶¹¹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 7.

⁶¹² Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 29.

⁶¹³ Craik, *Olive*, p. 7.

Young Girl's triumph over prejudice', as a confirmed example of how disability, in any capacity, can often be symptomatic of an entire malfunction in the existence of both the afflicted individual and of society's ability to accept them, offering an alternative view in Olive's case with her ability to overcome prejudice and intolerance of the 'other'. The prejudice that is triumphed over applies to both physical and biological abnormality, and to the broader treatment of women in the nineteenth century as socially disabled. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues: 'Disability too is a pervasive, often unarticulated, ideology informing our cultural notions of self and other',⁶¹⁵ and the segregation overcome by Olive relates to both her physical affliction and the place of her womanhood in society.

Craik does not cripple the child completely, instead portraying the condition as 'nothing disgusting, or painful... but still an imperfection, causing an involuntary 'Poor little creature, what a pity'.⁶¹⁶ Olive does not fit into the playful and beautiful world of her mother's creation, and Olive's banishment from this realm only adds to her imperfection, as Sybilla 'disadvantage[s] people by devaluing bodies that do not conform to cultural standards'.⁶¹⁷ Such is Olive's father, Angus' own reaction to the child: 'Putting his hand before his eyes, as if to shut out the sight.'⁶¹⁸ This undoubtedly affects Olive in her infancy, as Craik states: 'Young as she was, it went deep to her child's soul'.⁶¹⁹ Craik still refuses to reproach each parent, instead emphasising the often fraught relationship between the young couple and the implications the child has upon congenital

⁶¹⁴ Craik, *Olive*, p. 7.

⁶¹⁵ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, 'Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory', *NWSA Journal*, 14:3 (Autumn 2002), 1-32 (p. 4).

⁶¹⁶ Craik, *Olive*, p. 23.

⁶¹⁷ Thomson, 'Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory', p. 5.

⁶¹⁸ Craik, *Olive*, p. 23.

⁶¹⁹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 23.

considerations and the continuation of the family line; an issue that Craik's readership would acknowledge. As the shock of the child's physical abnormality subsides, and her father calls for her a second time, Olive is finally accepted into the family. Prior to this event, Olive's sole carer had been Elspie, of whom Craik states: 'Her passionate and selfish love could not have borne that any tie on earth, not even that of father or mother, should stand between her and the child of her adoption'.⁶²⁰ As biological influence and genetic consideration is absent in the bond between Olive and her nurse, there is fertile ground for genuine familial affection and concern, unable to exist between the biological family at this point in the narrative. Craik is fighting against an assumed connection between blood-tie and affection as 'natural' instinct, even suggesting that a biological tie based on expectation can be an impediment to the bonding between the parent and child. Disability narratives such as this offer an interrogation of the supposed 'naturalness' of parental affections, and through *Olive*, Craik is able to explore the way in which offspring can physically fail to live up to the expectations of their birth parents. Sanders recognises 'the home arena as a severe moral testing ground',⁶²¹ and such familial moral fibre is, at this stage of the narrative, found severely lacking.

Juxtaposed with the idea of adoption is Craik's acknowledgment of familiarity in the features between father and child. No such link has been made between mother and child, and yet with her father's acceptance of her, Olive's biological familial tie to the Rothesays is established. Olive's infantile actions

⁶²⁰ Craik, *Olive*, p. 27.

⁶²¹ Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 19.

‘melted him visibly’,⁶²² and so begins a new chance for the child. Craik states:
‘The return of the husband and father produced a considerable change in the little family at Stirling’,⁶²³ as Sybilla ‘had now to learn how to be a duteous wife, always ready at the beck and call of her husband, and attentive to his innumerable wants’.⁶²⁴

However, contextual and critical accounts depict another side to the story.

Elizabeth Langland argues:

The prevailing ideology regarded the house as a haven, a private domain opposed to the public sphere of commerce, but the house and its mistress in fact served as a significant adjunct to a man’s business endeavours. Whereas husbands earned the money, wives had the important task of administering the funds to acquire or maintain social and political status.⁶²⁵

This account of the significant, practical, and managerial role of middle-class women differs greatly from the naïve and inexperienced child-wife figure depicted in much nineteenth-century literature. In reality, Victorian women faced a constant struggle in managing the various threads of their existence in a manner which was perceived to be acceptable, and it is here that Sybilla fails. Olive’s ‘new dawn’ of acceptance appears at the detriment of Sybilla’s perceived idea of perfection and idealisation, and as she recognizes her new reality, her dreams of the ideal home and family, ‘once painted there in such glittering colours, began to fade’.⁶²⁶ This fading is used to depict both Sybilla’s new life as wife and mother, and also her later descent into blindness. Sanders recognises the alteration in Sybilla’s existence, pointing out that ‘traditional roles of... women have been

⁶²² Craik, *Olive*, p. 29.

⁶²³ Craik, *Olive*, p. 30.

⁶²⁴ Craik, *Olive*, p. 30.

⁶²⁵ Elizabeth Langland, ‘Nobody’s Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel’, *PMLA*, 107:2 (March 1992), 290-304 (p 291).

⁶²⁶ Craik, *Olive*, p. 30.

challenged, revised, and occasionally adjusted by law'.⁶²⁷ Sybilla is socially expected to be the epitome of the 'angel in the house', a role for which she is completely unprepared.

The doomed and unproductive second pregnancy of Sybilla heightens Olive's importance, both at this point and throughout the narrative, and ensures that Elspie's role as nurse, career, and primary maternal figure to Olive is cemented as Craik states: 'Continually did she [Elspie] impress on the child the glories of her birthplace, so that Olive in after-life, while remembering her childhood's scenes as a pleasant land on earth, came to regard her [Elspie's] native Scotland as a sort of dream paradise'.⁶²⁸ Craik is quick to dispel any aspects of ill-treatment in childhood, and yet of Olive she states: 'She never knew that fullness of love',⁶²⁹ which is perhaps an equally detrimental reality. This is supported by Mitchell, who states that this is due to Olive's appearance, in that 'from what we know of his wife, Captain Rothesay values the female sex only for its beauty'.⁶³⁰

Due perhaps to Elspie's encouragement and in spite of the 'uninformed love',⁶³¹ bestowed upon her by her parents, Olive's inquisitive mind carries an innate poetic intelligence. As Craik explains: 'Of Shelley's glorious lyric ode she knew nothing; and yet she never heard the skylark's song without thinking it a spirit of the air... she had never heard of Art, yet there was something in the gorgeous sunset that made her bosom thrill'.⁶³²

⁶²⁷ Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 10.

⁶²⁸ Craik, *Olive*, p. 37.

⁶²⁹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 37.

⁶³⁰ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 29.

⁶³¹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 37.

⁶³² Craik, *Olive*, p. 38.

Elspie's influence upon Olive becomes strikingly apparent as Elspie descends into illness, and Olive 'tended to her nurse lovingly and cheerfully, made herself quite a little woman for her sake'.⁶³³ Olive's bravery sets her apart from the childish fancies of her mother in facing the reality of a life without Elspie. Craik states:

The terrors in the haunted wood... were not greater or more real than little Olive's, when she stood at the entrance of the long gallery... None but those who remember the fearful imaginings of their childhood, can comprehend the self-martyrdom, the heroic daring, which dwelt in that little trembling bosom, as Olive groped across the gloom.⁶³⁴

This represents the unknown path she must take as her faithful nurse and adoptive maternal figure dies. Craik states: 'Young as she was, Olive knew that her sorrow must be borne alone for none could understand it',⁶³⁵ which serves to highlight the seclusion faced by the disabled in such a society as this. Olive's disability deems her unable to indulge in a childlike state of hope, or dreamy protection against the dangers of the world, and instead she is required to create her own world. Seeing as 'a woman was essentially a contingent presence, whose meaning depended on her relationships with other people, and her ethical atmosphere',⁶³⁶ such seclusion means a difficult road ahead for Craik's protagonist, as she must define herself through her affiliations with others.

Olive's disability continues to define her into her adulthood, and Olive's reaction to her disability has a particularly detrimental effect on her self-esteem. Approaching adulthood, Olive continues to be recognised as 'Little Olive',⁶³⁷ and

⁶³³ Craik, *Olive*, p. 39.

⁶³⁴ Craik, *Olive*, p. 42.

⁶³⁵ Craik, *Olive*, p. 44.

⁶³⁶ Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 19.

⁶³⁷ Craik, *Olive*, p. 49.

yet: 'there was quite enough in Olive's manner to show that she had entered on a woman's life of care'.⁶³⁸ This magnifies the unobtainable ideal of women portrayed both within the narrative, and beyond. Olive takes on the role of mediator between Angus and Sybilla, and yet, as Craik suggests: 'Alas! The time of 'Angus and Sybilla' was gone'.⁶³⁹ This circumstance represents a new dawn for Olive and her inevitable role throughout the narrative, which is made all the more notable when considering her infancy and physical deformity. As Bailin suggests of the disabled entering both the public and the domestic sphere, 'This figure emerged as an individual yet also, and by the same token, as a social phenomenon',⁶⁴⁰ suggesting not only a new dawn for Craik's protagonist, but also for society's increasing interest in and acceptance of the disabled. Indeed, as Craik suggests: 'this night - and not for the first time either - the little maiden of fifteen might have been seen, acting with the energy and self-possession of a woman'.⁶⁴¹

This self-possession continues as Craik persists in blurring the roles of mother and child, of the protector and the sheltered. Certainly, Olive is catapulted out of her girlhood by her mother, even at this early stage in her development. Sybilla states: 'Somehow, I have learnt to talk with you as if you were quite a little woman',⁶⁴² and even though '[Olive] lived the dream-life of early girlhood',⁶⁴³ she is still expected to fulfil certain roles expected of her; confidante, companion and constant source of reliability. This is particularly present in her relationship with Sara Derwent, through whom she experiences the first flushes of

⁶³⁸ Craik, *Olive*, p. 49.

⁶³⁹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 49.

⁶⁴⁰ Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction*, p. 10.

⁶⁴¹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 51.

⁶⁴² Craik, *Olive*, p. 55.

⁶⁴³ Craik, *Olive*, p. 55.

romantic expectation, as if painfully aware and accepting of the view that she will never experience such events herself, due to her deformity. This friendship is highly romanticised itself, with constant allusion to the parallels between the relationship and romantic love. Craik states:

How they used to pine for the daily greeting - the long walk, fraught with all sorts of innocent secrets. Or, in absence, the most interminable letters - positive love letters, full of 'dearest's and 'beloved's and sealing-wax kisses. Then the delicious meetings - sad partings, also quite lover-like in the multiplicity of tears of embrace,⁶⁴⁴

which demonstrates not only the common affection felt in such pairings, but also Olive's displacement of romantic attachment as she appreciates the lack of romantic connection in her own life. Ironically, it is Olive who will become step-mother to Sara's child, giving particular significance to Craik's assertions that '[Olive] counted her friend's happiness as if it were her own',⁶⁴⁵ and 'She might as well have been in love herself'.⁶⁴⁶ That this idealised version of the friendship does not extend to Sara's own view of the pairing: 'such a dear, loving, gentle thing, a girl, not pretty - even slightly deformed; but who was an amusing companion, and to whom she could confide everything',⁶⁴⁷ goes some way in epitomising the role created for Olive in her immediate society through her deformity, and the idea of relationships based upon pity.

Craik depicts Olive as a product of her deformity. She is dressed up to veil her affliction, viewed as being 'not made for this world, or the world for her',⁶⁴⁸ and Craik binds the issues of female adolescence and disability together in Olive's attending a ball. She states: 'Olive had never in her life before been at an orthodox

⁶⁴⁴ Craik, *Olive*, p. 57-8.

⁶⁴⁵ Craik, *Olive*, p. 60.

⁶⁴⁶ Craik, *Olive*, p. 62.

⁶⁴⁷ Craik, *Olive*, p. 59.

⁶⁴⁸ Craik, *Olive*, p. 62.

‘private ball’ ... It was perfect fairyland’,⁶⁴⁹ and her fragility, a result of her disability, highlights her vulnerability within this setting. As protected from the realities of her deformity as Olive has been in her childhood, her initial introduction into society, so concerned with the quest for ‘physical perfection’,⁶⁵⁰ provides her with the stark realisation of her physical difference. With this, she ‘achingly resigns herself to... loneliness’,⁶⁵¹ and Craik depicts this new awareness, and so her position in society, thus:

Olive spoke beneath her breath, and her eyes seemed fascinated into a cold, hard gaze. Sara became almost frightened. ‘Do not look so, my dear girl; I did not say that it was a positive *deformity*.’ Olive faintly shuddered: ‘Ah, that is the word! I understand it all now’,⁶⁵²

which exposes the expectation that Olive’s role in society should differ so very greatly from that expected of her able-bodied counterparts. Indeed, ‘the word was said - to linger, for ever after, on Olive’s mind. It brought back the look once written on her childish memory - grown faint, but never quite erased - her father’s first look. She understood it now’.⁶⁵³

It may seem improbable that Craik would have allowed her protagonist to reach this stage in her development without knowledge of the implications of her physical abnormality, and yet this is due to the nature of the care Olive receives. It is here that the success of such management of the disabled is called into question. Through Craik’s depiction of Olive’s new found knowledge: ‘She saw herself a poor deformed being, shut out from all natural ties - a woman, to whom friendship would be given but in kindly pity; to whom love - that blissful dream in which she

⁶⁴⁹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 63.

⁶⁵⁰ Craik, *Olive*, p. 65.

⁶⁵¹ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 29.

⁶⁵² Craik, *Olive*, p. 67.

⁶⁵³ Craik, *Olive*, p. 68.

had of late indulged- would be denied for evermore',⁶⁵⁴ and with Olive's exclamation: 'O God! Why hast thou made me thus?'⁶⁵⁵ her very femininity and existence as a woman are irreversibly altered, with a substantial portion of a woman's expectation of life shut from her vision. At this point, Olive, 'innocent as she was of all worldly guile'⁶⁵⁶ as a result of her protected girlhood, is destined to remain so as a result of her physical abnormality, and she resigns herself to the school of thought that her existence 'is often but another name for self-denying martyrdom'.⁶⁵⁷

In her care for others, as a woman, she has been given a purpose and as such, her deformity ceases to become her main definition. Although not alluding to this issue genetically, Craik uses the expectation of a 'confused and anxious'⁶⁵⁸ society concerned with physical wellness in order to portray the lack of maternal expectation anticipated in Olive's case. Craik's inclusion of a protagonist that goes against this grain of such expected biological maternity is mirrored in her own life and the adoption of the foundling child Dorothy in 1869. The idealisation of maternity, set out by a patriarchal society, was designed to preserve the purity and angelic nature of the perceived ideal woman, and resulted in a segregation of the sexes, in which middle-class women were treated largely as commodities requiring a specialist system of management by their largely patriarchal society and the 'separate spheres' dictated by them.

Olive's interest in and natural talent for art provides her with an opportunity perhaps deemed unavailable to the able-bodied women of her class.

⁶⁵⁴ Craik, *Olive*, p. 69.

⁶⁵⁵ Craik, *Olive*, p. 69.

⁶⁵⁶ Craik, *Olive*, p. 72.

⁶⁵⁷ Craik, *Olive*, p. 91.

⁶⁵⁸ Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 204.

With the lack of feminine idealism and expectation, Olive is released from the confines of propriety and therefore able to create her own existence and alternative narrative line to that of marriage and maternity in her artistic ability. However, as Mitchell has argued, there are limitations to the presentation of

Olive's agency through artistry:

Olive works specifically in woman's art because she lacks the strength and the self-absorbed ego to scale the heights reserved for males. (Typically, Craik pays only lip service to the greater worth of masculine art; Michael Vanburgh [Olive's mentor] is a Casaubon-like creature of grand and impossible visions, who drains the women around him).⁶⁵⁹

Craik states: 'She became an artist - not in a week, a month, a year - Art exacts of its votaries no less service than a lifetime',⁶⁶⁰ and as Olive views her lifetime as void of the previously held fancies of marriage and biological maternity, she understands herself to be a most appropriate votary in an almost nun-like calling away from familial roles. This can be paralleled with Wilkie Collins' publication, *Hide and Seek*, within which the deaf protagonist Madonna has a similar interest in art. This emphasises alternative outlets for a disabled woman's energies, and the success in both characters artistic endeavours is testament to the ability of the afflicted.

Olive sacrifices her development as an artist by forsaking an artistic exhibition in order to care for her mother. This again prevents the narrative from becoming too radical and far-reaching, and ensures that Olive remains in primarily a domestic setting; as Craik candidly states: 'Olive forsook not her duty'.⁶⁶¹ Sanders recognises the point in the narrative that witnesses 'an act of

⁶⁵⁹ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 108.

⁶⁶⁰ Craik, *Olive*, p. 126.

⁶⁶¹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 135.

self-sacrifice, that seems unnecessary or exaggerated'.⁶⁶² There is a sense of displacement in Olive's interest in art, as if it acts as a replacement for the husband and children she wished for so vehemently in her youth. Indeed, as Harriet Martineau suggests of the attentions of disabled women not focused upon wifely and maternal duties: 'I believe we must look to other powers'.⁶⁶³ This theme is mirrored in Michael Vanbrugh, of whose involvement in art Craik states, 'It was the gaze of a parent on his child, a lover on his mistress, an idolater on his self-created god'.⁶⁶⁴ Although particularly subtle, Craik is suggesting that any deviation from physical normality can have devastating consequences upon the roles available to women in the nineteenth century. With regard to able-bodied women, depending on their class, they were expected to run a household, bear children and represent the family in a social and political framework, all while preserving a moral virginity and outward subordinate attitude towards the men who controlled them through social roles depicted and maintained by much of Victorian England. Richardson suggests that 'The family, the basic building block of society, functioned as a microcosm of empire, fulfilling its duties of citizenship through reproduction',⁶⁶⁵ and in this sense, Victorian women were the most powerful tools in creating a society deemed appropriate for the era. The virtuous 'Angel in the House', then, existed as a means of supervision. Craik's narrative works as an exploration and interrogation of those ideals. To impose upon Olive, as a disabled woman, success as an artist, and depicting her as the sole provider

⁶⁶² Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 202.

⁶⁶³ Martineau, *Life in the Sick-Room*, p. 53.

⁶⁶⁴ Craik, *Olive*, p. 146.

⁶⁶⁵ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 74.

for her familial unit, is sweeping enough for Craik's middle-class readership of the mid-century.

Craik does not allow Olive to remain in her cocoon of rural domesticity and artistic expression, instead returning her to society at large. With the arrival of Christal Manners, Mr Rothesay's illegitimate child, although as yet unknown to Olive, comes another new dawn for her protagonist. As a member of the already unconventional family, Christal enables Olive's maternal instincts to expand in a new direction, and Olive immediately embraces the development of this role.

Craik states:

As she sat by Christal's bedside, Olive only felt the presence of the desolate orphan child. She said in her heart, 'Please God, I will do her all the good that lies in my feeble power. Who knows but that, in some way or other, I may comfort and help this child!'⁶⁶⁶

This suggests that Olive, although herself 'little more than a child',⁶⁶⁷ has been bestowed with an instinctive and innate maternal energy, nurtured despite her apparent lack of romantic attachment. That this presence of maternal intuition exists despite Olive's belief that she will not be a biological mother allows Craik the scope she requires to comment upon the lot of women who reach child-bearing age and yet lack the conventional aspects of marriage and domestic expectation. Although offered the opportunity to tour Rome and immerse herself in the study of art, Olive's refusal highlights not only this instinctive maternal impulse, but also the unconventional nature of the personalised domestic realm she has created, made plain through Vanbrugh's cries of: 'Does a child never leave a mother? It is a thing that happens every day; girls do it when they

⁶⁶⁶ Craik, *Olive*, p. 153.

⁶⁶⁷ Craik, *Olive*, p. 152.

marry'.⁶⁶⁸ When Vanbrugh proposes marriage, Olive is offered a chance of normality, which she turns down. Craik uses this plot to show that the strength of character acquired through her protagonist's disability enables her to resist the call of conventionality. Indeed, as Bailin suggests, 'Illness has always provided compelling images and sometimes plausible explanations for conditions of the spirit, the mind, the social body, and the body politic',⁶⁶⁹ in that the very existence of the disabled differs greatly from that of their able-bodied counterparts due to the different rules they were expected to live by. Disability and affliction play a significant part in defining the individual against a backdrop so concerned with propriety, leading to a differing set of expectations and often an altered moral code.

No sooner has this realisation of new ideals taken place, than Craik begins to prove that Olive is indeed capable of fulfilling the conventional roles of wife and mother. This may appear to be something of a contradiction, and yet Craik executes it in such a way as to suggest that it is the concluding exploration into Olive's character. There is an immediate connection between Olive and the 8 year old girl who is to become her step-daughter, and Olive, 'who loved all children',⁶⁷⁰ instinctively expresses her innate maternal ability. That this child was biologically mothered by Sara enables Craik to link her protagonist to her past. However, Craik is able to strike a balance between these representations of accomplished women and the dangers of a complete separation from the idealising of women.

Olive's unfaltering faith and religious reasoning inevitably play a large

⁶⁶⁸ Craik, *Olive*, p. 157.

⁶⁶⁹ Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction*, p. 8.

⁶⁷⁰ Craik, *Olive*, p. 163.

part in her relationship with the late Sara's husband, Harold Gwynne. As an unbelieving clergyman, Olive's reaction to him is described thus: 'her woman's heart was yearning with tenderness and truth over this man, whose spirit seemed at once so daring and so crushed',⁶⁷¹ once again expressing the perceived importance of womanhood. Here Sanders recognises the ability of female protagonists to 'nurse weak men through illness and spiritual despair'.⁶⁷² Harold's regression into uncertainty allows for Olive's kind-hearted guidance, as Harold himself confesses: 'You are no thoughtless girl, but an earnest woman, whom the world has long tried. I have been tried, too; therefore it is no marvel we are friends'.⁶⁷³ As Martineau suggests of the advantages of being disabled:

Our happiest fellowship must be, I think, in seeing, with a clearness we could never otherwise have attained, the vastness and certainty of the progression with which we have so little to do. I do not believe it is possible for persons in health and action to trace, as we can, the agencies for good, that are going on in life and the world.⁶⁷⁴

This adheres to Olive's ability to view situations with something akin to detached thoughtfulness. Olive's ability to counsel each of the characters in the narrative renders her almost God-like herself, and her angelic qualities parallel those of Muriel Halifax, the angelic blind child in Craik's 1856 novel, *John Halifax, Gentleman*. Olive and Muriel, although both disabled, are afflicted with differing ailments. However, both are instrumental in driving the plots forward and heavily influence the lives of other characters in their nurturing and inspirational roles.

The final rite of passage that Craik's protagonist must experience is her

⁶⁷¹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 193.

⁶⁷² Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 170.

⁶⁷³ Craik, *Olive*, p. 195.

⁶⁷⁴ Martineau, *Life in the Sick-Room*, p. 41.

understanding of the effects of religious bearing upon those lacking such steadfast faith as her own. There are distinct parallels made between disability and religion here, as if Craik is lobbying for a greater social understanding of both. Rejecting the antique understanding of disability, particularly physical abnormality, as being a physical embodiment of sin, Craik offers a universal understanding of a wider sense of the term 'disability'; that is, disability being any deviation from the norm, in any aspect of social inclusion. Indeed, it:

Signif[ies] not simply a medical condition or exclusively a social role, invalidism might more profitably be thought of as cultural mentality, a mode of thought that shaped a posture that expressed the way men and women conceptualized, experienced, and represented a wide range of afflictions.⁶⁷⁵

In much the same way as society was intrigued and often repulsed by outward examples of physical abnormality, so Olive is challenged by the religious inability of the able-bodied man. Craik candidly states of Olive's inner turmoil:

In the dead of night, when all was still - when the frosty moon cast an unearthly light over her chamber, Olive lay and thought of these things. Ever and ever anon she heard the striking of the clock, and remembered with horror that it heralded the Sabbath morn, when she must go to Harbury church - and hear, oh, with what feelings! The holy service uttered by the sacrilege of Harold's daily life. It rushed upon her mind; and she felt as though to think of him, to speak his very name, were like associating herself with his sin,⁶⁷⁶

which may appear particularly unforgiving and even draws parallels with the misunderstanding Olive has experienced at the hands of others with regard to her disability.

The eventual death of her mother allows Olive the opportunity to attend to her own needs and her attentions immediately become focused upon Harold.

⁶⁷⁵ Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity*, p. 8.

⁶⁷⁶ Craik, *Olive*, p. 199.

However, the residual doubt in her romantic ability as a result of her realisation of her deformity ensures that ‘the possibility of Harold’s loving her, or choosing her as his wife, never entered her mind’.⁶⁷⁷ Craik states that: ‘Olive had ceased to dream about love at all’,⁶⁷⁸ and yet she continues to candidly state her feelings towards Harold: ‘It is not friendship I feel, it is love’,⁶⁷⁹ exposing her innate romantic capacity. This confession, though, is wrought with unease and depicts a heavy upheaval in the life Olive has created for herself, and she hides behind her physical abnormality as she states:

“Neither he nor any living soul will ever know that I loved him otherwise than a sister might love a brother. Who would dream there could be any other passion in me - a pale, unlovely thing - a woman past her youth (for I seem very old now)? - It ought not to be so; many women are counted young at six-and-twenty; but they are those who have been nurtured tenderly in joyous homes, while I have been struggling with the hard world these many years. No wonder I am not as they - that I am quiet and silent, without mirth or winning grace- a creature worn out before her time - pale, joyless, *deformed*. Yes! Let me teach myself that word, with all other truths that can quench this mad dream. Then, perhaps, knowing all hope vain, I may be able to endure.”⁶⁸⁰

Craik is quick to dispel any untoward pity that may be felt towards her protagonist, however, and candidly exclaims: ‘unwedded and childless women, envy her not’.⁶⁸¹ However, in her relationship with Ailie, Sara’s child, Olive has indeed wholly adopted a maternal role.

Unable to bring the peace she so longs for to her protagonist, Craik shifts the background of the narrative and again uses it to reflect Olive’s state.

Venturing to the wildness of the Scottish landscape, Olive admits that it was as if

⁶⁷⁷ Craik, *Olive*, p. 229.

⁶⁷⁸ Craik, *Olive*, p. 230.

⁶⁷⁹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 230.

⁶⁸⁰ Craik, *Olive*, p. 231.

⁶⁸¹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 233.

‘waking in another world’,⁶⁸² and it is fitting that the sensationalist element of the narrative, the confession that Christal is Olive’s half-sister, should take place here. Through this confession, Craik bestows upon her protagonist a biological tie to the world, and in the dark-skinned foreign sister, she is able to confront the taboo of the ‘other’, exemplifying any aspect or example of deviation from the norm as immoral or restructured. Of Olive’s knowledge of the biological tie to Christal, Craik states:

Often, yearning for kindred ties, she longed to fall on Christal’s neck, and call her by that tender name! But she knew it could never be, and her heart had been too long schooled in the patience of silent, self-denying, unrequited love, to murmur, because in every human tie this seemed to be perpetually her doom. Her *doom*? Say, rather, her glory.⁶⁸³

The fraught conclusion to this sub-plot is Christal’s fleeing and subsequent moral rescue at the hands of Harold, and yet Craik uses the inability for the sisters to co-exist to expose the vulnerability and fragility of a biological tie. In this way, Craik is championing her personal domestic arrangement in her adoption of daughter Dorothy, and Olive becomes an idealised figure to her creator in her embodiment of feminine selflessness and instinctive maternal qualities which remain undiminished by a lack of biological maternity.

In order to overcome her protagonist’s resistance to her lost desire, that of romantic attachment, Craik performs a symbolic cauterising of Olive, done through the burning of her home. It falls to Harold to save her life, risking his own, and therefore awakens in Olive a suspected ability that she may, too, fulfil such a romantic role. Craik states: ‘Every feeling of womanly shame vanished

⁶⁸² Craik, *Olive*, p. 224.

⁶⁸³ Craik, *Olive*, p. 279.

before the threatening shadow of death',⁶⁸⁴ and the vulnerability of both parties allows this attachment to take place. Harold admits:

Ah! Olive, you thought not that you were more to me than any friend - any sister - that I loved you - not calmly, brotherly - but with all the strength and passion of my heart, as a man loves the woman he would choose out of all the world to be his wife... I tell you this, because now, when I feel so changed that all earthly things grown dim, I am not too proud to say I love you,⁶⁸⁵

and the lack of stringent propriety allows for this confession. There is a distinct lack of allusion towards Olive's physical deformity, suggesting an acceptance and entering of true womanhood that Craik's protagonist had previously thought unavailable. Although 'few Victorian novelists present established marriage in an attractive light',⁶⁸⁶ they are 'equally reluctant to leave their heroines working indefinitely for a living',⁶⁸⁷ and Craik uses the marriage of Olive and Harold to prevent the narrative from becoming overtly radical, but also to depict that social roles should be available to the differently abled.

Not only has Olive formed this sought after romantic attachment and succeeded in creating numerous roles for herself, she has cemented her maternal instincts into a concrete mothering role. Craik states: 'Not the least sweet of all her new ties was it, that Harold's daughter was now her own',⁶⁸⁸ and it is interesting to note that Olive's newfound familial and feminine acceptance is the product of her idealised childhood friend, Sara, who was previously married to Harold and the biological mother of his child. The 'loud, fierce wind swept by... it harmed not them... true man and woman, husband and wife, ready to go

⁶⁸⁴ Craik, *Olive*, p. 309.

⁶⁸⁵ Craik, *Olive*, p. 313.

⁶⁸⁶ Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 202.

⁶⁸⁷ Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 202.

⁶⁸⁸ Craik, *Olive*, p. 325.

through the world without fear, trusting in each other, and looking up to Heaven to guide their way',⁶⁸⁹ and although Harold's mother and daughter are the only remaining physical examples of a familial biological tie, through her use of 'Heaven', Craik suggests that paternal guidance is not exclusively found in genetic transmission and can indeed be procured through numerous avenues including religious faith, even to a disabled woman who thought herself undeserving of such a life. The novel's lack of detail surrounding hereditary and medical concern emphasise this, softening the harsh realities of the newly expanding social education that was so preoccupied with, amongst other concerns, judging the suitability of maternity.

Disabled Attitudes: Matters of Gender and Class in *A Noble Life*

In Craik's 1866 novel *A Noble Life*, she confronts these newly expanding themes of heredity, eugenics and class, in relation to disability and the non-biological family. Craik takes her contribution to the larger debates and expands them in this narrative, turning her attention to class and the hereditary influences within that arena. The differing degree of severity of affliction between male and female characters is of particular importance, as the sickroom, and indeed infirmity itself, was often feminised, particularly in representations of blindness and deafness. There is much more focus on the idea of transmission in this text than is present in *Olive*. The protagonist here is male, and of the aristocracy, and as such is expected to produce an heir to ensure transmission not only of noble blood but of

⁶⁸⁹ Craik, *Olive*, p. 331.

the estate. Tess O'Toole recognises 'the drive to preserve and defend the family',⁶⁹⁰

continuing to suggest 'safeguard[ing] its integrity is balanced by the need to revitalize the family, the need for blood regeneration'.⁶⁹¹ Through Craik's protagonists in both *Olive* and *A Noble Life*, we see that social expectation was in no way limited to women. The potentially devastating effect that severe disability had upon the bloodline is present through the character of the Earl, and although a biological tie is eventually reached between the Earl and his heir, Craik uses his position to comment upon the constructive aspects of adoption.

In the opening chapter of *A Noble Life*, Craik states that her protagonist 'was the last Earl, and with him the title became extinct',⁶⁹² pointing to the significance of heredity from the outset and in this case highlighting its importance in terms of social circles and titles. Described as one of the 'novelists with a purpose',⁶⁹³ Craik immediately addresses this matter eugenically, tackling the perceived need for such titles to be held by superior beings and outlining the negative connotations of such a school of thought. She places her protagonist within a bodily prison of disability, thus allowing this disability to become an outward embodiment of the often prison-like confines that the aristocracy faced in terms of rigid social expectation. She addresses the need for change in introducing members of different classes into her central character's circle and re-moulding the idea of familial ties being exclusively related to biological ties. The Earl's crippling physical disability which affects his limbs also places importance upon

⁶⁹⁰ Tess O'Toole, 'Adoption and the "Improvement of the Estate" in Trollope and Craik', *Nineteenth-century Literature*, 52:1 (1997), 58-79 (p. 58).

⁶⁹¹ O'Toole, 'Adoption and the "Improvement of the Estate"', p. 60.

⁶⁹² Dinah Craik, *A Noble Life* (London: Hurst and Blackett Limited, No Date) p. 1.

⁶⁹³ Elaine Showalter, 'Dinah Mulock Craik and the Tactics of Sentiment: A Case Study in Victorian Female Authorship', *Feminist Studies*, 12:2/3 (1975), 5-23 (p. 5).

the 'normal'; 'the average then becomes a kind of ideal, a position devoutly to be wished'.⁶⁹⁴

Craik notoriously deals with issues of class, seen also in *John Halifax, Gentleman*, and yet tends to concentrate on the position of the middle and upper classes only; Craik seems unwilling to push the boundaries further by fully integrating the lower classes into her plot. Although in *A Noble Life*, disability has struck the aristocracy, and thus removes them from a pedestal of a more uncontaminated, pure and therefore superior line of heredity, it is seemingly the aristocracy that is perhaps more adept at handling the conditions of disability. With Craik's omission of a central character that belongs to a particularly low class, she is able to bypass fraught commentary upon the 'complicating issues of responsibility in relation to poverty and disease'.⁶⁹⁵ As a result of the protection he has received, the Earl holds no illusions of any inferiority, preferring instead to be resigned to his shortcomings. The fact that he is in such a position to receive the advice and protection of his guardians highlights the importance of Craik's decision to bestow upon the last Earl a high status. In doing so, she strips her narrative of any problems that may occur should he have been born to a lower class; indeed, she states: 'had he been born poor, in all probability he would have long ago died- of sheer suffering'.⁶⁹⁶

In her introduction of the Earl as a child, Craik gives an outward representation of the vulnerability of children, extending the need for mothering into a wider sphere by shifting the focus from women to society, suggesting that

⁶⁹⁴ Lennard J. Davis, 'Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Disability Studies Reader: Second Edition*, ed. by Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 3-16 (p. 5).

⁶⁹⁵ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 203.

⁶⁹⁶ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 84.

this level of responsibility should be genderless, hence the inclusion of Mr Cardcross and Mr Mentieth. Marianne Novy argues that 'adoption plots dramatise cultural tensions about definitions of the family and heredity',⁶⁹⁷ and placing the Earl in such a position when he is merely a baby magnifies this school of thought, as he will inevitably be required to create a new family; his inability to do so resulting in the loss of the aristocratic heredity of himself and his parents. The premature deaths of the Earl's parents are indicative of a social commentary upon freedom from this position of hierarchal propriety. The Earl's father meets his death during a sudden storm in an otherwise peaceful loch, underlining the powerful force of nature and its control over the ebb and flow of society. In the use of water in the death of the last Earl's unnamed father, Craik is able to invite images of natural progression, cleansing, and even corrosion. In doing this, Craik removes any disappointment or anger that his father may have felt should he have been alive to witness the last Earl's birth, enabling her to focus wholly upon her radical protagonist and to explore a range of reactions to his 'superior' position being held by someone with such an inferior physical state. His mother dies shortly after this, seemingly unable to cope with the situation. As she gives up and wastes away, the framework of aristocratic responsibility is transferred to her son, the last Earl. Craik uses the Earl's disability to communicate the susceptibility of the higher classes, thus normalising them and allowing a more open line of comparison between the two so seemingly separate worlds.

Cairnforth Castle, the family home, is important in terms of geographical location. It lies:

⁶⁹⁷ *Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture*, ed. by Marianne Novy (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2004) p. 2.

on the extremity of a long tongue of land which stretches out between two salt water lochs - Loch Beg, the “little” , and Loch Mhor, the “big lake”. The latter is grand and gloomy, shut in by bleak mountains, which sit all round it, their feet in the water, and their heads in mist and cloud. But Loch Beg is quite different. It has green, cultivated sloping shores.⁶⁹⁸

Each Loch stands as a metaphorical commentary on class division; that Craik uses this ‘tongue of land’ as the scene for her protagonist’s father’s death is important; as if suggesting that he attempted to go some way to bridge the gap between the classes, working for greater understanding and co-operation between them, and yet society simply was not ready, the valiant attempt drowning with the man. Yet, through her adoption plot, Craik is able to address this segregation, as: ‘Adoption often implicates in each other’s lives people from groups usually widely separated’.⁶⁹⁹ Concerned with ideals of class, tensions surrounding the notion of eugenics were (as outlined in the introduction) undoubtedly present prior to the coining of the phrase in the 1880s. George Robb suggests: ‘late-Victorian England was haunted by fears of degeneration... to get to the root of the problem, it was necessary to confront heredity and natural selection, so that the choice of one’s sexual partner became crucial to the nation’s future’.⁷⁰⁰

As early as 1857, the influence of the physical form and the role it played within society were evident: ‘the Crimean War had directed public attention to the physical condition of the masses whence our soldiers and sailors must be obtained’, urging the necessity of ‘providing for the people healthy out of door

⁶⁹⁸ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 2-3.

⁶⁹⁹ Novy, *Imagining Adoption*, p. 3.

⁷⁰⁰ George Robb, ‘Race Motherhood: Moral Eugenics vs Progressive Eugenics’, in Ann Sumner Holmes and Claudia Nelson (ed.) *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain. 1875-1925* (London, Macmillan, 1997) p. 58-74 (p. 58).

recreations'.⁷⁰¹ Authors were using their already established social platform to comment upon this, and Craik de-emphasises the importance of physical condition using the sharp contrast between the crippled yet moral Earl and Captain Bruce, who is a soldier himself, to represent the unfitting nature of a school of thought that prioritises physical virility.

By bringing the Earl into the forefront of his society and enabling him to exist within it, Craik addresses disability as 'the other', of which Victorian culture was not wholly accepting. *A Noble Life* exists amongst 'narratives of illness, whether in case histories, advice manuals, or literary texts, [that] could shape...

how people perceived relationships between mind and body, self and other, private

and public spheres'.⁷⁰² As Athena Vrettos argues:

despite repeated attempts to make the individual and the social coalesce, nineteenth century representations of illness reveal a persistent sense of disjunction between individual physical experience and the cultural discourses through which that experience was shaped and defined.⁷⁰³

This is taken further in Holmes' description of identity as 'constant performance' in that each disabled person, regardless of class, was required to use their disability and 'a stylized repetition of acts...to confirm social membership on whatever term[s] it was offered'.⁷⁰⁴

Although the Earl is not ostracised for his disability, Craik does investigate stigmatisation through the Doctor's pessimistic treatment of him. The medical figure sees no hope for the physically disabled infant, a vision that would later lead to the 'hereditarian climate of the 1890s, [where] poverty, immorality, crime

⁷⁰¹ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 14.

⁷⁰² Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (California: Stanford University Press, 1995) p. 2.

⁷⁰³ Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions*, p. 5.

⁷⁰⁴ Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 187.

and prostitution were all swept up under the umbrella of disease',⁷⁰⁵ a phenomenon that was seemingly foreseen. By characterising her protagonist as pious and morally superior, she challenges the eugenic thought process. This was a thought process that permeated every sphere, including marriage and even romantic love. Ceasing to be an expected by-product of a marital union, wherein the emphasis on producing offspring moved from a private choice to public responsibility, 'reproduction was no longer a sacred, private act, but one of public service, into which one entered from rational choice and sense of duty'.⁷⁰⁶ Craik undoubtedly recognizes and challenges this, by using the Earl's disability to remove the need for a sexual partner and allowing him the freedom to choose Helen's son as his heir. However, the narrative's convenience of the child's biological link to the Earl, who is fathered by his relative Captain Bruce, cannot be overlooked, and it seems that to use any other outcome would simply be deemed too radical.

To include a major physical disability in her narrative enables Craik to open up the idea of family, showing it to be in existence between members of a community. It also scrutinises the new levels of personal control that were being introduced over reproduction, familial structure and heredity. She does this being fully aware of the responsibility that published authors had, as

the novel might become a tool of responsible citizenship , spreading the gospel of Apollo over and against Dionysus, thought over emotion, heads over hearts, redirecting the heart's eugenic devotion... allowing the effects of heredity to be explored in detail.⁷⁰⁷

Against the backdrop of a drastically changing society, Craik recognises the cultural

⁷⁰⁵ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 72.

⁷⁰⁶ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 72.

⁷⁰⁷ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 91.

weight attached to producing offspring, which is emphasised by the Earl's status and need for an heir. Claudia Nelson suggests that as 'the Victorian world placed substantial pressure on middle-class women to prove their capacity for mothering...[they] might use adoption as a way to fulfil themselves in ways society would approve [of]',⁷⁰⁸ and in her use of the Earl, Craik takes this idea and places it firmly into the public sphere, as such pressure extended to the upper classes and also to men; particularly men of the aristocracy who needed to produce an heir.

Craik ensures that Malcolm Campbell, brother of the boatman who dies alongside the late Earl's father in the accident, survives: 'The only person saved was little Malcolm Campbell...a boy about ten years old'.⁷⁰⁹ It is significant that Craik includes the detail of Malcolm's age, as it is also the age at which the last Earl is re-introduced to the narrative. This provides a link between the old generation and the new, and also the old and new 'worlds' of a drastically changing society in terms of morals and values, as well as class structure. By placing importance upon the role of the minister- 'Who but the messenger of God should know best how to communicate His awful will, as expressed in great visitations of calamity?... There could be but one answer - "Thy will be done-'⁷¹⁰ she is able to include a deeper dimension to the story unveiled in the novel, reasserting the authority and power of God by placing Him in control in a time where ripples of conflict between religion and scientific advances were beginning to show. Had she

⁷⁰⁸ Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (Westport, Praeger Publishers, 2007), p 160.

⁷⁰⁹ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 4.

⁷¹⁰ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 4.

used the character of Cardcross in a different manner, with a different employment

and responsibilities, the novel would inevitably lose some of its focus and bite;

humanising and secularising these issues would give more room for earthly influences and remove the focus of a higher power. This is undoubtedly a literary technique also, as Craik is aware that ‘middle-class readers would probably have

been more comfortable once the clergyman entered the picture’.⁷¹¹ Reverend

Cardcross, carrying all associated connotations of social paternity, ‘was the only person, beyond [the last Earl’s late mother’s] necessary attendants, who saw her

until she died’,⁷¹² cementing his involvement in the case and ensuring the religious

theme continues throughout with his presence and influence. There is an element

of a New Covenant present within this novel, as the previously held ideal that ‘One

had to be without defect in order to approach God’s place of residence’⁷¹³ is

challenged and, with the authority of a resident religious character, all but

eradicated. This is also seen in *Olive*, as her religious bearing and salvation for

Harold demonstrate a new, more accepting view of religious faith. Monica Correa

Fryckstedt recognises this shift in religious acceptance and its role within the

uncertain waters of a Darwin-influenced society. She argues, ‘traditional values

were gradually beginning to be threatened, and it is possible that, rushing to their

defence, domestic novelists manipulated their readers into believing in a perfect

calm, while, in fact, discordant notes were disturbing the harmony’.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹¹ Nelson, *Family Ties*, p 15.

⁷¹² Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 4.

⁷¹³ Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 2007) p. 2

⁷¹⁴ Fryckstedt, ‘Defining the Domestic Genre’, p. 22.

As Cardcross makes his way to Cairnforth Castle in order to baptise the unfortunate child, Craik's use of nature indicates, perhaps a little prematurely, that a new dawn is beginning. As the descriptive imagery becomes more childlike, we see that Craik will not allow this child to sink into the unfortunate and ultimately pessimistic waters that took his father's life and placed such responsibility upon him. She describes the scene:

He [Cardcross] walked, in meditative mood, through the Cairnforth woods, now blue with hyacinths in their bosky shadows, and in every nook and corner starred with great clusters of yellow primroses... Their large, round, smiling faces, so irresistibly suggestive of baby smiles at the sight of them, touched the heart of the good minister,⁷¹⁵

thus communicating the inevitable importance of this new arrival. The positivity included in Craik's description goes some way to suggest that the child's disability is an outward sign of an overdue shift in the aristocratic attitudes of class division, eugenic ideals and the overtaking of religion by science. Throughout the novel, she is able to show that such attitudes were 'broken', and what was previously exhibited in a person's character is now embodied in a physical manner, accelerating the change in social attitudes. In remembering the deceased parents and envisioning the 'poor little motherless and fatherless baby',⁷¹⁶ Cardcross' 'tears gathered again and again... shutting out from his vision all the beauty of spring',⁷¹⁷ which renders the image deeply religious as it invites comparisons with the Easter story in its reference to a new dawn of spring and the resurrection of a figure deemed lifeless, as does the inclusion of 'cross' in Cardcross' name. Craik goes so far as to liken the child himself to Jesus, present

⁷¹⁵ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 5.

⁷¹⁶ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 6.

⁷¹⁷ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 6.

in Helen's child's later admission of 'I know Jesus. He is the Earl'.⁷¹⁸ Just as Jesus rose from his tomb, his prison, Craik is suggesting that the same will happen in the birth of the last Earl, as she states, 'The great doors used almost always to stand open, and the windows were rarely closed... but now all was shut up and silent, and not a soul was to be seen about the place'.⁷¹⁹

As the Minister, Cardcross is described as 'like a father to his children, true

pastor of a most loving flock',⁷²⁰ as one who commands dignity and respect without

the preconceived traits of a strict Victorian father figure. Sanders recognises that

'the Victorian ideal of manliness was constantly repositioning itself in relation to the role of women',⁷²¹ and as Cardcross is alone in his paternity, he must become

both mother and father to his children, as well as his flock. Craik continues this

religious theme through a series of allusions; she later has the Earl arrive, for

example, 'in darkness, and rain, unwelcomed save by his own servants',⁷²² allowing

that 'on Sunday morning all things were changed',⁷²³ continuing the emphasis on resurrection.

The scene wherein Mr Cardcross meets Dr. Hamilton, whose reputation precedes him, is particularly important as the representative forces of religion and science come face to face and meet in the child's nursery. The child, emotively described as 'the smallest, saddest specimen of infantile deformity',⁷²⁴ is the physical embodiment of the tension between the two opposing schools of thought.

⁷¹⁸ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 240.

⁷¹⁹ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 5.

⁷²⁰ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 29.

⁷²¹ Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 98.

⁷²² Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 30.

⁷²³ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 30.

⁷²⁴ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 13.

As the Doctor muses as to whether it is desirable for the child to live, Cardcross reiterates the involvement of God, stating: 'It could not live, it could never have lived at all, if He were *not* willing',⁷²⁵ suggesting that the probability of the child's survival is beyond human power, again placing the control and all forthcoming events firmly in the hands of religious faith. Cardcross is described as 'their pastor and teacher, consoler and guide',⁷²⁶ allowing him to become a medium for God's will and creating a deep, permanent air of religious influence. Catherine Judd recognises the shift from religious to medical prominence in the Victorian novel, a shift that Craik's work resists. Judd states:

Other critics attribute the prominence of death and disease in the Victorian novel to a counterphobic reaction to morbidity itself. No longer able to derive comfort or justification from religion, the argument goes, the Victorians were compelled to concentrate on that which they could not master, their preoccupation with death betraying a saturnine fascination with that which they most feared.⁷²⁷

It is interesting to note that the Doctor, renowned for his medical ability and expertise, seems to fail to observe how his own assistance can be useful in such a position as this. He states:

It is a case in which no medical skill is of much avail, if any: nature must struggle through - or yield: which I cannot help thinking would be the best ending. In Sparta, now, this poor child would have been exposed... to be on saved by any opportune death from the still greater misfortune of living.⁷²⁸

He makes no attempt to disguise his thoughts the child's worth. Craik does not condemn him for this, instead choosing to use Cardcross as a juxtaposition, as he

⁷²⁵ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 13.

⁷²⁶ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 14.

⁷²⁷ Catherine Judd, *Bedside Seductions: Nursing and the Victorian Imagination* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), p. 18.

⁷²⁸ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 15.

earnestly replies, 'we are not Spartans, but Christians: to whom the body is not everything, and who believe that God can work out His wonderful will, if He chooses'.⁷²⁹ It is only Cardcross, and what he represents, who is able to see past the outward deformity, adding 'Do you think... that the mind is as imperfect as the body?'.⁷³⁰ an issue which has been overlooked in favour of medical aid for the physical state of the child, reflecting the 'medicalization of society'.⁷³¹ Craik argues, 'It was the guardian's duty to see that every aid which medical skill and surgical science could procure, was supplied to a child so afflicted, and upon whose life so much depended',⁷³² omitting the equally important pastoral side of parental responsibility, which Cardcross will fulfil.

The decision is regretfully made by the Earl's guardians to send the child away from 'the admiration of the country-side before even a single soul in the parish - except Mr. and Mrs. Cardcross - had set eyes upon him'.⁷³³ Hiding the child away from a world seemingly not yet ready to accept such a deviation from the norm is deemed the only option, and yet this adds to the already overwhelming future that this child must face should he exceed medical predictions and live. It seems that already religion has triumphed over science, as the voice of medical authority, Dr. Hamilton, states, 'The minister's opinion seems to carry great weight here'.⁷³⁴ It is down to Cardcross to conclude the meeting with his moving and hopeful dialogue:

⁷²⁹ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 15.

⁷³⁰ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 16.

⁷³¹ Judd, *Beside Seductions*, p. 19.

⁷³² Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 17.

⁷³³ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 21.

⁷³⁴ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 18.

“Give him every possible chance of life and health, and a sound mind, and then we must leave the rest to Him, who would not have sent this poor little one into the world at all if He had not had some purpose in doing so, though what that purpose is we cannot see. I suppose we shall see it, and many other dark things - some time.”⁷³⁵

With the lack of scientific involvement, indeed, medical interaction entirely fails to alleviate the Earl’s condition, Craik is able to heighten the impact of religion and faith, nurtured through the Earl’s ongoing involvement with the Cardcross family. Craik’s position in navigating the often competing contemporary claims of science and religion is clearly informed by her own religious fortitude, and as such she is able to comment upon the conflict between science and religion brought about by the radical ideas being thrust into Victorian society by theorists such as Charles Darwin and Francis Galton.

Although the topic of scientific explanation of the importance of heredity was particularly important in terms of family, and seen to be concurrent with ‘the creation of the next generation’,⁷³⁶ Craik offers another view, and celebrates the family created through choice and emotional attachment, without adhering to medical or scientific guidelines. In this way, Craik rejects concerns with hereditary disability, instead choosing to focus on other forms of inheritance such as title, land, and social position. By giving no clues as to the condition of the Earl’s parents, or any relative prior to them, Craik cannot trace where his disability may have originated, surely a deliberate act on her part. She places her protagonist biologically alone against such a backdrop, challenging society to accept him.

⁷³⁵ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 19.

⁷³⁶ Anthony Smith, *The Human Pedigree* (London: Lippincott, 1975), p. 214

The Earl's 'coming home' at the age of ten years old is a crucial point of the novel, as Craik does not condemn him with a disability that renders him completely secluded. Instead she includes him in the group of: 'fictional characters who were not isolated as "freaks", but rather placed parallel to "normal" lives, close enough to mark a notable falling-away from normative outcomes (marriage, for example) and thus to build a compelling and melodramatic "if only" gap'.⁷³⁷ He is able to exist within society without any damaging exclusion, thus allowing for comparisons between himself and the other characters to take place, emphasising the humanity, exposure and vulnerability of each individual in such a society, reducing the 'fear' of the unknown in terms of disability. The Earl is physically carried by Malcolm Campbell, the only survivor, at the age of ten years old, of the accident which killed both his brother and the last Earl's father. Malcolm is described as 'a big, stalwart young Highlander of about one-and-twenty... who carried in his arms, very gently and carefully... what looked like a baby, or a very young child'.⁷³⁸ This highlights the individual importance of them both, as Craik contrasts the Earl with Malcolm, 'the very embodiment of active, vigorous youth',⁷³⁹ and enables their continual partnership to be successful throughout. In this way, she is able to demonstrate how each individual is valued in a familial community.

Craik reassures us that the Earl does not suffer mentally, indeed, his mind is rather advanced. Although his voice is 'thin and sharp, and unnatural rather, for a boy',⁷⁴⁰ Craik describes his eyes as 'large' and 'intelligent', seemingly the

⁷³⁷ Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, pp. 14-15.

⁷³⁸ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 32.

⁷³⁹ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 34.

⁷⁴⁰ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 32.

‘principal feature of the thin face’.⁷⁴¹ This is a child who does not invite pity; rather Craik uses him to overcome the many preconceptions associated with such disability in a context where it was often feared. As Holmes suggests; ‘Disabled people... were decidedly constituted as a social problem in need of a programme of management’,⁷⁴² to which Craik alludes in the discussions between Cardcross and Dr. Hamilton.⁷⁴³ Holmes suggests that ‘these identities were probably mostly constructed to fulfil the wishes and allay the fears of non-disabled people’,⁷⁴⁴ and through her representation of the Earl and his ability to conduct a relatively full life, Craik is very much a part of the:

wide range of... texts [both fiction and non-fiction] that addressed disabled people as a newly visible group within Victorian culture [and] simultaneously activated and attempted to manage the idea that disabled people’s place might be within the marriage bed and the productive economy, rather than at its afflicted and isolated margins.⁷⁴⁵

Helen Cardcross, the minister’s daughter, is a particularly significant character in the Earl’s life, as she is both a mother figure and partner to him, although Craik removes any possibility of a sexual relationship between them with her convenient union with the Earl’s cousin Captain Bruce. Although she eventually becomes a biological mother, she is already a mother in terms of duty and intrinsic character, illustrated in her taking on the maternal role for her brothers following the death of her mother. Craik’s audience was beginning to understand the importance of this: ‘for some worshippers at the maternal shrine, in short, motherhood trumped sexuality; *being* a mother was far different from,

⁷⁴¹ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 33.

⁷⁴² Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 191.

⁷⁴³ Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 191.

⁷⁴⁴ Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 191.

⁷⁴⁵ Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 192.

and much more important than *becoming* a mother'.⁷⁴⁶ Craik was no stranger to this inherent mothering role herself. By the age of twenty, her widowed father had disowned her and her brothers, placing her in the maternal role, but with the added responsibility of financially supporting them, which she did with her writing. In her own adoption of a child with husband George Lillie Craik, she was able to make a conscious decision to fulfil this role in a more customary manner. The innate motherhood she bestows upon the character of Helen is extended towards the Earl also, and at their first meeting:

she came forward in her serious, gentle, motherly way... Then by a sudden impulse of conscience, quite forgetting the rank of the Earl, and only thinking of the poor, crippled, orphaned baby - for he seemed no more than a baby - Helen did what her warm, loving heart was in the habit of doing, as silent consolation for everything, to her own tribe of 'mitherless bairns' - she stooped forward and kissed him.⁷⁴⁷

It is also evident in her serving him milk: 'Helen held it to his lips- the first time she ever did so but not the last by many',⁷⁴⁸ serving him 'the sweet draught of human affection, not dried up even to such heavily afflicted ones as he'.⁷⁴⁹ The use of the milk is most significant, as she embodies the mothering role entirely, with connotations of a maternal nursing. Here Helen is adhering to the 'image of the homebound, healing woman [that] became a subspecies of the angel in the house'.⁷⁵⁰ The 'forgetting' of the Earl's rank serves to humanise the child and elevate the importance of the lower classes; a notion that resonates throughout the narrative, and a concept that the Earl himself wholly realises.

⁷⁴⁶ *Maternal Instincts*, ed. by Holmes and Nelson, p. 2.

⁷⁴⁷ Craik, *A Noble Life*, pp. 46-47.

⁷⁴⁸ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 61.

⁷⁴⁹ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 62.

⁷⁵⁰ Judd, *Bedside Seductions*, p. 22.

The Earl is eventually 'left to nature',⁷⁵¹ as was foreseen by Dr. Hamilton's scepticism about curing his condition, and he revels in the fact that the days of enduring 'doctors coming about me and hurting me' are over.⁷⁵² It is here that the juxtaposition of rank and health is outlined:

She [Helen] turned away to the window, where she saw her own big brothers, homely-featured and coarsely clad, but full of health, and strength, and activity - and then looked at this poor boy, who had everything that fortune could give, and yet - nothing!⁷⁵³

By placing the Earl at the apparent mercy of those around him, describing him as 'dependent as an infant'⁷⁵⁴ and removing biological ties to any care-giving parent, Craik is able to present the precariousness of aristocratic bloodlines. She presents them as vulnerable; just as prone to mortality and disability as others. Craik continues this theme, even to the fated involvement of his only blood tie, Captain Bruce, leading to the conclusion that the family the Earl creates for himself is much more enlightened and positive. Indeed, the Earl's wish to be educated in the Manse and not in the 'dreary... big library',⁷⁵⁵ suggests that he wishes to become a fixture in the middle-class Cardcross family, in their community, as opposed to welcoming people into his own aristocratic home. This highlights his child-like dependency and emphasises the close-knit aspect of a family striving to survive together. Craik states:

for the first time taken out of his shut-up nursery life, where he himself had been the principal object - where he had no playfellows, no companions... removed from this, and brought into ordinary family life,

⁷⁵¹ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 49.

⁷⁵² Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 49.

⁷⁵³ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 50.

⁷⁵⁴ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p 50.

⁷⁵⁵ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p 50.

the poor child felt- he could not but feel - the sad, sad difference between himself and all the rest of the world.⁷⁵⁶

Although this alludes to his disability, its focus is also on his rank. The Earl is envious of the easy-going and pleasant background that the Cardcrosses have created for their boys, a life from which he is somewhat excluded. He longs to 'play with boys',⁷⁵⁷ and yet both his rank and physical condition thwart his chance at childhood; the irony being that he remains in a child-like body throughout his adolescence and adulthood. The Earl does, however, work to overcome his 'prison', evident through his treatment of Malcolm. Refusing to be intimidated by his towering physical stature, 'he ordered Malcolm about - the big fellow obeying him, with something beyond even the large limits of the feudal respect which his forbears had paid to the Earl's forebears for many a generation',⁷⁵⁸ the affection between them suggesting that the gap between the classes may indeed be narrowed, despite an exaggeration of the hierarchy of the master and the respectful servant. The relationship between the two males is a heady mix of both dependency upon the physicality of Malcolm and the need for the Earl's assertion in order to carry out from making the everyday challenges his disability presents to him.

Unable to derive pleasure the fields and hills his playground, the Earl creates the same landscape in his intelligence, deriving the same pleasure from exercising his mind instead of his body, and 'cultivating [his] feelings',⁷⁵⁹ which was

⁷⁵⁶ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p 57.

⁷⁵⁷ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 58.

⁷⁵⁸ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 59.

⁷⁵⁹ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 79.

predominantly viewed as a woman's vocation. Here Craik is feminising her protagonist, as able-bodied women as well as disabled men were 'denied participation in public life'.⁷⁶⁰ Indeed, as Mitchell continues to recognise:

The Earl of Cairnforth, like Phineas Fletcher, represents an essentially feminine predicament. A woman unhappily powerless in a patriarchal society can hardly avoid feeling that she is a crippled and helpless specimen of mankind. The Earl of Cairnforth is doomed because of the body given to him at birth.⁷⁶¹

However, this only serves to create and deepen the bond between the Earl and Mr Cardcross, representative of the Holy Father on earth and fast becoming a father figure to the Earl himself. Their relationship is mutually advantageous, as Craik suggests: 'above all, to teach a boy unto whom learning seemed a pleasure rather than a torment, a favour instead of a punishment, was such an exceeding and novel delight to the good minister, that he soon forgot the crippled figure'.⁷⁶² She represents them as meeting on a level that surpasses all expectation and challenge at the hands of rank, age and physical state. The Cardcross family have seemingly adopted the Earl, and in the same way the Earl has adopted them, and they become almost a bridge for the Earl to enter into society. In this way, Craik closes the gap between the classes by uniting them in misfortune, be that of body, mind or circumstance. The Earl's intelligence serves to humanise him, going some way to remove the wariness that the community may feel, as 'to talk with him was like talking to a grown man'.⁷⁶³ Her protagonist is categorically not 'normal', and yet we feel an inexplicable tie that allows us to identify with him; recognising his

⁷⁶⁰ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 79.

⁷⁶¹ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 65.

⁷⁶² Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 60.

⁷⁶³ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 64.

struggles to overcome his situation and the deep bonds he creates with his community are, to a certain extent, aspirations that many of us hold. By removing the invitation of pity for her protagonist, Craik is able to overcome any isolation given to the Earl through his soundness of mind and frank likeability.

The Earl's impending duties are never far away from the minds of his guardians, however, and Mr Menteith suggests, 'he ought to be fitted, in case he should live, for as many as he can fulfil of the duties of his position'.⁷⁶⁴ It is here that Helen's involvement is magnified, as she teaches the Earl to write his own name for such purposes. This is an example of what Mitchell refers to as the novel being 'constructed to show how much the Earl is to be pitied and to let the other characters discuss him tenderly',⁷⁶⁵ perhaps a reason why she finds *A Noble Life* 'embarrassing to read'.⁷⁶⁶ Rather than provoking this embarrassment, Craik recognises the requirement for a sympathetic response towards her protagonist, allowing for a clearer engagement of her readership with the major social, scientific and religious questions raised by the Earl's disability. Fryckstedt looks to Craik's readership in order to understand this, stating, 'The moral message may seem meek and mawkish in the extreme to a modern reader, but a Victorian woman could hardly learn endurance too early'.⁷⁶⁷

As the Earl grows up and must inevitably take on more responsibility, his surroundings are also transformed. Seemingly no longer at peace, the:

⁷⁶⁴ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 70.

⁷⁶⁵ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 64.

⁷⁶⁶ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 64.

⁷⁶⁷ Fryckstedt, 'Defining the Domestic Genre', p. 14.

cruelly advancing finger of Civilization has touched [Cairnforth]... ploughed it with smoky steam-boats, and will shortly frighten the innocent fishes by dropping a marine telegraph wire across the mouth of the loch.⁷⁶⁸

This anxious depiction contrasts with the much simpler and peaceful description of

the loch from an earlier generation, that of the late Earl. Such developments show that this childhood steeped in pleasant protection cannot last forever. As the Earl's coming of age ever advances, so does his understanding of himself. His prison-like

body that gets 'no bigger, no stronger, and scarcely less helpless than a child'⁷⁶⁹

must bear the inheritance of the estate and all attached responsibilities.

As his childhood, and religious safety net, slips away, the advancement of medical science appears once more, as he is sent to London for a final attempted cure. As his 'adoptive family' 'bade him goodbye, and watched the carriage drive slowly from the Castle doors, [they] felt as sad as if they were parting from him, not for London, but for the other world'.⁷⁷⁰ Such uncertainty is again magnified by

the Earl's physical condition and the lack of improvement found in London shows once again the insufficiency of medical science, and Craik's continuing emphasis on the restorative power of religious faith. Returning once more to his 'family', he has reached maturity and yet this is counteracted by his 'still puny and childish frame'.⁷⁷¹ It is here that the Earl's disability takes its heavy and inevitable toll. At

an age where he no longer requires teaching, mothering or guardianship, his

condition keeps him imprisoned and prevents him from a naturally progressing life.

⁷⁶⁸ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 73.

⁷⁶⁹ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 79.

⁷⁷⁰ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 84.

⁷⁷¹ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 90.

Medical aid has again failed, now for the final time, and he must remain within his

useless, restrictive body as he carries out his important duties, a juxtaposition that

serves to emphasise both issues, and yet the Earl soon becomes renewed by his

impending responsibility to 'his people'⁷⁷² and the idea that he may be able to carry

out some level of paternalistic duty after all. He argues: 'I am nearly twenty-one.

Any other young man would have been a man long ago. And I will be a man - why

should I not? True manliness is not solely outside. I daresay you could find many a

fool and a coward six feet high',⁷⁷³ showing a resolve that has been evident

throughout. He now takes on a more mature and masculine role, communicating no

signs of inability from his physical prison. Indeed, as he states: 'It will be something

to live for'.⁷⁷⁴ Rather than setting him up to fail at the duties that would create a

further prison for many others in terms of responsibility and accountability, Craik

uses the Earl's social duties to liberate him and enable him to act as a father figure

to the community that had adopted him so readily in previous years. As O'Toole

argues of other nineteenth-century disability narratives, 'The introduction

of an element of difference is a catalyst to plot, the family's reconstitution also

allows the novelist to represent the broader social reconfigurations transforming

Victorian society'.⁷⁷⁵

The Earl's will-making is a pivotal point within Craik's narrative, and as Mr

⁷⁷² Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 104.

⁷⁷³ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 106.

⁷⁷⁴ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 108.

⁷⁷⁵ O'Toole, 'Adoption and the "Improvement of the Estate"', p. 17.

Menteith suggests: 'There are many instances where blood is *not* thicker than water

- and a friend, by election, is often worthier and dearer - besides being closer - than

any relative',⁷⁷⁶ a belief that echoes throughout the novel. In making Helen

Cardcross his heiress, the Earl swiftly acknowledges her as his family; he wishes to

bestow upon her the material equivalent of what she has given to him. Indeed, as

Steven Mintz suggests: 'The stereotype of the Victorian family - even though

represented in innumerable daguerreotypes - is as much fantasy as reality. There

was of course, 'no single Victorian family type'.⁷⁷⁷ Craik's fiction is interested in

the multiplicity of family, and she places the concept of friends and a self-made

family at the heart of her fiction. Claudia Nelson argues that: 'while both the cult

of domesticity and the Victorian science of eugenics made much of the blood tie,

in practice many nineteenth-century children were raised by people other than- or

in addition to- their biological parents'.⁷⁷⁸ It is interesting to note the many

references to Helen's child-like state; although she is particularly capable, 'that

innocent, child-like look never, even when she was an old woman, quite faded out

of Helen's eyes',⁷⁷⁹ suggesting that the Earl sees himself as her protector now. His

coming of age is further cemented in the death of Mr Menteith 'who had been

almost as good to him as a father',⁷⁸⁰ resulting in the recognition of the Earl's own

fatherly duties. He states of his late guardian's children: 'the money I design for

them will be far better spent now, or some portion of it, in helping the fatherless

⁷⁷⁶ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 123.

⁷⁷⁷ Mintz, *A Prison of Expectations*, p. xi.

⁷⁷⁸ Nelson, *Family Ties*, p. 145.

⁷⁷⁹ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 148.

⁷⁸⁰ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 150.

children on in the world'.⁷⁸¹

Upon hearing of Helen's marriage to his only biological tie, the Earl's cousin Captain Bruce, the Earl regresses to his previous child-like state. The striking image conveyed by allowing himself to be carried by Malcolm shows this:

'Malcolm lifted his master, and carried him, just as in the days when the Earl was a child'.⁷⁸² This is even further exemplified through his new-found reliance upon Mrs Campbell, 'whom he seemed to cling to as when he was a little child'.⁷⁸³ As the marriage which has taken the Earl's strength begins to show signs of decay, however, the Earl's resolve increases and he acts almost as a protective father figure

in bringing about Helen's recovery. Helen is quickly freed from the role of wife through Captain Bruce's death by consumption, and her salvation comes in the form

of her child. As she had been throughout the Earl's childhood, she is able to continue in a purely motherly role: 'It was easy to see that she would be one of those women who remain such - mothers, and nothing but mothers, to the end their

days'.⁷⁸⁴ This insistence on Helen as nothing but maternal again removes any sexual

implication that she may carry. Aware that 'it was no longer simply through ties of

love and respect that motherhood laid claim to a central role in the public sphere:

national greatness was contingent upon reproduction'.⁷⁸⁵ Craik makes herself

⁷⁸¹ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 154.

⁷⁸² Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 176.

⁷⁸³ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 180.

⁷⁸⁴ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 224.

⁷⁸⁵ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, pp. 74-75.

current in social debates and by recognising this shift she is able to introduce Helen's child into the narrative with no connotations of sex. Instead she produces an heir to the Earl's estate, contributing to this national greatness in enabling the Earl's lineage, and therefore the aristocracy he represents, to continue, albeit in a slightly more harmonious manner that connects the classes. This bequeathing of property serves to minimise the radical nature of an inheritance beyond blood ties as well as beyond class structure.

The Earl has rather a childlike reaction to the introduction of Helen's child,

he 'begged as a special favour, to be allowed to do exactly as he liked with his little

'cousin'... a mystery which it was his lot to behold - as all the joys of life - from the outside',⁷⁸⁶ and the distinct lack of any Bruce influence serves to make the transition easier upon the Earl. Craik states that the child 'inherited Helen's great blue eyes, large frame, and healthy temperament; and was, in short, that repetition of the mother in the son which Dame Nature delights in, and out of which she sometimes makes the finest and noblest men that the world ever sees'.⁷⁸⁷ The maternal role had shifted in terms of a mother's responsibility and she was seen to hold the key to the offspring's disposition. Indeed, 'rarely...can any public work that [women] do equal the value of the priceless work of building up, stone by stone, the temple of a good man's character which falls to the lot of his mother'.⁷⁸⁸ Craik represents this view through Helen's concerns that her child will inherit Captain Bruce's negative characteristics. This is illustrated by Craik's use of Helen's overreaction to the child's minor untruth, "What if my son, my only

⁷⁸⁶ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 226.

⁷⁸⁷ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 230.

⁷⁸⁸ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 75.

son, should inherit - I mean, if he should grow up to be a liar?" That word "inherit" betrayed her. No wonder now at the mother's agony of fear - she who was mother to Captain Bruce's son'.⁷⁸⁹ Yet, as Mitchell has argued, Captain Bruce is 'less a character than a device to provide a fantasy son for the chaste lovers to raise: Helen's courtship and married life are not even admitted to the imagined reality of the story, but take place entirely off stage'.⁷⁹⁰

Captain Bruce acts as a male surrogate for the Earl. Unable to father a child himself, he takes on full responsibility for the child, with Captain Bruce's own permission and as a result of this, he is provided with an heir to which he has a blood tie. As Mitchell suggests, this neatly ties up any question of sexuality between the Earl and Helen, as the situation 'cleanses both motherhood and male-female companionship of the sexuality and the unequal power that contaminate them in the real world'.⁷⁹¹ The Earl's unfaltering insistence that Helen's child 'is my boy too'⁷⁹² is evident throughout and Craik even states: 'The Earl's eyes brightened almost as much as Helen's did, when Cardcross leaped in',⁷⁹³ suggesting that the Earl fully fulfils a paternal role for the child. Having such a solid involvement in the boy's life fulfils the Earl in a new way, and he insists 'he is my son too... my adopted son; and it is time that he should know it',⁷⁹⁴ further cementing their attachment to each other. In an astonishing display of frankness, he admits: 'I should like - it would make me happy - if on his coming of age he

⁷⁸⁹ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 246.

⁷⁹⁰ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 65.

⁷⁹¹ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 65.

⁷⁹² Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 277.

⁷⁹³ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 262.

⁷⁹⁴ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 281.

were to change his name, or add mine to it',⁷⁹⁵ suggesting the child will no longer simply be 'boy'.

The omission of the child's name, only to be referred to as 'boy' cannot be overlooked. Craik does not include him as a character in his own right, instead as a canvas upon which the Earl can project 'the founder of a new name and family'.⁷⁹⁶ 'Boy' is predominantly a representative character and alludes to the representative nature of Craik's other characters also, particularly her protagonist.

Holmes argues that:

the afflicted child, the begging impostor, and the unmarried woman were reproduced over and over again in Victorian culture because they were eminently functional representations, useful for mediating the anxieties and desires of a host of different segments of the non-disabled public.⁷⁹⁷

Craik does not allow the Earl wholly to overcome his physical prison, and he perceives this through his utterance of: 'while keeping a safe watch over him [Helen's child], and a cheerful house always open to him, I shall also give him somebody to take care of. I shall be as much charge to him almost as a woman-and it will be good for him'.⁷⁹⁸ In this way, Craik is commenting on the limitations of women and the responsibility that they bring, a line of argument that is not exclusive to this novel but evident in many other works of the period. Craik 'usually made the crippled character male, but the behaviour and emotion of her invalids are always feminine'. These contextual 'fears of the masculination of women',⁷⁹⁹ were

⁷⁹⁵ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 283.

⁷⁹⁶ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 233.

⁷⁹⁷ Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 189.

⁷⁹⁸ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 291.

⁷⁹⁹ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 43.

accompanied by a ‘corresponding fear of effeminacy in men: both were expressions

of degeneration’,⁸⁰⁰ and Craik appears to recognise this, confronting these ideas.

She wishes to ‘tie all social boundaries together [and] think about disability not as an isolated, individual medical pathology but instead as a key defining social

category on par with race, class and gender’.⁸⁰¹ Mintz argues that:

The personal family conflict between a father and a child embodied tensions and issues that stood at the core of Victorian culture... no understanding of the pattern of emotional relationships within a Victorian home can be complete without a recognition of the way family experiences embodied larger cultural concerns involving such basic concepts as authority, duty, legitimacy, and personal responsibility.⁸⁰²

The Earl’s relationship with Helen’s child directly addresses such concepts without

the narrowing effect that a closely biologically related family would present. This

enables Craik to suggest that, ‘many a man, absorbed in the restless struggle of this

busy world, prosperous citizen, husband and father, had, on the whole, led a far less

happy life than the Earl of Cairnforth’.⁸⁰³ It also allows their relationship to be of

mutual advantage as Helen’s child feels that the Earl never ‘watched me nor

domineered over me.’⁸⁰⁴

Of the decision to make the boy his heir, the Earl states that he was ‘deliberately chosen... not merely as being my cousin and my nearest of kin, but because he is his mother’s son’,⁸⁰⁵ paying tribute to the unassuming family that

⁸⁰⁰ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 43.

⁸⁰¹ Catherine J. Kudlick, ‘Disability History: Why we need Another “Other”’, *The American Historical Review*, 108:3 (June 2003), 763-793 (p. 764).

⁸⁰² Mintz, *A Prison of Expectations*, p. 59.

⁸⁰³ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 269.

⁸⁰⁴ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 301.

⁸⁰⁵ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 307

had adopted the Earl as their own in previous years. It also allows him to have some legitimate familial tie to them, and here the gap between the two classes has all but closed, as the boy binds the two families together. It appears that only now, only when the Earl has found his family, albeit self-made, is he able to be released from his helpless body and leave his legacy and estate, both material and otherwise, in good faith. Mitchell suggests that: 'All of the important characters - Helen, the Earl, the son - accept human frailty and dependence by taking help when they need it',⁸⁰⁶ which is wholly evident in the self-made family that the two lines have created. It is only upon his grave that he is fully named, and the 'last Earl of Cairnforth' which has been uttered throughout the narrative takes on a new meaning. Never again will there be another like him and the 'old' way has been paved over by a form of New Covenant brought by the Earl. He was both young and old at the same time throughout the novel, and it is here that this disability, seen as a prison, is viewed with a new light of liberation, as he was able to act in such a way because he was denied the heavy weights of an enforced biological familial responsibility. As he regresses to a child-like state once again in death, laid next to his father and mother in a 'small coffin, scarcely heavier than a child's',⁸⁰⁷ he has fulfilled the roles which he thought unavailable to him: living not only to come of age and inherit his fortune, but also to pass it on to a legitimate heir, continually parenting despite being physically and biologically unable to do so. In this way, Craik ties the themes of adoption and disability together irreversibly, by removing any chains of expectation and allowing her characters to create new familial modes, using her protagonist's disability to

⁸⁰⁶ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 66.

⁸⁰⁷ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 313.

generate a new understanding of both limitation and acceptance. As Elaine Showalter argues, 'Craik was both influential and representative'⁸⁰⁸ bringing such provocative subjects as adoption and disability to a more accessible level and with a certain voice of authority, as she was familiar with both issues on a personal level. Craik often wrote on characters that deviate from the norm. Here, she uses disability as that deviation. In using the treatment of disability to humble the aristocracy and challenge eugenic ideals of heredity, alongside suggesting a new familial mode that is more accepting, she is able to conclude that other forms of approval and acceptance are available, beyond conceptions of a perfect body and a perfect family. Craik instead places the focus on emotional ties to other human beings, emphasising the development of strength when they 'have to take care of someone else'.⁸⁰⁹

The treatment of the physically disabled in Victorian Britain is directly linked to the able-bodied public's fears of social, political and economic upheaval, as well as inner moral battles specific to the individual. The afflicted were often used as commodities that allowed the able-bodied scope to compare themselves against the disabled; an outward embodiment of inner torment or sin that plagued the able-bodied. Cora Kaplan argues that 'such spectacles reassured Victorians as to their own normative humanity and superior attributes'.⁸¹⁰ For the physically disabled, their difference made them spectacles, relegated to the sidelines of mainstream society. It often engulfed their identity entirely, posing a perceived

⁸⁰⁸ Showalter, 'Dinah Mulock Craik and the Tactics of Sentiment', p. 7.

⁸⁰⁹ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 66.

⁸¹⁰ Cora Kaplan, *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2010), p. 141.

threat to the very idea of physicality through the difference and abnormality such affliction presented.

The Travelling Cloak: Legs of Its Own

Although Craik primarily wrote for a middle-class female readership, she also wrote children's stories. This was firstly a financial decision and was later influenced by her own child. *The Little Lame Prince*, described as 'a parable for young and old', was first serialised in 1875 in the magazine *Good Words*⁸¹¹ and depicts a young prince disabled in infancy, left to carry out his childhood and adolescence in a sickroom of a tower. As is typical of Craik, the tale is optimistic and affirmative in tone throughout, and has a particularly happy ending. It tackles motifs of mid-Victorian ideas of inheritance in terms of the transmission of status and property, as well as acceptance of, and liberation through, disability, providing a first-hand account of the experience of the disabled through Craik's own experience of her husband loss of the use of his legs as a result of a railway accident in the 1860s, shortly before the two met.

The tale opens thus: 'Yes he was the most beautiful prince that ever was born'.⁸¹² At this point, the child is able-bodied and this fairytale scene depicts a picture of utopic positivity. This scene of domestic bliss is short-lived however, as the child's mother, Dolorez falls into sickness and dies. In this, the prince is able to replace her in his disability with his inheritance of her name, becoming Prince Dolor. This feminisation of disability is a technique characteristic of Craik and is seen in many of her works, notably, as we have seen, in the presentation of the

⁸¹¹ *Good Words* was a periodical that ran between 1860 to 1906, after which it became merged with the weekly *Sunday Magazine* until 1910. It was primarily aimed at evangelical members of the lower middle class.

⁸¹² Dinah Craik, *The Little Lame Prince* (Rockville: Serenity Publishers, 2010), p. 7.

protagonist the Earl in *A Noble Life*. The protagonists presented in both *The Little Lamé Prince* and *A Noble Life* are strikingly similar. Both male, both of aristocratic descent, they struggle to attain the roles associated with both masculinity and aristocracy. Kept in infancy through their respective disabilities, they are wholly reliant on others throughout their infancy and adolescence and only fulfil their rightful roles after a period of seclusion, be it mental, physical, or both.

The scene of the accident that cripples the young Prince is described thus:

In truth, though very few knew, the Prince in coming to the chapel had met with a slight disaster. His nurse, - not his ordinary one, but the state nurse-maid, - an elegant and fashionable young lady of rank, whose duty it was to carry him to and from the chapel, had been so occupied in arranging her train with one hand, while she held the baby with the other, that she stumbled and let him fall, just at the foot of the staircase. To be sure, she contrived to pick him up again the next minute, and the accident was so slight and seemed hardly worth speaking of. Consequently nobody did speak of it. The baby had turned deadly pale, but did not cry, so no person a step or two behind could discover anything wrong; afterward, even if he had moaned, the silver trumpets were loud enough to drown his voice. It would have been a pity to let anything trouble such a day of felicity.⁸¹³

All concern for the child is lost amongst the noise of celebration of status, of spectacle and pageantry. This is mirrored in the use of trumpets to silence the fairy god-mother who is to fulfil the child's social needs as the narrative progresses. Craik states: 'They began to blow the silver trumpets in order to stop all further conversation',⁸¹⁴ which further explores the role of high status in challenging the parental care of a child, seen also in the concern with propriety and social standing in Craik's 1850 novel *Olive*. This fairy god-mother, 'the little

⁸¹³ Craik, *The Little Lamé Prince*, pp. 9-10.

⁸¹⁴ Craik, *The Little Lamé Prince*, p 11.

old woman dressed in gray',⁸¹⁵ recognises the injured child and her maternal influence upon him is cemented through her admission: 'My friend in the palace is the King's wife'.⁸¹⁶

The old woman ignores the allegations that she is 'exceedingly ill-bred'⁸¹⁷ and focuses directly upon the child. She states: 'I choose to take him for my own, and be his god-mother, ready to help him whenever he wants me'.⁸¹⁸ This non-biological familial link is seen in much of Craik's work, showing her championing of adoption and non-biological familial ties outside of this fairy tale setting. Indeed, she states: 'I think people generally are kind to motherless children, whether princes or peasants',⁸¹⁹ and the 'orphaned and helpless Prince Dolor', as Mitchell suggests, 'is a projection of the female situation'.⁸²⁰ Indeed, as Mitchell continues to suggest, 'some of the details suggest the rather specific social conditions of Victorian women's lives'.⁸²¹ That is, Craik's feminisation of her male characters can be seen directly as commentary upon the scripted roles available to women in the nineteenth century. As Frawley states:

The invalid was not only an especially ambiguous type of medical figure but also a multivalent social actor, one who played a 'sick role' scripted in various ways by society and inflected by other dimensions of identity, chief among them gender, class, nationality, and religious belief.⁸²²

Following the Christening, the child's new existence comes forth. Craik states: 'everything seemed to go wrong with him',⁸²³ and the child's insensible

⁸¹⁵ Craik, *The Little Lane Prince*, p 11.

⁸¹⁶ Craik, *The Little Lane Prince*, p 12.

⁸¹⁷ Craik, *The Little Lane Prince*, p 12.

⁸¹⁸ Craik, *The Little Lane Prince*, p 12.

⁸¹⁹ Craik, *The Little Lane Prince*, p 14.

⁸²⁰ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 88.

⁸²¹ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 89.

⁸²² Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity*, p. 4.

⁸²³ Craik, *The Little Lane Prince*, p 14.

environment is alluded to once more. Of the child's now evident disability, Craik states: 'What a dreadful thing! What a misfortune for the country!'⁸²⁴ going on to say, rather as a cleverly placed afterthought, 'Rather a misfortune to him also, poor boy! But nobody seemed to think of that'.⁸²⁵ This further reiterates the lack of maternal care for the child; the entire community viewing him solely as an heir, and only recognising his worth as such.

The death of the king and the banishment of the child to his tower relieve the prince of any royal duty. Indeed: People soon ceased to call him his Majesty, which seemed such a ridiculous title for a poor little fellow, a helpless cripple, - with only head and trunk, and no legs to speak of'.⁸²⁶ In true fairy tale manner, Craik introduces a malevolent character in the form of the child's uncle, who forges the prince's death and takes over his royal duties, becoming King himself. Craik is quick to dispel any real connotations of evil, however, instead describing him thus:

He did not mean to be cruel. If anybody had called him so, he would have resented it extremely: he would have said that what he did was done entirely for the good of the country. But he was a man who had always been accustomed to consider himself first and foremost, believing that whatever he wanted was sure to be right, and therefore he ought to have it. So he tried to get it, and got it too, as people like him very often do.⁸²⁷

This again comments upon the importance given to status and the overlooking of individual needs.

Under the care of a deaf and dumb man who was to visit monthly with provisions, and a nurse who was to be executed but allowed to live as long as the

⁸²⁴ Craik, *The Little Lamé Prince*, p 14.

⁸²⁵ Craik, *The Little Lamé Prince*, p 14.

⁸²⁶ Craik, *The Little Lamé Prince*, p 19.

⁸²⁷ Craik, *The Little Lamé Prince*, p 20.

prince lived, the child is taken to his new home - a large tower in the plains that are wholly uninhabited. Craik states: 'It was not an unhappy life. There was nobody to tease or ill use him, and he was never ill',⁸²⁸ and the sick room becomes a 'legitimized site for the representation of an alternative society and mode of existence'.⁸²⁹ However, Craik is not suggesting that disabled people should be separated from society. To the contrary, the re-introduction of the old woman, the child's fairy god-mother, tells of a different suggestion altogether.

As the child makes his wish for companionship, so his god-mother arrives, bringing with her the travelling cloak which alters the child's existence. With the cloak comes the realisation that the child is not like other children, due to both his status and his disability. Another motif of Craik's work - the acceptance of one's lot - is confronted here as she states:

The sense of the *inevitable*, as grown-ups call it - that we cannot have things as we want them to be, but as they are, and that we must learn to bear them and make the best of them - this lesson, which everybody has to learn soon or late - came, alas! Sadly soon to the poor boy.⁸³⁰

The prince:

began dimly to guess what his godmother meant. He had never seen any real live boys, but he had seen pictures of them running and jumping; which he had tried hard to imitate but always failed. Now he began to understand why he failed, and that he always should fail - that, in fact, he was not like other little boys; and it was of no use wishing to do as they did, and play as they played, even if he had had them to play with. His was a separate life, in which he must find out new work and new pleasures for himself.⁸³¹

The cloak, however, is Craik's way of allowing the Prince some liberation from his prison, both from the 'Hopeless Tower', and from his disability. It allows him

⁸²⁸ Craik, *The Little Lame Prince*, p 24.

⁸²⁹ Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction*, p. 9.

⁸³⁰ Craik, *The Little Lame Prince*, p 34.

⁸³¹ Craik, *The Little Lame Prince*, p 34.

a 'vantage point above the earth',⁸³² and ensures that 'the magic travelling cloak can provide entertainment, nourish the mind, and comfort the spirit in even the most oppressive circumstances'.⁸³³ Craik ensures that the prince does not possess a large amount of self-pity, and in this she is able to comment directly upon society and the realities of living with suffering and ailment. She states:

When we see people suffering or unfortunate, we feel very sorry for them; but when we see them bravely bearing their sufferings and making the best of their misfortunes, it is quite a different feeling. We respect, we admire them. One can respect and admire even a little child.⁸³⁴

This goes some way in categorising her works, as such noble suffering is seen in *Olive*, *A Noble Life*, and *John Halifax, Gentleman*.

Bestowed with a pair of glasses and silver ears that amplify his senses, the prince is able to see further into what life is like for the able-bodied, serving only to demonstrate his lot. Indeed, 'almost all of the ordinary delights of boy-life had been taken away from, or rather never given to this poor little prince'.⁸³⁵ Instead, the prince, liberated and enlightened by his travelling cloak, is able to see beauty in the simplest of pleasures. Craik describes his reaction to the countryside:

Yet it was nothing but what most of you children see every day and never notice... It had no particular features - nothing in it grand or lovely - was simply pretty, nothing more; yet to Prince Dolor, who had never gone beyond his lonely tower and level plain, it appeared the most charming sight imaginable.⁸³⁶

This is paralleled with both Olive's and the Earl's joy in nature, and Craik goes on to state:

⁸³² Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 88.

⁸³³ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 88.

⁸³⁴ Craik, *The Little Lame Prince*, p 38.

⁸³⁵ Craik, *The Little Lame Prince*, p 46.

⁸³⁶ Craik, *The Little Lame Prince*, p 49.

There is something which we listen to daily and never notice... We hear this, and are so accustomed to it that we think nothing of it; but Prince Dolor, who had lived all his days in the dead silence of Hopeless Tower, heard it for the first time. And oh! If you had seen his face.⁸³⁷

Here Craik is championing the simple pleasures in life during a time when advances in the industrial, medical and social sectors were forthcoming, and also communicating to the able-bodied the realities and difficulties that the disabled faced in having their voices and experiences heard by an able-bodied public. As found in most of her works, the disabled protagonist faces extreme adversity and must enter into a rite of passage to achieve something akin to personal growth. As Mitchell recognises, the protagonist must go through 'rejection, enforced helplessness, a discovery of inner self-determination which may not alter worldly status but does make life bearable, and compensation found by living for and through others'.⁸³⁸

New hope for the prince comes in the form of his nurse's admission of his history. He states: 'But I must be independent... Fancy a king being dressed like a baby!'⁸³⁹ and as a child taking its first steps, surveys his kingdom. Sanders recognises that 'masculinity thus generates its own culture of anxiety, like femininity, as men feel the need to prove and test themselves against accepted ideals',⁸⁴⁰ and although Craik has heavily feminised her protagonist, he is still male with duties to carry out, which places Prince Dolor in an unenviable position, and one that the adolescent can scarcely understand. Craik states:

There were a few things in it which surprised Prince Dolor - and, as he had said, he could not understand them at all. One half of the people seemed so

⁸³⁷ Craik, *The Little Lane Prince*, p 51.

⁸³⁸ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 90.

⁸³⁹ Craik, *The Little Lane Prince*, p 60.

⁸⁴⁰ Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 95.

happy and busy - hurrying up and down the full streets, or driving lazily along the parks in their grand carriages, while the other half were so wretched and miserable,⁸⁴¹

which she uses to highlight the injustices of Victorian Britain. The death of the king, Prince Dolor's uncle, signals a new era for both the Prince and his people. However, a revolution starts, as the 'restless country has fancied change better than no change at all'.⁸⁴² In this turmoil, the Prince regresses back to boyhood and longs for the safety and solitude of his tower. This is characteristic of Craik and the 'keeping [of] her male characters in a familiar and feminised setting'.⁸⁴³ Indeed, 'even his lonely tower seemed home, and its dreariness and silence absolute paradise after all this'.⁸⁴⁴ Following a period of desolation and solitude, much like Christ in the desert, the prince 'sat very calm and patient, like a king in his castle, waiting for the end'.⁸⁴⁵ He states:

'Still, I wish I had done something first - something worth doing, that somebody might remember me by... Suppose I had grown a man, and had work to do, and people to care for, and was so useful and busy that they liked me, and perhaps even forgot I was lame? Then it would have been nice to live, I think.'⁸⁴⁶

Craik bestows upon him this chance. Sanders suggests that 'while women were expected to 'endure', or suffer and be still, men... were given the more heroic quality of stocism',⁸⁴⁷ and the prince is finally allowed this stoic bravery in his rule. Although a 'crucial figure in Craik's map of interior territory is illness, disability, and the figure of the weak or damaged human',⁸⁴⁸ her protagonists are

⁸⁴¹ Craik, *The Little Lane Prince*, p 63.

⁸⁴² Craik, *The Little Lane Prince*, p 68.

⁸⁴³ Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 103.

⁸⁴⁴ Craik, *The Little Lane Prince*, p 68.

⁸⁴⁵ Craik, *The Little Lane Prince*, p 73.

⁸⁴⁶ Craik, *The Little Lane Prince*, p 73.

⁸⁴⁷ Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 95.

⁸⁴⁸ Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 112.

given special opportunities within which to create a meaningful existence. For example, as the trumpets sound and the prince is released from his sick room after fifteen years, he is crowned King. Craik states: 'So Prince Dolor quitted his tower – which he had entered so mournfully and ignominiously as a helpless baby carried in the deaf-mute's arms - quitted it as the great King of Nomansland'.⁸⁴⁹ This almost familial arrangement of disability, the physically disabled Prince and the deaf-mute, is significant as they understand each other's plight; the non-biological family becoming closer than the biological due to similar experiences and understanding. Craik also uses Prince Dolor's return to the throne to recognise the expansion in medical understanding, as 'a council of eminent surgeons and mechanics invented for him a wonderful pair of crutches, with the help of which, though he never walked easily or gracefully, he did manage to walk so as to be quite independent'.⁸⁵⁰ Bailin recognises that 'the sickroom in Victorian fiction is a haven of comfort, order, and natural affection',⁸⁵¹ and Craik is here suggesting that the idea of the sickroom can exist within those who experience it after they have left the physical space. That is, Prince Dolor rules his kingdom as the previously mentioned haven of Bailin's suggestion.

Craik chooses not to bestow upon her protagonist a family of his own, instead allowing his subjects to take on the role of his children and his godmother the roles of both mother and wife:

He never gave them a queen. When they implored him to choose one, he replied that his country was his bride, and he desired no other. But perhaps the real reason was that he shrank from any change; and that no wife in all

⁸⁴⁹ Craik, *The Little Lambe Prince*, p 78.

⁸⁵⁰ Craik, *The Little Lambe Prince*, p 80.

⁸⁵¹ Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction*, p. 6.

the world would have been found so perfect, so loveable, so tender to him in all his weaknesses as his beautiful old godmother.⁸⁵²

In removing any sense of sexuality, Craik is able to maintain both the purity of the children's parable and also the nobility of the Prince. He is particularly feminised during the narrative, from the adaptation of his mother's name to his reliance on others; through which Craik offers an oblique commentary upon the crippling social roles available to women during the nineteenth century. In this way, Craik is using physical disability to represent the social disability of being a woman. She uses her simple children's story, like much of her fiction for adults, to point to wider issues in a society that wanted to keep women housebound in her maternal and marital roles. Craik is able to comment upon this and also go some way in offering a social salvation in terms of showing understanding of, and sympathy for, such crippling roles.

As Prince Dolor eventually passes on his crown to a distant relative, nineteenth-century ideals of inheritance are adhered to. In this way, Craik is able to stay within the confines of propriety whilst employing whimsy in the Prince's final scenes, as his subjects watch him fly away on his sacred travelling-cloak. In using the genre of children's literature, Craik is able to speak simply and plainly upon the subjects she explores within the narrative, the most noticeable being how disability need not mean a prison of either social or psychological making. Indeed, the liberation it brings can often be a blessing, much as the travelling-cloak is to Prince Dolor.

The treatment of disability altered as the century progressed, but what did remain throughout was the question of how to manage the afflicted. Both disabled

⁸⁵² Craik, *The Little Lame Prince*, p 81.

men and women were not expected to fulfil standard roles as set out by society, and were instead viewed as lesser beings; feminised and infantilised to the point of incarceration. What Craik has achieved in *Olive, A Noble Life* and *The Little Lamé Prince* is to show that disabled individuals can in fact overcome their adversity and become functioning members of society, even exceeding expectation and taking their rightful places as aristocracy and royalty in the cases of the Earl and Prince Dolor. That the male protagonists are heightened in social class reveals that Craik worked hard not to see them feminised at the culmination of the narratives, instead choosing to allow them to fulfil more masculine roles; taking part in the running of the Empire despite the expectation that they will be physically unable to do so. Upon *Olive*, Craik bestows a conclusion that sees her protagonist not only fulfil her personal desires, but those of society. She is a wife and mother, albeit non-biologically, and Craik has enabled her to find her place in society and adhere to the expectations previously denied to her. Kaplan states: 'it was crucial to campaigners that these... men, women and children commanded sympathy and invoked as little as possible the atavistic fear of radical disability',⁸⁵³ and yet Craik mirrors Martineau in the normalising of her protagonists in order to reveal the absurdity of the treatment of the afflicted in nineteenth-century society. Showing them to be able to fulfil customary social roles, and as sound-minded individuals, Craik is able to provide commentary on the way in which the disabled were viewed as less than human in some ways and in need of management, choosing instead to present a far more liberating existence for her protagonists.

⁸⁵³ Kaplan, *Victoriana*, p. 141.

Conclusion

The texts discussed within the thesis all follow a strikingly similar pattern. They begin with a challenge to cultural expectations and preconceptions of disability, narrate a search for identity for the afflicted individuals and those linked to them, encounter some level of liberation, and conclude with both acceptance of the respective disability and triumph in the recognition of the disabled as a functioning and effective part of society. Indeed, as Holmes suggests:

[The] shift of pathos [to disability] exemplifies how the cultural assumption of disability as misery, lack, suffering, sorrow, and loss, is kept alive, along with the fantasy of happiness, wholeness, self-sufficiency, and plenitude of able bodiedness. Of course sadness can be part of the experience of disability, but for people with impairments, sorrow does not necessarily cling to the impaired body or cover it as a master narrative.⁸⁵⁴

For the blind, we see a new vision of both the protagonists and of society; freed from the perceptions of social expectation, and therefore without being able to see their better able-bodied counterparts for comparative purposes, each blind character discussed here is able to see an altogether altered way of life than the sighted members of Victorian society. The blind are, somewhat ironically, enabled by a deeper sense of vision, they are able to see things that their able-bodied contemporaries cannot begin to comprehend. This manifests itself in a number of different ways. For *Poor Miss Finch*'s Lucilla, it means allowing for a challenge in prejudice, and the arrival at a conclusion of inclusion, recognising that each individual, regardless of what our eyes tell us about them, is fundamentally equal to ourselves. For Sybilla Rothesay, blindness is primarily

⁸⁵⁴ Holmes, "Happy and Yet Pitying Tears", p. 64.

concerned with the idea of removing propriety and expectation, and celebrating the freedom and reconciliation this allows. For Dickens' Bertha, blindness ensures that an individual's inner situation takes precedence over the physical position and circumstance, and Collins' Leonard overcomes the particularly restrictive masculine blindness to enable a deeper sense of equality between himself and his wife.

In deafness, the perceived savagery attached to the affliction allows for commentary and exploration of the nature of humanity. This becomes particularly liberating because the afflicted are able to deafen themselves against the strict instruction given by Victorian culture. This is why Victorian society was most threatened by the deaf out of all the disabilities discussed here, and explains the reasoning behind the perceived constant need for deaf management. Martineau's deaf playmate is able to identify with himself following a period of complete isolation, and Collins' Madonna escapes the fate of 'commodity' to create a particularly normative existence for herself. Dickens presents his deaf protagonist Sophy as a character that dispels cultural fears concerning hereditary influence and dampens the importance of social instruction regarding the organisation and management of those afflicted in this way.

The representation of physical abnormality holds up a mirror to Victorian society, often inciting extreme discomfort. The depictions of physical disability discussed here are more extreme in male characters, suggesting that the higher the visibility of the physical deformity, the more moralistic and virtuous the disabled character is represented to be. This representation challenges the notion of an outward embodiment of sin and ethical corruption, suggesting very firmly that

there is no link between moral fibre and physical exterior. For the female Olive, rites of passage that were seemingly so out of reach are achieved, The Earl of Cairnforth is able to carry out his duties uncorrupted and thriving in his role, and Prince Dolor is similarly able to adhere to his expected roles. Yet, in this way, physical abnormality adheres wholly to the overriding theme of liberation present in the thesis, as these disabled characters are used to enlighten their able-bodied counterparts about what a disabled individual can achieve and how far they are able to observe the gendered expectations of them. These plots of physical disability also bear out Martineau's observation that: 'It is the disorder of any organ of the body, or function of the mind, which discloses to us the very true structure and action',⁸⁵⁵ which relates to the idea of society's need for the physically disabled against which to measure themselves.

Throughout each text, extreme, and sometimes disproportionate, focus is placed upon emotional attachment and the chosen family. This removes hereditary expectation, of course, but also recognises and emphasises the basic human need for companionship and acceptance, regardless of physical condition. Issues that so preoccupied the Victorians, such as gender and class, are also dampened in importance through the depictions of disability shown here. The combined plots of disability and the chosen family work to present a kind of liberation, agency, and freedom from expectations of both biological and cultural destiny. These seemingly separate plots often appear together to challenge the debates surrounding the improvement of the race as a result of superior breeding, and also

⁸⁵⁵ Martineau, 'Deaf Mutes', p. 134.

to suggest that the familial bond can be strengthened by extending it outward to favoured and preferred self-made kin.

Instead of keeping its afflicted restrained, then, disability actually allows the afflicted to escape the prison-like expectations of propriety that trapped and constricted its able-bodied inhabitants. For women, this meant that they were not required to partake in the marriage market, or adhere to maternal expectation. For men, this escape from propriety is just as significant. They were expected to exist simultaneously within both the public and private spheres, produce healthy heirs, and maintain the face of Victorian Britain. It goes some way in bridging the gap between both gender and class divisions, acting as an equaliser; a channel that allows the humanity and frailty of the individual to take precedence, both challenging, and in some ways, dispelling the Victorian fear of difference and of the 'other'. Indeed, as Craik suggests: 'In spite of its outward incompleteness, it had been a noble life'.⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵⁶ Craik, *A Noble Life*, p. 313.

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