Disabilities and Gender in the Novels of Wilkie Collins

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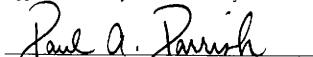

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Many Victorian novelists sought to promote the importance of the individual by placing their characters in situations that allowed them to go outside society's pre-established boundaries. In spite of these novelists' intentions, a closer study of their works reveals that the writers who tried to move beyond society's expectations were often inherently trapped within them. My thesis argues that Wilkie Collins's representations of characters with disabilities show that even though Collins intended for disabilities to help characters supercede society's expectations for them, the Victorian context in which he was writing prevented him from completely achieving his goals. In particular, my thesis examines the ways in which Victorian attitudes toward gender influenced Collins's portrayals of characters with disabilities. Disabilities served to empower Collins's female characters who either physically embodied Victorian ideals of beauty and purity or who were financially independent. In contrast, women who did not fulfill these expectations were hurt by disabilities, as were all of Collins's male characters. My thesis outlines the ways in which Collins's constructions of these characters indicate that he was unconsciously influenced by his society's beliefs about gender even as he was challenging these beliefs.

INTRODUCTION

An age of increased urbanization and industrialization, the Victorian period was a time of great unrest in England. In response to the rapid changes taking place in society, Victorians sought to establish a coherent conception of their world; Robin Gilmour observes, "More than any previous generation the people we call Victorians were driven to find models of social harmony and personal conduct by means of which they could understand, control, and develop their rapidly changing world" (20). During this time in which Victorians struggled to define and understand the changes that were taking place in their society, they began to question, in particular, the ways in which individuals could distinguish themselves in a society that was becoming increasingly mechanical and impersonal. As they explored these questions through formal treatises, through art, and through literature (Gilmour 16-22), different artists and writers constantly challenged each other's ideology. Mary Poovey writes that "the middle-class ideology we most often associate with the Victorian period was both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations" (3). Linda Shires echoes this statement, arguing that Victorian thought can be characterized primarily by the instability of its ideology (185).

Because the instability of Victorian ideology encouraged the continual expression of new ideas, different artists were able to use their media as a means of challenging social boundaries. Mary Poovey explains that literature is a particularly good medium for offering alternatives to society's norms:

> Because imaginative texts do not wield the same kinds of social

> authority or produce the same kinds of social effects that some other discourses (like law or medicine, for example) do, they occupy a different social position and perform their ideological work in a slightly different way. Because literary texts mobilize fantasies without legislating action, they provide the site at which shared anxieties and tensions can surface as well as be symbolically addressed. (124)

Poovey thus argues that writers can argue effectively for social change through their writings because fictive texts do not hold direct social authority. At the same time, however, she makes the point that no writers are able to free themselves wholly from the influence of their societies' standards and expectations, explaining that "'Literature' cannot exist outside a system of social and institutional relations, and in a society characterized by systemic class and gender inequality, literature reproduces the system that makes it what it is" (123). Mitchell echoes Poovey's idea and focuses in particular on the ways in which "Even the most revered literary texts embody the prejudices and debilitating attitudes of their own historical moments of production" (13). Thus, even though Victorian authors frequently tried to change social ideology, the constraints of their society hindered them from fully accomplishing their goals.

Wilkie Collins's presentations of characters with disabilities in his novels illustrates this tension between Victorian writers' lofty moral goals and the societal conditions that prevent authors from fully departing from their society's prejudices. Collins's novels contain a variety of characters with mental disabilities, conditions that deprive them of one of their senses, and physical disfigurements. Although Collins explains that he wants disabilities in his works to reveal "the better parts of human

nature" and to inspire individuals' "nobler thoughts," his actual portrayals of figures with disabilities are sometimes gruesome, weak, and unappealing. In order to present this contrast more fully, the remainder of this introduction will explain Collins's reasons for emphasizing the role of disabilities in his novels. The chapters of this thesis will then turn to Collins's novels and examine his presentations of characters with disabilities.

"'Decline and Fall' in the Art of Writing Fiction": Collins's Criticism of Other Victorian Novels

A study of Collins's characters with physical and mental disabilities reveals that Collins persistently highlighted such characters in his novels in spite of the fact that his Victorian critics condemned these presentations and said that Collins's depictions of "physical, mental, and moral deformity . . . should be banished from fiction" (Lonoff 163). Although he received this negative attention, Wilkie Collins continued to emphasize figures with disabilities in his works, and his criticism of the novelists who were his contemporaries establishes a foundation for understanding his reasons for doing so. Collins's statements about his own writing indicate that he considers novels to be a worthy medium for teaching moral messages to audiences but that he believes that originality of characters and appeals are crucial to making this communication a success. He scorned the fiction of his day, writing to Paul Hamilton Hayne that the Victorian Age was "a period of 'Decline and fall', in the art of writing fiction" (3 May 1884), and he linked this period of decline to a lack of originality in the way in which themes and characters are presented in novels. Although he believed that novels could encourage readers to improve themselves, he felt that other novelists were too ponderous and predictable in their attempts to teach their audiences a moral lesson; moreover, he

suggests that more unique appeals might help writers accomplish their purposes better, explaining:

> The literary Pulpit . . . appears to me . . . to be rather overcrowded with the Preachers of Lay Sermons. Views of life and society to set us thinking penitently in some cases, or doubting contemptuously in others, were . . . quite plentiful enough already. More freshness and novelty of appeal to the much-lectured and much-enduring reader, seem[s] to lie in views which might put us on easier terms with ourselves and with others. . . (My Miscellanies, v)

Besides criticizing his contemporaries for writing novels that lacked originality in presenting moral messages, Collins also mocks traditional depictions of gender in Victorian novels by presenting them as hackneyed. In his collection of essays My Miscellanies, he suggests that presentations of men and women in these novels are roughly the same across all novels: "As a rule . . . our novel-reading enjoyments have hitherto been always derived from the same sort of characters and the same sort of stories" (111). Collins then comments on presentations of the male and female body and how novelists consistently link their bodies to the characters' actions and emotions; these comments show that Collins finds there to be a link between typical presentations of the body and presentations of the character. For example, in discussing male characters, he says that novelists frequently link men's arms to certain attitudes and challenges these novelists to change their ways of connecting the physical with the mind:

> [W]e have so often beheld him [the Hero] pacing with folded arms, so often heard him soliloquize with folded arms, so often broken in upon him meditating with folded arms, that we think he had better do something else with his arms for the

> future. Could he swing them, for a change? or put them akimbo? or drop them suddenly on either side of him? Or could he give them a holiday altogether, and fold his legs by way of variety? (112)

Similarly, Collins criticizes his contemporaries for consistently linking women's moral attributes to their physical characteristics:

> I know that it is a rule that, when two sisters are presented in a novel, one must be tall and dark, and the other short and light. I know that five feet eight of female flesh and blood, when accompanied by an olive complexion, black eyes, and raven hair, is synonymous with strong passions and an unfortunate destiny. . . I have studied these great first principles of the art of fiction too long not to reverence them as established laws; but I venture respectfully to suggest that the time has arrived when it is no longer necessary to insist on them in novel after novel. (113)

This quote indicates not only that Collins appreciated originality in presentation of characters, then, but also that he identified departures from the norms of movement and appearance as means by which novelists could distinguish their works from the other works of the day. Collins hoped that such departures would enable readers to appreciate more subtle moral messages as well.

"To Stir His Nobler Thoughts": Collins's Intentions for the Representation of Disabilities in His Works

In his novels, Collins consistently attempted to alter the norms of movement and appearance in his characters for the sake of offering moral messages to his readers, and representing some of his characters as disabled was one way he achieved these

alterations. In a letter of dedication for his second novel, Basil, Collins explains that he includes an accident that deforms a character in his book because he believes that introducing readers to characters dissimilar to people whom they have encountered in their lives is an effective means of communicating moral messages:

> By appealing to genuine sources of interest within the reader's own experience, I could certainly gain his attention to begin with; but it would be only by appealing to other sources (as genuine in their way) *beyond* his own experience, that I could hope to fix his interest and excite his suspense, to occupy his deeper feelings, or to stir his nobler thoughts. (v)

Collins says that he, unlike his contemporaries, chooses unusual events and characters, primarily characters with disabilities, to interest and inspire readers.

In later books, too, Collins highlights characters with disabilities and deformities to emphasize the position of marginalized figures; in doing so, he follows the path of many authors who use "disability to visually underscore the devaluation of marginal communities" (Mitchell and Snyder 21). Catherine Peters argues that Collins presents these characters to suggest that individuals can make a difference in their society. She explains that Collins highlights the positive aspects of handicaps to encourage his readers to understand that if even people with disabilities can rise above their conditions, then surely people without these misfortunes can make important contributions to those around them (xvii-xix). Indeed, Collins states that he believes that the patience of sufferers can serve as a testimony to the goodness of humanity; in his notes on Hide and Seek, he explains that he features a deaf-mute character in his novel for moral reasons:

> The moral purpose to be answered by the introduction of such as personage as this. . . lies. . . so plainly on the surface, that it can be hardly necessary for me to indicate it even to the most careless reader. I know of nothing which more firmly supports our faith in the better parts of human nature than to see . . .with what patience and cheerfulness the heavier bodily afflictions of humanity are borne. (431)

Collins suggests, then, that his readers should view his characters with disabilities as inspiration to believe in the goodness of people and in the importance of individuals.

"The Better Parts of Human Nature": A Literary Analysis of Disabilities in Collins's Works

Although Collins asserts that he wants disabilities in his works to benefit his readers morally and to emphasize the importance of individuals, a closer study of his characters with disabilities suggets that some of his works fall short of his intentions. This thesis presents an analysis of several of Collins's characters and argues that even though he intends to encourage readers to look beyond societal norms, Victorian attitudes toward gender heavily influence Collins's representations. Although Collins attempts to advance the plights of people with disabilities to inspire compassion in his readers, he ultimately reinforces his society's expectations for both men and women.

PART ONE

The introduction explains that even though Wilkie Collins frequently argued that he presented characters with mental and physical disabilities in the hopes that they would inspire compassion and "nobler thoughts" from his readers, the gender of these characters heavily influences Collins's perceptions of the ability of each of them to perform well in society. While women can indeed accomplish Collins's goal overtly, male characters are inhibited, tortured, and alienated by their disabilities. However, gender is not the only factor that determines an individual's ability to succeed in Collins's novels. Although Collins shows women as potentially noble because of their disabilities, it is only when they possess physical characteristics that fit in with Victorian ideals, an unusually high level of independent wealth, or both wealth and the "appropriate" appearance that they can use their disabilities as a source of strength. This chapter contrasts Collins's treatment of female characters with disabilities who also possess a high level of wealth or beauty with his attitude toward those female characters with disabilities who lack these additional qualities. The fact that such a contrast exists demonstrates how Collins's Victorian understanding of the world influences his ideas even without his realizing it. These ideas seem to render Collins incapable of envisioning a society in which people with certain disabilities are treated fairly and in which women, in particular, are not expected to conform to particular physical expectations. Collins's portrayals of women with disabilities thus both reflect and implicitly reinforce this Victorian way of thinking.

Collins's attitudes toward women reflect social conventions of appearance that exist throughout Victorian society; his female characters with disabilities embody Victorian desires for women to be beautiful physically but for that beauty also to reflect

purity and domesticity. Kathy Psomiades details the nature of this Victorian social expectation of feminine beauty in her study of the relationship between images of femininity and Victorian aestheticism and identifies art as the realm in which the ideal of beauty can be safely contained. Citing a 1937 essay by Herbert Marcuse, Psomiades recognizes that people have historically perceived that, although beauty is in some respects a cultural ideal, it can also be "dangerous," embodying a "violence that threatens the given form of existence"; Marcuse explains that "Beauty is fundamentally shameless. It displays what may not be promised openly and what is denied the majority" (qtd.in Psomiades 44). Moreover, Psomiades argues that there is a connection between this element of unattainable desire conceived as part of beauty and people's conceptions of feminine figures; she identifies a link between beauty and prostitution embedded in Marcuse's comment:

> By implication, the allures of beauty in affirmative culture function like the allures of the prostitute, promising the unattainable – 'real pleasure' – giving the illusion of its attainment, yet withholding true happiness in the realm of the ideal. Yet as well as the quality of shameless display, the prostitute and beauty also share the paradoxical function of putting on the market that which ought not to be bought and sold. . . Beauty, rather than soul, is problematic, because beauty **does** congeal in objects, because beauty is precisely, in its sexualized appeal, the problem. (45)

Although Psomiades argues that Victorian society considered beauty in women to be an ideal, she explains that beauty contains a "shameless" quality linked with prostitution and

with the idea of "putting [women] on the market." In spite of a desire for beauty in females, then, Victorians were suspicious of excessively beautiful women in society and linked their beauty to "shamelessness" and to implied involvement with prostitution. However, Psomiades notes that in art, unlike in society, beauty can be safely contained and rescued from the sordidness of society; a portrait of a woman can possess the ideal of beauty without its shameless qualities. Collins's portrayals of women reflect the assumption that he shares with many Victorians that beauty in a portrait is more ideal than that in the ordinary world because beauty in society is often impure.

Thus, Victorian expectations contain a paradox in that Victorians believe that women should be beautiful, but this expectation potentially conflicts with their desire for women to embody morality, purity, and domesticity. Though beauty itself was problematic, other Victorian standards for women were seen as complementary; Mary Poovey identifies the connection between domesticity and virtue in pre-Victorian beliefs:

> [V]irtue was increasingly articulated upon gender in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries . . . [V]irtue was depoliticized, moralized, and associated with the domestic sphere, which was being advanced at the same time – both rhetorically and, to a certain extent, materially – from the so-called public sphere . . . As superintendents of the domestic sphere, (middle-class) women were represented as protecting and, increasingly, incarnating virtue. (10)

Poovey goes on to explain that women, as "superintendents of the domestic sphere," are expected to embody virtue because their morality, unlike that of men who were involved in the public sphere, would not interfere with Britain's economic success; a man could

function in the public sphere while his wife served as his "moral hope" and "spiritual guide" (10). Indeed, Victorian author Margaret Oliphant pushed women to achieve purity for the sake of their countries, saying, "'A woman has one duty of invaluable importance to her country and her race which cannot be overestimated, and that is the duty of being pure" (qtd.in Helsinger et.al. 143). Unfortunately, this purity was hard to maintain; inherent in men's conceptions of women were women's reproductive capacities, which were necessarily part of the domestic sphere because a domestic woman was expected to give birth to children (Poovey 11). Thus, a conflict arose even between Victorian society's desires for purity and domesticity, but it was particularly difficult for women to meet these social expectations when they were beautiful as well.

In spite of Wilkie Collins's determination to challenge the stereotypes of physical characteristics associated with gender that he saw as structuring the writings of his contemporaries (My Miscellanies 111-114)[1], these pervasive physical expectations for women in Victorian society do in fact appear to dominate Collins's novels. The same tension exists in Collins's attitude toward class. Collins's overt treatment of class issues in "The Diary of Anne Rodway" provides evidence of his desire to remove barriers between classes. Through the narration of a poor woman who speaks feelingly but humbly about her situation, Collins reveals the difficulties that impoverished Victorians were facing; moreover, he challenges the dominant social assumption that people in lower stations of life should accept their position as what God had dictated to them:

> So little as poor people want to set up in house-keeping and be happy together, it seems hard that they can't get it when they are honest and hearty, and willing to work. The clergyman said in his sermon, last

> Sunday evening, that all things were ordered for the best, and we are all put into the stations in life that are properest for us. I suppose he was right, being a very clever gentleman who fills the church to crowding; but I think I should have understood him better if I had not been very hungry at the time, in consequence of my own station in life being nothing but Plain Needlewoman. (129)

On the surface, this passage seems to reinforce the solidity of people's stations in life; the narrator commends the clergyman and assumes the veracity of his statements. Collins calls these ideas into question, however, through his reference to the narrator's hunger and its relation to her "own station in life". Ultimately, this passage thereby challenges traditional ideas that assume that poor people somehow deserve their situation.

Although the opening of "The Diary of Anne Rodway" encourages a more positive assessment of those such as a "Plain Needlewoman," Collins's first novel, Basil, seems to contain an underlying suggestion that people from the lower classes have a questionable moral code. In this novel, Basil, who is the son of a wealthy gentleman from an ancient family, falls in love with a shopkeeper's daughter. After his father cautions him against involving himself with a member of a lower class, Basil expresses his irritation at his father's superior attitude, and a reader might well assume that Collins is portraying Basil's father unfavorably to show the elitist attitudes of the upper classes. However, Basil's father's warnings prove to be justified; the woman is cruel and materialistic, and Basil discovers her infidelity to him the night before they consummate their marriage. Thus, although Basil's love for this woman could be viewed favorably as

defiance of traditional class expectations and boundaries, the disastrous results of his love reflect some of the same biases that he apparently struggles against.

In the areas both of physical characteristics associated with gender stereotypes and of social class, this tension in Collins's attitude is highlighted by looking at the way he treats women with disabilities. Although Collins ostensibly intends to portray disabilities as potentially ennobling, his female characters can only retain some independence and power in spite of a disability when they meet Victorian physical and financial ideals. Disabilities serve to empower only those women who possess a great deal of money or whose physical appearance is both beautiful and somehow indicative of purity and domesticity. Given this conjunction of beauty and purity, it is not surprising that the physical ideal against which two of his female characters with disabilities are measured is the figure of the Virgin Mary. Helena Michie, for example, reminds us that the Virgin Mary often represented a feminine ideal of chastity in Victorian works (21). For Collins, as for many Victorian thinkers, the image of the Virgin Mary represented beauty and purity, and he directly aligns that with two of his female characters, one of whom is blind and the other deaf and mute. Writing about each in association with Raphael's pictures of the Madonna di San Sisto, Collins allows them to transcend societal restrictions in two ways: first, by their association with art (recall Psomiades's argument that beauty and purity can exist together in art but not in society), and second, by their association with the image of the Virgin Mary, which again represents the joining of beauty and purity. In addition to describing his characters as embodying the two sometimes contradictory Victorian ideals of beauty and purity, Collins views their disabilities not so much as disadvantages but as capable of empowering them; at the same

time, the ways in which these characters fulfill Victorian expectations of gender, class, and (dis)ability underscore the influences of Victorian ideology on Collins's ideas.

One of Collins's early novels, Hide and Seek, involves a character whose physical similarity to Raphael's portraits of Madonna dominates others' perceptions of her so much that her intimate friends all call her "Madonna." When Collins initially describes her, he links her physical appearance to these portraits and emphasizes the character traits of femininity and purity traditionally linked to images of Madonna, and in particular with Raphael's portraits of Madonna; he describes the reactions of people who meet her as follows:

> They unanimously asserted that the young lady's face was the nearest living approach they had ever seen to that immortal 'Madonna' face, which has for ever associated the idea of beauty with the name of RAPHAEL. . . The general effect of these features, the shape of her head and face, and especially her habitual expression, reminded all beholders at once, and irresistibly, of that image of softness, purity, and feminine gentleness, which has been engraven on all civilized memories by the 'Madonnas' of Raphael. (51)

Not only does Collins use "Madonna's" name to suggest that she has the purity of the Virgin Mary, but he also reinforces her purity by emphasizing her similarity to a portrait; this similarity links Madonna to art, the realm in which beauty and purity can co-exist. Valentine Blyth, the man who adopts Madonna, is explicit about this connection with art and tells people that he and his friends "used the name [Madonna] only in an artist-sense, and only with reference to Raphael's pictures" (51). Thus, Madonna embodies beauty

and purity together by serving both as an image of the Virgin Mary and as an image of a work of art by Raphael.

Madonna's physical resemblance to Raphael's portrait is crucial to her advancement in society because it places her in a position from which her disabilities can enable her to overcome her situation as an orphaned child who performs in a circus. Madonna is part of this circus from her infancy and endures physical abuse at the hands of its proprietor. When Madonna is a young child, an accident causes her to lose her ability to hear and speak and leads to the creation of an entire circus act that focuses on her disability (56-57). Although she is being exploited, this exploitation inspires compassion in others to a greater extent than do plights of other circus performers; thus, Madonna's disability automatically makes people treat her differently from other people in her situation, which is important because Victorians viewed circus performers as particularly low on the social stratum. Audience members who view Madonna's performance murmur, "'Deaf and dumb! Ah, dear, dear, deaf and dumb!'"(60), and Collins emphasizes the sorts of feelings that might occupy their minds, all of which indicate pity rather than a desire to watch a performance[2]:

> Ah, woful sight! So lovely, yet so piteous to look on! Shall she never hear kindly human voices, the song of birds, the pleasant murmur of the trees again? Are all the sweet sounds that sing of happiness to childhood, silent for ever to her? . . . Shall the clear, laughing tones be hushed always? The young, tender life be for ever a speechless thing, shut up in dumbness from the free world of voices? (61)

Thus, people who see Madonna perform feel great compassion for her and are interested in her situation.

Although Collins demonstrates the compassion that Madonna's disabilities inspire in people, it is only because Madonna's looks, in addition to her disabilities, distinguish her from her fellow circus performers, that Madonna is elevated from her station in life. Valentine Blyth, the artist who adopts her, initially pities her plight, but it is her physical appearance that drives him to feel the need actually to adopt her, and when he expresses this desire, he speaks of her beauty and her disability together. When Blyth first sees Madonna, he is immediately overwhelmed by her similarity to portraits of the Virgin Mary and of angels; Collins says that "Mad and mysterious words, never heard before in Rubbleford, poured from his lips. 'Devotional beauty,' 'Fra Angelico's angels,' 'Giotto and the cherubs,' 'Enough to bring the divine Raphael down from heaven to paint her'" (60). Later, Valentine continues to comment on the child's beauty as well as on her disabilities; he is said to "expatiate in the wildest manner on the subject of the beautiful deaf and dumb girl" (64), and ultimately, he voices his desire to "'take that injured, beautiful, patient little angel away from this villainous place'" (69). Thus, although Madonna's disability empowers her by leading people to feel more compassion for her than they do for other children in her situation, it is her physical embodiment of beauty and purity, coupled with her disability, that enables her to improve her station in life.

Collins uses the same image of Raphael's picture of the Madonna di San Sisto to point to beauty and purity in the blind Lucilla Finch, the heroine of Poor Miss Finch. When the novel's narrator, Madame Pratolungo, first meets this heroine, she is overwhelmed by her physical similarity to this picture:

> I happen to have visited the picture gallery at Dresden in recent years.
> As [Lucilla] approached me, nearer and nearer, I was irresistibly reminded of the gem of that superb collection – the matchless Virgin of Raphael, called "The Madonna di San Sisto." (13)

Although this link to Raphael's Madonna dominates Madame Pratolungo's perception of Lucilla, Madame Pratolungo admits that because of their blindness, Lucilla's eyes do not fully mirror the eyes of the Madonna in this picture. However, she carefully distinguishes the appearance of Lucilla's eyes from an actually displeasing deformity, saying that "There was no deformity; there was nothing to recoil from, in my blind Lucilla. The poor, dim, sightless eyes had a faded, changeless, inexpressive look – and that was all"(14). Through this statement, Madame Pratolungo implies that a more obvious deformity in Lucilla's personal appearance might interfere with the similarity between her and the image of Madonna and thereby lead people justifiably to "recoil" from her. Since Lucilla is fortunate enough to possess a disability that allows her to maintain traditional physical beauty with "no other personal defect" than slightly unusual-looking eyes (14), Madame Pratolungo assumes that people will accept Lucilla.

Moreover, throughout the novel, Collins describes Lucilla through Madame Pratolungo's eyes to reinforce the idea that Lucilla's beauty and her blindness are her dominant physical features. He demonstrates his intentions to link Madame Pratolungo's perceptions to those of the reader when Pratolungo appeals directly to the reader after Lucilla has demonstrated self-possession around a stranger; she asks the reader, "Does it not surprise you, as it surprised me? 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" (37). Having suggested that Madame Pratolungo's expectations of Lucilla might be similar to the readers', Collins then uses Madame Pratolungo's comments to remind the readers that Lucilla possesses beauty in addition to her blindness. Madame Pratolungo calls Lucilla a "nice pretty blind girl" (26) and admires her "poor pretty blind face" (60). Madame Pratolungo's descriptions of Lucilla thereby put Lucilla's beauty and her blindness together at the forefront of the readers' minds.

In addition to Lucilla's appearance meeting the paradoxical physical standards (of beauty and purity) that Victorians held for women, Lucilla's situation is also easier because she possesses a great deal of money. Moreover, her financial situation is unusual because of the degree of independence she holds within it; Collins evidently felt the need to establish her financial security beyond a doubt in order for Lucilla to be in a position in which her blindness can empower her. Lucilla's uncle dislikes her father so much that he leaves Lucilla a legacy under conditions that "render it absolutely impossible . . . under any circumstances whatever" for her father to receive any of her money (30). Miss Finch chooses to be an "independent lodger" in her father's home and pays him a small annual fee to live there (31). Because of her wealth, Miss Finch pities her father for "his poverty" (32) and recognizes that he relies more on her for financial favors than she does on him; she is "her own mistress" (33).

Lucilla's financial position and idealized physical appearance place her in a situation in which she can use her blindness as a source of empowerment. One advantage that these factors give her is the ability to marry whomever she chooses, and her wealth contributes to her ability to choose a husband for herself. She meets Oscar Dubourg, falls in love with him, and writes her father a letter suggesting that they meet each other.

Although her father is satisfied with her proposed marriage to Oscar because of Oscar's financial position, he would not be a position to forbid this marriage if he disapproved, even though he knows that Lucilla's marriage will render her less free to choose what to do with her income (36). Not only does the independence of Lucilla's financial decision enable her to play an active role in choosing a husband, but her physical appearance also attracts men to her and leads them to desire to form romantic attachments with her. Her fiance's brother falls in love with her because he finds her similarity to Raphael's picture of Madonna entrancing; Madame Pratolungo describes his reaction in first meeting Lucilla by saying, "The first impression which poor Miss Finch produced on Nugent Dubourg, was precisely the same as the first impression which she had produced on me. 'Good heavens!" he cried. "The Dresden Madonna! The Virgin of San Sisto!'" (141). Nugent congratulates his brother on the relationship, calling Lucilla "charming" and "unique" (143), and his behavior quickly indicates that he is struggling against the desire to approach her romantically himself (148-150). Thus, Lucilla's financial independence enables her to choose a husband for herself, and she has the opportunity to choose between two different men because of her physical appearance.

After endowing Lucilla with the looks of Madonna and establishing her in a financial position that frees her to marry the man of her choice, Collins proceeds to show how her blindness empowers her both to recognize this man and to conceive of him as having the appearance she desires. She tells Madame Pratolungo that she sees Oscar "in her thoughts" (65), and can distinguish his touch from other people's, saying, "When Oscar takes it [my hand], a delicious tingle runs from his hand into mine, and steals all over me" (147-148). It is important for Lucilla to be able to recognize Oscar by touch;

when she gains her sight and loses the feelings she has when she touches him, she is in vulnerable position to be deceived by Oscar's twin brother Nugent when he puts himself in Oscar's place. On learning that Nugent has convinced Lucilla that he is Oscar, Madame Pratolungo hopes that Lucilla will be able to recognize Oscar's true identity through her sense of touch, as she would once have been able to do. However, a doctor explains to her that Lucilla has indeed lost that ability through the restoration of her sight:

> "Her hand will tell you nothing -- no more than yours . . . All those thrill-tingles that she once had when he touched her, belong to anodder time -- the time gone-by when her sight was in her fingers and not in her eyes. With those fine-superfine-feelings of the days when she was blind, she pays now for her grand privilege of opening her eyes on the world. It is a sort of swop-bargain between Nature and this poor girl of ours. I take away your eyes -- I give you your fine touch. I give you your eyes -- I take away your fine touch." (404)

Thus, although Lucilla's financial independence and physical appearance are the factors that give her the right and ability to choose her husband, it is her blindness that ensures that she will marry the man whom she has chosen because it enables her to recognize him with her fingers.

Lucilla appreciates this ability to recognize through feeling so much that when her blindness returns and she is offered an additional opportunity to regain her sight through surgery, she declines; her decision to remain blind shows that she attains a kind of power from her blindness that is not available to most people through her ability to "see" through touching. Specifically, she realizes that when she is blind, she can pretend to

herself that her husband looks the way she wants him to look. She detests dark colors (14) to such a degree that while she is blind, her husband keeps from her the fact that his face is a dark shade of "blackish blue" because he is being treated for epilepsy (121); she says later that when she saw her fiance, her "disappointment was so dreadful" that she wished herself to be blind again (413). Thus, not only is Lucilla upset that she can no longer recognize her husband through touch, but she is also disappointed because her new-found ability to see leads her to discover that her husband's face is dark. When Lucilla loses her sight a second time and meets her fiance again at this point, she rejoices to discover that she can once more recognize him through touch (416). Moreover, she can forget his physical appearance and envision him in the way she wants to imagine him; thus, she ignores reality and creates an alternate conception of the world for herself. She tells Madame Pratolungo, "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 keeps my own beloved image of him -- the one image I care for -- unchanged and unchangeable" (417-18). Thus, Lucilla embraces blindness as the means by which she can construct her own image of the world without interference from other people.

Besides giving her the opportunity to choose a marital partner for herself, Lucilla's blindness also enables her to live life on her own terms through increasing her mobility. The irony of this idea draws attention to it; typically, one would say that a person with sight would have more freedom to go where she wants, but Collins challenges this assumption by highlighting some of the constraints that seeing people have. For example, Collins emphasizes the ease with which Lucilla can walk around in the dark. Through giving Lucilla advantages such as this, Collins succeeds in identifying

ways that her disability can serve as a source of power; however, Lucilla's empowerment depends on factors outside her disability because she could not have had the freedom to walk where she chooses in the first place if she were not financially independent. Because of her father's dependence on her, Lucilla can wander through his house at her leisure without any constraint that might be imposed on her if her father had any right to dictate how she should be spending her time, and she is accustomed to walking through the village by herself as well. After establishing her financial freedom and resulting mobility, Collins can then portray her blindness as further empowering her, explaining that it heightens her already-present ability to move around at will. At night, Lucilla tells Madame Pratolungo:

> "Go away with your candle . . . The darkness makes no difference to *me* . . . Own the advantage I have over you now . . . *You* can't see at night without your candle. *I* could go all over the house, at this moment, without making a false step anywhere." (65)

Lucilla's blindness enables her to move throughout the house in the dark; however, she can only use this ability because her father's dependence on her allows her to "go all over the house" at will. Moreover, Lucilla loses this ability to move in the darkness by using her sense of feeling when she regains her sight through an operation. Lamenting its loss, she speculates, "The restoration of my sight . . . has made a new being of me. In gaining the sense of seeing, have I lost the sense of feeling which I had when I was blind? I want to know if it will come back when I have got used to the novelty of my position?" (362).

Lucilla's financial situation and physical appearance, then, give her both freedom to choose whom she will marry and physical mobility, and Lucilla's blindness empowers

her within this advantageous social position. Although Mrs. Wragge in No Name does not share Lucilla's advantageous physical appearance, she is similarly empowered by her disability only because she has inherited money in the first place. Like Lucilla, Mrs. Wragge, who is both physically a giant and who thinks slowly because of a learning disability (202-203), receives a choice among multiple potential marriage partners, and she acknowledges that this choice comes by virtue of her money:

> "[H]e married me. There was others wanted me besides him. Bless you, I had my pick. Why not? When you have a trifle of money left you that you didn't expect, if that don't make a lady of you, what does? Isn't a lady to have her pick? I had my trifle of money, and I had my pick, and I picked the captain -- I did. He was the smartest and the shortest of them all. He took care of me and my money." (206)

Because Mrs. Wragge has money, then, she marries a man who will take care of her, which is important because her disability makes it difficult for her to work (205). A surface examination of her marriage suggests that her husband misuses her and controls her; he screams at her and makes it clear that he desires order in all things (204-206). However, because of Mrs. Wragge's financial situation, her husband depends on her as well; when Mrs. Wragge is interfering with his ability to perform a swindle, he explains to another character that he depends on her presence for financial reasons, saying, "Speaking purely in a pecuniary point of view, I can't afford a total separation from her" (352). Although Captain Wragge is a swindler who takes large portions of his wife's money, he also takes care of his wife as a way of maintaining his source of income.

Not only does Mrs. Wragge's money make her husband somewhat dependent on

her and force him to care for her, but her disability further empowers her within the marriage relationship by limiting her husband's ability to earn money apart from that which he can expect from her inheritance. Throughout most of the novel, Captain Wragge and his niece work together to swindle a wealthy distant relative into giving them money. To gain this money, they assume false identities, and Captain Wragge hopes to convince his wife to pretend to be someone else in order to solidify the swindle. However, even though the Captain assures his niece that he can "hammer [Mrs. Wragge's] new identity into her head" (352), he nevertheless realizes that Mrs. Wragge has the power to ruin his plan completely because her disability renders her incapable of pretending to be someone she is not:

> "In plain English, my dear girl, Mrs. Wragge is a pitfall under our feet at every step we take . . . I never interfere with questions of sentiment. But I have a word to say, on my own behalf. If my services are to be of any use to you, I can't have my hands tied at starting. This is serious. I won't trust my wife and Mrs. Lecount together. I'm afraid. . . I put the matter plainly, it is too important to be trifled with." (352-53)

Captain Wragge knows that his wife would not either wish or comprehend how to create a false identity for herself, and he fears that she will reveal her true identity to Mrs. Lecount, someone who is capable of foiling his plan. Thus, Captain Wragge depends on Mrs. Wragge because of her money, and at the same time, she threatens his ability to make money from alternative (albeit dishonest) sources by communicating news of the deception to other people (462-64).

Moreover, because Mrs. Wragge's disability prevents her from understanding why someone would want to pretend to be someone else, it ultimately protects her from having her husband dictate her identity to her. She cannot comprehend why or how someone might assume a false character, and she therefore cannot act upon her husband's desire for her to assume a particular identity. For the purposes of earning money, Captain Wragge has been able to convince his niece to play several different roles throughout the novel, and he thereby continually changes her identity. By the novel's end, both the Captain and his niece have been pretending to be other people for so long that they have lost their senses of who they really are. Mrs. Wragge, in contrast, is incapable of pretending to be someone she is not and thereby retains her sense of self throughout the novel. Ultimately, her inability to adopt a false identity leads her husband to a higher moral level as well; by the novel's conclusion, Captain Wragge has chosen a new profession for himself that involves being honest about who he is (713-15). Thus, Mrs. Wragge's money places her in a position in which her disability reinforces and protects her sense of self and ennobles her husband by forcing him not to assume false identities; through these events, Collins again succeeds in portraying disabilities as potentially noble.

In his novels, then, Collins portrays women who are empowered to succeed in spite of their disabilities because of their financial situations or physical beauty. The fact that he felt the need to endow these characters financially or to connect them to the image of the Virgin Mary in order to enable them to succeed in society indicates that Victorian expectations about women's physical appearance and class influenced Collins's presentations of these women, reflecting societal beliefs that deem the combination of

beauty and purity imperative in women and that equate higher class with more noble morals. Further evidence of these connections comes from an examination of the experiences of women who were not endowed either with a high level of wealth or with a physical appearance that met society's ideals. In contrast to Madonna, Lucilla, and Mrs. Wragge, these unfortunate characters remain isolated from society and do not find love, underscoring the implication that women had to possess wealth or beauty and overt signs of purity in order to advance in society.

Collins's portrayal of women whose physical appearance did not meet Victorian desires reflects his underlying assumption that physical disfigurements that prevented a woman from being considered beautiful also prevented her from being able to establish normal social relationships. For example, unlike Madonna and Lucilla, both of whom marry at the end of their stories, Collins's characters with physical disfigurements are criticized or pitied for falling in love with men. The belief that a woman with an imperfect body should not seek a romantic relationship and a traditional marriage was prevalent in Victorian novels; Cindy LaCom argues that Victorian authors often portray disabilities as signs either of sexlessness or, paradoxically, of sexual deviance, playing upon "the connection between 'deformed' body and deformed principles" (192-193). In describing a disabled character in a work by Anthony Trollope, LaCom notes that her "'condition' (consisting of both her disability and her single status) is such an essential aspect of her identity that her sister wonders how she can contemplate a romantic relationship" (197). Collins's novels present these underlying assumptions as well, further emphasizing Victorian attitudes that influenced Collins's works.

This feeling of incredulity that a woman with a physical disfigurement might desire a romantic relationship comes into play in Collins's depictions both of Rosanna Spearman in The Moonstone and of Ariel in The Law and the Lady. Rosanna, who possesses the "misfortune of having one shoulder bigger than the other" (47), falls in love with Franklin Blake. However, her deformity, coupled with her low social status and plain physical appearance, prohibits other people from being able to understand her feelings because they see her as subhuman. When Gabriel Betteredge hears that she has fallen in love, he finds it absurd, explaining:

> You have heard of beautiful young ladies falling in love at first sight, and have thought it natural enough. But a housemaid . . . with a plain face and a deformed shoulder, falling in love, at first sight, with a gentleman who comes on a visit to her mistress's house, match me that, in the way of an absurdity, out of any storybook in Christendom, if you can! I laughed till the tears rolled down my cheeks. (70)

Betteredge is shocked that Rosanna can think of loving someone because of her station in life, her lack of beauty, and her physical deformity. Unlike Madonna, whose beauty enabled her to be elevated miraculously to a higher class, Rosanna's deformity ensures that she is destined to remain in the servant class.

Betteredge's daughter Penelope's statements about Rosanna's feelings further illustrate that a woman with Rosanna's physical disfigurement should not forget her social position. Although Penelope understands the validity of Rosanna's feeling and voices compassion for her, at the same time she criticizes this interest in Blake because of Rosanna's social class, saying, "It's quite monstrous that she should forget herself and

her station in that way" and calling Rosanna's love for Blake "madness" (164). Betteredge echoes her sentiments later; he expresses pity for Rosanna but links this pity to his belief that it is wrong for Rosanna to expect love from a gentleman, saying, "'Sad! Sad! – all the more sad because the girl had no reason to justify her, and no right to feel it" (164). Moreover, not only do others notice and disapprove of Rosanna's feelings, but Rosanna herself is so immersed in her society's ideas that she believes that her physical appearance and low social position justify Blake's lack of interest in her, and she blames herself for her misery. She writes Blake a letter and acknowledges that her physical appearance and social status should have prevented her from thinking he might love her:

> "I went back to the house, and wrote your name and mind in my workbox, and drew a lovers' knot under them. Then some devil – no, I ought to say some good angel – whispered to me, 'Go and look in the glass.' The glass told me – never mind what. I was too foolish to take the warning. I went on getting fonder and fonder of you, just as if I was a lady in your own rank of life, and the most beautiful creature your eyes ever rested on." (327)

Thus, because Rosanna's disability prevents her from possessing the Victorian ideal of beauty, other people disapprove of her seeking a romantic relationship with a man from a higher class, and she herself is so immersed in her society's beliefs that she thinks that their attitudes are justified. Moreover, unlike the physical appearance of Madonna, whose similarity to Raphael's picture enables her to be adopted by an artist and placed in a home where she is surrounded by luxury and refinement, Rosanna's physical appearance leads others to expect her to remain in the social position to which she was

born; in saying that Rosanna should not pursue romantic feelings for Blake, the characters couple Rosanna's physical deformity with her station in life.

Collins's portrayals of women with disfigurements also incorporate another stereotype embedded in LaCom's statement about traditional depictions of Victorian women with disabilities; they seem to confirm the suspicion that a "deformed" body is somehow indicative of a sinful character. In contrast to Madonna and Lucilla, who embody images of a nearly-sinless woman, Rosanna had been a thief before working as a servant (46), and Sergeant Cuff links her shoulder to her past because it serves as such a distinguishing feature. And unlike Madonna, whose patience is acclaimed, Rosanna's friend "Limping Lucy" (a woman with a misshapen foot) is characterized as having a poor temper (201). Similarly, in The Law and the Lady, a woman named Ariel (a giant) is called an "idiot" (203) and threatens the narrator (226-227), and other characters liken her actions to a dog's (211 and 261). The personality traits and images associated with these figures with physical disfigurements, then, contrast greatly with the beauty and purity that characters in Hide and Seek and Poor Miss Finch associate with Madonna and Lucilla because of these heroines' physical appearance and social class.

Another difference between Collins's portrayals of Madonna and Lucilla and his depiction of other female characters with disabilities lies in their ability to relate to people in society. Other characters are drawn to Madonna and Lucilla by their physical similarity to Raphael's pictures; they describe these women as charming and are happy to form friendships with them throughout the novel. Mrs. Wragge, too, forms friendships and social ties, both because of her wealth and because other characters find her disposition as sweet and "gentle" as they expect "giants of both sexes" to be (202).

However, female characters with disabilities who come from the lower classes and whose physical appearances do not exhibit beauty and purity are isolated from society and have few friendships. LaCom argues that "disabled female character[s]" whose disabilities are associated with sin are often "banished from fictive texts" (193). Her argument is substantiated in the interactions of Rosanna Spearman and Ariel, both of whom have limited contact with other people. Each has only one real friend, and in each case, that friend possesses a disability as well. Rosanna is "solitary" (47) and her only true friend is Limping Lucy, who feels a kinship with her because they both possess physical deformities (144); similarly, Ariel does not speak to anyone but the man who has enslaved her, Miserrimus Dexter, who is a paraplegic (203-204).

Ariel's refusal to speak to anyone but Dexter is part of a larger characterization that is particularly telling because it further underscores Collins's assumptions about how an un-feminine female character with little money and a disability interacts with others differently from one who embodies the beauty and purity of the Virgin Mary or who possesses enough money to be sought after as a marital partner. In understanding Collins's assumptions, Ariel's physical appearance is of primary importance; she is dominated by giant features that other characters link to her mental disability. Unlike Collins's characterization of Madonna, which tells the reader of her "softness" and "feminine gentleness" (Hide and Seek 51), Collins's portrayal of Ariel focuses on her coarseness and her masculine features. The narrator first observes Ariel from a distance and immediately recognizes her masculine habits, noting her "coarse masculine voice" (209) and saying that she works "in brute silence, with a lumpish look and a clumsy gait" (210). When the narrator first sees Ariel closely enough to describe her physical

appearance, she is further overwhelmed by Ariel's masculinity and considers her not only barely a woman, but barely a living human being:

> I could now see the girl's round, fleshy, inexpressive face, her rayless and colourless eyes, her coarse nose and heavy chin. A creature half alive; an imperfectly-developed animal in shapeless form, clad in a man's pilot jacket, and treading in a man's heavy laced boots; with nothing but an old red flannel petticoat, and a broken comb in her frowsy flaxen hair, to tell us that she was a woman . . . (210)

Ariel's physical appearance, then, contrasts greatly with those of the characters whose physical disabilities empower them. Her physical characteristics affect the way people view her disability as well. Rather than appreciating that Ariel's disability makes her "unique," the way people consider Lucilla's blindness (Poor Miss Finch 143), others associate Ariel's displeasing physical appearance with her mental disabilities; in describing her appearance, her master says, "It is the face of an idiot" (211).

Rather than making her a source of compassion, Ariel's physical appearance, because of the masculinity and mental disability associated with it, limits her interactions with other members of society. In contrast with Mrs. Wragge, whose mney enables her to form many social relationships and who is therefore accustomed to addressing people cheerfully, Ariel generally ignores everyone except her master, who enjoys showing other people how he can make her respond to things he says (211-212). Because Ariel generally does not interact with people, she is increasingly viewed as inhuman; her master calls her a "vegetable" (211), and the narrator observes, "A machine could have taken less notice of the life and talk around it than this incomprehensible creature" (211).

Moreover, because Ariel does not interact with others in society and because of her physical appearance, people in the village mock her and further ostracize her from society. The narrator observes:

> I found all the idle boys in the neighborhood collected round the pony-chaise, expressing, in the occult language of slang, their high enjoyment and appreciation of the appearance of "Ariel" in her man's jacket and hat. The pony was fidgety – he felt the influence of the popular uproar. His driver sat, whip in hand, magnificently impenetrable to the jibes and jests that were flying round her. I said, "Good morning," on getting in the chaise. Ariel only said, "Gee up!" and started the pony. (226)

Ariel's physical appearance, then, leads her to be mocked rather than pitied, and Collins's portrayal of her suggests that her disability makes her unaware of the way others treat her. Thus, her disability isolates her from others in society, and her physical appearance leads other people to encourage this isolation because she contradicts Victorian expectations so completely.

Certainly, then, Collins treats his female characters with disabilities differently based on whether they otherwise conform to Victorian physical and social expectations. Women who do meet Victorian ideals earn other people's love and inspire other people through their patience. On the other hand, female characters from lower classes whose disabilities make them unable to attain the physical expectations that Victorians held for women have experiences akin to those that Cindy LaCom identifies as typical for characters with disabilities in this time period. Although Collins intends to inspire people toward compassion in his portrayals of figures with disabilities and to show that

disabilities can often empower people, then, the role of class and physical appearance in determining whether his female characters will succeed in society suggests that Collins's society's beliefs influence him to a greater degree than he realizes.

PART TWO

As I argued in the first part of my thesis, Collins's portrayals of females with disabilities illustrate that his assumptions about physical appearance and money influence the extent to which he presents disabilities as serving as a source of empowerment for these characters. Similarly, Collins's portrayals of men with disabilities reveal that Victorian ideas influence Collins's expectations for men and consequently affect the way that he depicts male characters with disabilities. However, in contrast to female characters whose disabilities empowered them when accompanied by an appropriate physical appearance or a comfortable financial situation, disabilities hurt all of Collins's male characters, even those who are handsome or rich. Collins's treatment of male characters with disabilities reveals the ways in which Victorian ideas about gender roles influence his attitude toward men as well as women.

During the Victorian period, a man's ability to work, and in particular to perform physical labor, became increasingly the standard by which others judged him. This view is strongly expressed in Thomas Carlyle's famous doctrine of work, which he believes holds "an endless significance"; he argues that working is the means by which "a man perfects himself" (196). Carylye's concept of work requires a certain degree of physical strength; even though Carlyle is a writer, he speaks of the completion of work as a more perfect embodiment of man's virtues than is completion of a piece of writing or speaking. He explains that a man's work encompasses his moral and physical strength together because work is "an epitome of a man":

> The spoken Word, the written Poem, is said to be an epitome of a man; how much more the done Work. Whatsoever of morality and of

> intelligence, what of patience, perseverance, faithfulness, of method, insight, ingenuity, energy; in a word, whatsoever of Strength the man had in him will lie written in the Work he does . . . To work: why, it is to try himself against Nature, and her everlasting unerring Laws; these will tell a true verdict as to the man. So much of virtue and of faculty did we find in him; so much and no more! . . . Working as great Nature bade him: does not that mean virtue of a kind; nay, of all kinds? (160)

Thus, Carlyle believes that all of a man's "virtue" and "faculty" can be seen in the work he performs. Furthermore, it is important for a man's work to be productive and concrete so that it can make an everlasting impact on the world; Carlyle contrasts work with speech in this way by observing, "[A]ll speech and rumour is shortlived, foolish, untrue. Genuine WORK alone, what thou workest faithfully, that is eternal, as the Almighty Founder and World-Builder himself" (136). Carlyle's emphasis on the productivity of work is also intended to offer the lower classes an opportunity to become noble through their labor, for in labor "there is something of divineness . . . Labour, wide as the Earth, has its summit in Heaven" (202).

Because Victorians valued the performance of physical work, they also idealized men whose physical appearance indicated the prowess and strength necessary for labor. Nicholson finds this emphasis on physical strength in Victorian working men's attitudes in general. He argues that these men judged each other based on their physical abilities: "There was little point in exhorting a working man to privilege moral over physical force . . . Many social factors played a part in establishing a working man's status within his local community, but his manliness was certainly not least among them" (145). The

connection between a man's physical prowess and his "manhood" is also voiced in the Victorian doctrine of "muscular Christianity," which Mark Girouard defines as the belief "that a Christian should dedicate his body, mind, and will to the service of God" (143). Although Girouard's definition suggests that muscular Christianity involves a man's "mind" and "will," he explains that embedded in this belief was an understanding that men should serve God and develop a "valiant and noble manhood" for themselves by emphasizing their bodies rather than their minds:

> The particular form in which [Kingsley] and Thomas Hughes preached "a valiant and noble manhood" had its own special flavour, which the phrase 'muscular Christianity' caught to perfection. The flavour lay less in the doctrine than in the way in which it was presented. The doctrine . . . was unexceptionable, and, as Hughes and Kingsley pointed out, by no means new. But the way in which they wrote and talked made it clear that emotionally they found physical prowess gloriously exciting; that they preferred a strong man to a clever one . . . (143)

It appears, therefore, that the doctrine of "Muscular Christianity" put a greater value on a man's physical strength ("a strong man") than on his mental abilities ("a clever one").

Victorians thus valued men who were capable of performing labor and whose appearance reflected physical strength. The Victorian association of masculinity with work and physical strength is also evident in Collins's novels. While Collins suggests that female characters with disabilities would be able to advance in society if their disabilities were accompanied by the appropriate physical appearance or by an advantageous financial situation, he presents disabilities as depriving all of his male

characters of their manhood, regardless of their physical appearance or financial positions, and reducing them to children or machines.

One of Collins's characters who illustrates the association between a physical disability and a loss of manhood is The Law and the Lady's Miserrimus Dexter, who is a paraplegic. Although Collins makes a point of endowing Dexter with an attractive physical appearance and above-average mental abilities, he nevertheless characterizes Dexter as both a child and a machine. This characterization reinforces the Victorian assumption that a man must be able to work in order to be considered masculine and emphasizes the difference between gender expectations for women and men; like Madonna and Lucilla, Dexter is physically attractive and masculine-looking apart from his disability, but his situation differs from theirs in that his disability prevents him from establishing friendships with other people without disabilities. Collins's initial descriptions of Dexter, like his descriptions of Madonna and Lucilla, point to his physical beauty and his deformity together, but he explains that Dexter's physical appearance highlights his disfigurement rather than diminishing it. His disfigurement destroys his manhood; at the outset, the narrator describes him as "a strange and startling creature – literally the half of a man" (173). She emphasizes the physical beauty combined with evidence of strength and manliness evident in Dexter's upper body, but she explains that Dexter's physical attractiveness makes his deformity seem even worse:

> To make this deformity all the more striking and all the more terrible, the victim of it was – as to his face and body – an unusually handsome, and an unusually well-made man. His long silky hair, of a bright and beautiful chesnut colour, fell over shoulders that were the perfection of

> strength and grace. His face was bright with vivacity and intelligence. His large, clear blue eyes, and his long, delicate white hands, were like the eyes and hands of a beautiful woman. He would have looked effeminate, but for the manly proportions of his throat and chest: aided in their effect by his flowing beard and long moustache, of a lighter chesnut shade than the colour of his hair. Never had a magnificent head and body been more hopelessly ill-bestowed than in this instance! (173)

Like Madonna and Lucilla, then, Dexter has beauty that fits in with Victorian expectations for his gender. Indeed, his physical appearance embodies other characteristics desired for men as well, such as "strength" and "intelligence," and the narrator is careful to describe the "manly" appearance of his upper body. However, unlike Madonna and Lucilla, the ways that Dexter's physical appearance fit in with Victorian expectations make his disfigurement more "striking" and "terrible" rather than endearing people to him; the narrator finds this disfigurement "hopelessly ill-bestowed" on a handsome man.

Throughout the novel, Collins's descriptions of Dexter underscore the contrast between his beauty and his deformity, which the narrator later reiterates has "degraded and destroyed the manly beauty of his head and his breast" (213). This opposition, in turn, highlights the difference between Collins's portrayal of Dexter and his portrayals of Madonna and Lucilla. Madonna's and Lucilla's beauty leads people to love them, and once their beauty has attracted people to them and helped them form initial relationships, their disabilities can empower them and strengthen their relationships. In contrast, the narrator of The Law and the Lady explains that Dexter's physical beauty would

ordinarily attract people to him, but that his disfigurement prevents him from forming relationships rather than empowering him within relationships. For example, she explains that a painter "would have revelled in him as a model for St. John" (214), had it not been for his disability. Dexter himself tells the narrator, "'My bodily build would have been Roman, if I had been born with legs'" (211). Moreover, the narrator emphasizes that even though Dexter's beauty would generally ensure a woman's attraction to him, his deformity would prevent any sort of romantic attachment; she observes that "A young girl, ignorant of what the Oriental robe hid from view, would have said to herself the instant she looked at him, 'Here is the hero of my dreams!'" (214). Thus, although Dexter is endowed with physical beauty and the appearance of masculinity, these physical characteristics do not enable him to gain power from his disability.

Indeed, most of Collins's characterization of Dexter focuses on the ways in which his disability disempowers him by removing his manhood. This again contrasts with Collins's portrayals of women; while Collins's female characters are, in some cases, able to use their disabilities as a source of strength, Dexter's disability instead subsumes his identity. By Victorian standards, the narrator sees Dexter as less than a man; she likens him to "a woman recovering from a burst of tears" (208) and to a child literally carried by his servant (209, 220). More commonly, however, she suggests that Dexter's identity is connected with that of his wheelchair, which implies that Dexter's disability makes him at least partly an object. In one instance, his relationship to his chair makes him an animal; he "sprang out of [Ariel's] arms with a little gleeful cry, and alighted on his seat, like a bird alighting on its perch!" (209). In general, however, his chair is portrayed as

being half of his identity because it serves as his ability to move. The narrator describes Dexter as "self-propelled in his chair on wheels" (173), and on another occasion, she observes that "The chair on wheels glided away, with the half-man in it" (179). The chair overshadows him physically; on yet another occasion, "A high chair on wheels moved by . . . carrying a shadowy figure" (206). Even more revealingly, the chair merges completely with Dexter; the narrator calls him "the new Centaur, half man, half chair" (206). Not only does the narrator connect Dexter's identity to his chair, but Dexter also sees his chair as being part of himself. At one point, when someone attempts to move his chair, Dexter flies into "a furious rage" and says, "'My chair is Me . . . How dare you lay your hands on Me?'" (145). He later offers to let the chair engulf him completely; when the narrator is angry with him for making a pass at her, he offers to hide himself, as a means of atonement, inside his chair:

> He backed his chair penitently, as he made that entreaty. 'Am I far enough away yet?' he asked, with a rueful look. 'Do I still frighten you? I'll drop out of sight, if you prefer it, in the bottom of the chair.' He lifted the sea-green coverlid. In another moment he would have disappeared, like a puppet in a show, if I had not stopped him. (240)

Thus, Dexter and the other characters connect Dexter's identity to his wheelchair, and Dexter seems to accept this connection with the understanding that his deformity renders his lack of manliness inevitable.

Not only does Dexter's deformity deprive him physically of his manhood, but Collins also suggests that this deformity prevents him from having a true understanding of who he is. In contrast to Mrs. Wragge, whom I have argued is one of the few

characters in No Name who is fairly constant in her principles and in the way she presents herself to others, Dexter is temperamental and unpredictable. Some characters link this mental instability to overt madness. Major Fitz-David tells the narrator that Dexter's "'mind is as deformed as his body'", though he also admits, "'I don't deny that he is clever in some respects – brilliantly clever, I admit. And I don't say that he has ever committed any acts of violence, or ever willingly injured anybody. But, for all that, he is mad, if ever a man was mad yet'" (191). Mrs. Macallen, similarly, calls Dexter a "madman" (199). Dexter's deformity is thus linked to an unpredictability that inhibits his ability to relate to others in society.

Regardless of whether Dexter is technically mad, his attitude toward the relationship between the body and the mind leads him to lack a strong self-concept. Dexter's acute awareness of his disability shapes his self-image and his image of others because he characterizes people by looking at their bodies more than their faces. For example, he identifies a similarity between the narrator and another woman, and he emphasizes the fact that this similarity is in "'the figure'" rather than "'the face'" (216). He also enjoys watching the narrator walk because her "'movement'" is similar to that of this other woman (234). Thus, Dexter's conception of the narrator is based on the shape of her body and the way that her body enables her to walk. The emphasis he places on her body, coupled with Dexter's statements connecting himself with his wheelchair, suggests that his knowledge of his disfigurement controls the way that he perceives himself. Just as Dexter's disability makes him physically "half of a man" (173), it also deprives him of a complete sense of self. Dexter's incompleteness is reflected in the appearance of his house, the outside of which is surrounded by "the half-completed

foundations" of other houses (202), and in the music he composes, which does not consistently fall into the category of any other music known to man (at one point, the narrator thinks it suggests an Oriental dance, but at another, it reminds her of Gregorian chants) (219-220). Even more strikingly, Dexter repeatedly takes on other people's identities in an apparent attempt to make up for the strong identity that he does not possess. He tells the narrator that he likes to take on the identities of men who have more power than he does:

> I have an immense imagination. It runs riot at times. It makes an actor of me. I play the parts of all the heroes that ever lived. I feel their characters. I merge myself in their individualities. For the time, I *am* the man I fancy myself to be. I can't help it. I am obliged to do it. If I restrained my imagination, when the fit is on me, I should go mad. I let myself loose. It lasts for hours . . . (218)

Thus, Dexter takes on the identities of other men because he has no identity himself. Interestingly, the men whose identities he takes on are all particularly powerful; he identifies with Napoleon Bonaparte, Admiral Nelson, and Shakespeare. Through the different identities he chooses for himself, Dexter attempts to gain some form of the sense of self that his disability prevents him from possessing.

Thus, in Miserrimus Dexter, Collins portrays a man whose physical disability destroys his manhood and prevents him from demonstrating the strength of character that he otherwise might have had. This portrayal is particularly interesting because it contrasts so directly with Collins's depictions of women with disabilities; while beauty helped those women gain power from their disabilities, Dexter's disfigurement overrides

the power that his physical appearance might otherwise have given him. The same contrast is evident between Collins's female characters who profit from their financial situations and a male character who is in a similar situation. Leonard Frankland, the blind hero of The Dead Secret, is "a gentleman of fortune" (129), but his wealth, unlike that of Lucilla and Mrs. Wragge, does not place him in a situation within which his disability can empower him. People see Frankland's blindness as more important than his wealth in judging his suitability for marriage. In contrast to Lucilla and Mrs. Wragge, who were seen as good marriage partners because of their money and in spite of their disabilities, Frankland is seen as a questionable match because of his blindness. In spite of Frankland's wealth, others see his wife as having "'made a sacrifice'" by choosing to marry a blind man (47). They praise her for the constancy of her affection and are particularly amazed that Frankland's blindness does not change her feelings for him; on the day of their marriage, the vicar who has married them says, "'[N]o delays could alter Rosamond – six years, instead of six months, would not have changed her. There she was this morning as fond of that poor, patient blind fellow as she was the first day they were engaged'" (48). Furthermore, Frankland himself sees blindness as a justifiable reason not to marry; other characters observe that when he first became blind, he immediately offered to release his partner from the engagement (47). Thus, the people in Frankland's society, including Frankland himself, consider even a wealthy man's blindness a legitimate cause for breaking an engagement, which contrasts with the assumptions made by characters in Poor Miss Finch and No Name that consider any wealthy woman a good marital partner, regardless of whether she has a disability.

Not only do people consider Frankland's blindness to be a legitimate impediment

to his marriage, but his blindness also diminishes his manhood, partly by giving his wife power over him within the marriage. In contrast to Lucilla, who relied on touch to see the world for herself, Frankland lets his wife control the way he views things by literally functioning as his eyes; Rosamond likes to describe to him the things she sees and tells him, "You shall have hold of my hand, and look with my eyes" (74). Although she enjoys helping her husband in this way, however, she recognizes that she could use the trust he places in her to deceive him. He consequently sees events only from her perspective. Nevertheless, she is careful to be honest with him in the hopes that she is helping him; she tells him:

> "I can't help kissing you, Lenny, when you talk of the loss of your sight. Tell me, my poor love, do I help to make up for that loss? . . . I will never deceive you, love, even in the veriest trifle. My eyes serve for both of us now, don't they? You depend on me for all that your touch fails to tell you, and I must never be unworthy of my trust – must I?" (64)

Although Rosamond works hard to deserve her husband's trust, she retains the ability to deceive him and is tempted to take advantage of this ability at the novel's end. She and her husband find a letter that reveals her low birth, and she considers hiding the letter's contents from her husband because of his pride and social class (287-288). Even though she ultimately chooses to be honest with him, this event highlights the fact that Frankland's blindness enables his wife to obscure important truths from him if she so chooses.

Not only does Frankland depend on his wife to describe the world to him and to

be honest with him about facts that relate to their relationship, but he also relies on her both to make decisions about his well-being and to protect him when he travels. In contrast to Lucilla, whose wealth enabled her to move freely about her father's home and village because it gave her independence, Frankland has trouble travelling without his wife, in spite of his wealth. He does not want to travel by himself; on one occasion, he contemplates a trip to London by himself but hesitates to go, reasoning that "If he went there without his wife, his blindness placed him at the mercy of strangers and servants" (301). Rosamond echoes his reasoning and decides that he should not go because she thinks that "[t]he idea of her husband traveling any where, under any circumstances, without having her to attend on him" is "too preposterous for consideration" (302). Because of Frankland's blindness, then, his wife makes decisions about what he can and cannot do. In another instance, Collins further underscores Frankland's helplessness by describing how his wife literally leads him around "as if he had suddenly changed from a grown man to a helpless little child" (37). Frankland's blindness thereby makes him depend on his wife, in contrast to Lucilla, whose blindness helps her sees things as they really are and prevents her fiancee's brother from deceiving her.

Besides portraying the consequences of blindness for a wealthy gentleman's manhood, Collins addresses the effects of epilepsy and its medical treatment on another gentleman, Oscar Dubourg in Poor Miss Finch. Oscar's epilepsy makes him weak and prevents him from being characterized fully as a man (93). Even Madame Pratolungo's initial description of him, though she acclaims his physical beauty, focuses on the ways in which his appearance is more like a woman's or child's than a man's:

> [T]hough he was a little too effeminate or my taste -- he really was such

> a handsome young man! His hair was of a fine bright chesnut colour, with a natural curl in it. His eyes were of the lightest brown I had ever seen – with a singularly winning gentle modest expression in them. As for his complexion - so creamy and spotless and fair - he had no right to it: it ought to have been a woman's complexion, or at least a boy's. He looked indeed more like a boy than a man: his smooth face was quite uncovered, either by beard, whisker, or moustache. If he had asked me, I should have guessed him (though he was really three years older) to have been younger than Lucilla. (39)

Although Oscar is handsome, he has a weak constitution because of his epilepsy. He thus both appears weak and behaves weakly, thereby inspiring "contempt" in Madame Pratolungo (40). She finds Oscar's manner "weak" and "womanish" and suggests that her attitude toward him probably parallels that of other women by commenting, "In common with all women, I like a man to *be* a man" (40). Oscar's disability thus hurts other's perceptions of his manhood by making him physically weak. Indeed, toward the novel's end, Madame Pratolungo admits that her view of his character has been shaped entirely by his constitution; she laments having judged him primarily by his physical constituion but treats this as a natural human tendency, implying that others would view him as weak and unmanly as well (274).

Not only does Oscar's epilepsy give him an outward appearance that suggests a lack of physical strength, but he also can only control it through a treatment that marks his appearance even more through a dark blue coloration that repels the people with whom he comes in contact. Oscar himself is so grateful that the treatment prevents him

from having seizures that he willingly accepts its side effects, although he admits that his new coloration is like "death" and that he sometimes startles himself when he looks in the mirror (117). However, the other characters find his new appearance horrifying; their impulse is perceive him as inhuman because they link his skin's darkness to abtract evil. Madame Pratolungo finds his discolored face a "shocking spectacle" (128) and calls the blackish blue hue "hideous," "superhuman," and "almost . . .devilish" (105). Madame Pratolungo's reaction to first seeing Lucilla and Oscar together after Oscar's face has turned blue further establishes the moral dichotomy that she associates with darkness and light; she shudders to see Lucilla's "fair cheek laid innocently against the livid blackish blue of *his* discoloured skin" (121). Similarly, Lucilla, who has an unusual "'antipathy to dark people and to dark shades of colour of all kinds'" (117), finds Oscar's face so terrible that she demands that her eyes be re-bandaged so that she will not have to look at him:

> A cry of terror escaped her: she started back, shuddering, and caught hold of Nugent's arm. Grosse motioned sternly to him to turn her face from the window; and lifted the bandage. She clutched at it with feverish eagerness as he held it up. "Put it on again!" she said, holding by Nugent with one hand, and lifting the other to point towards Oscar with a gesture of disgust. "Put it on again. I have seen too much already." (255-256)

Thus, even the cure for Oscar's epilepsy damages his appearance and makes others hate looking at him.

Another character who is ostracized for a facial deformity is Robert Mannion in Basil, a novel in which Collins emphasizes the effects of disabilities on working-class

men. In the course of this work, Basil deforms Robert Mannion's face and causes blindness in one of his eyes because he is angry that Mannion had an adulterous relationship with his fiancee. Mannion's reaction to this disfigurement illustrates the connection between the way lower-class men perceived their manhood and their perceptions of their ability to work. Mannion writes Basil a vengeful letter, saying that his deformity has destroyed his manhood by destroying his ability to hold any occupation except for that of stalking Basil:

> Do you still exult in having deformed me in every feature. . . Do you triumph in the remembrance of . . . destroying my very identity as a man? . . . My deformed face. . . shall hunt you throughout the world . . . Do you call this a very madness of malignity and revenge? It is the only occupation in life for which your mutilation of me has left me fit. (249, 251)

Mannion's deformity has prevented him from being able to work and has thus, following Carlyle's logic, deprived him of moral virtue as well. After the disfigurement of Mannion's face, people think that Mannion is a devil (318), and Basil, in spite of being responsible for Mannion's deformity, finds the thought of him "frightful" and "vivid in its horror" (303). Indeed, Mannion himself links his deformity to revenge and evil; he believes that in attempting to destroy completely Basil's ability to function in society, he will be performing "work worthy of [his] deformity" (251). Moreover, he reinforces the suggestion that there is an inherent connection between physical and moral deformity by explaining that he considers his desire for revenge not to be merely a natural human tendency, but instead to be linked to a deeper form of evil:

> [T]here is something besides the motive of retaliation, something less

> earthly and apparent than that, which urges me horribly and super-naturally to link myself to you for life; which makes me feel as the bearer of a curse that shall follow you; as the instrument of a fatality pronounced against you long ere we met . . . (252)

Collins's portrayal of Robert Mannion thereby underscores the idea that moral deformity is a necessary companion to physical deformity. Thus, because Mannion's deformity has prevented him from being able to validate his manhood through working, Mannion becomes a subhuman monster whose work is supernatural and horrible.

In sum, disabilities serve to disempower all of Collins's male characters who possess them. People in Collins's novels consider men with disabilities not to be whole men, often leading the characters themselves to feel a sense of helplessness or a lack of certainty about who they really are. Because disabilities diminish these characters' power in society by affecting their ability to work and by making them look physically weak, Collins's portrayals of these characters reflect Victorian expectations for men. Even though Collins hoped to use disabilities to enlighten his readers, his representations suggest that even he could not envision a society that did not consider physical strength and the ability to perform manual labor to be a man's defining characteristics.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of Wilkie Collins's portrayals of figures with disabilities shows that although Collins sometimes succeeded in depicting disabilities as potentially ennobling or empowering, he was limited in what he could do by the expectations that his society associated with gender. Throughout his novels, a tension is evident between his desire to challenge society's assumptions about gender and the constraints that he places on his characters with disabilities in order for these challenges to be successful. As Poovey notes, however, this tension is characteristic of many Victorian authors who worked to challenge societal norms; even when these authors are trying to reshape their society's views, Victorian ideals and expectations still influenced their writing. In light of this inescapable tendency, Collins's attempt to portray disabilities as ennobling was an innovative and surprisingly modern way to address the plights of marginalized figures in society. By at least sometimes challenging stereotypical portrayals of disabilities, Collins encouraged his readers to find every individual important in a society increasingly influenced by utilitarianism.

1 For a more detailed explanation, see pages 4 and 5 of my introduction.

2 From a twentieth-century perspective, people who express pity or compassion toward those with disabilities are not viewed in a completely positive light. Paul K. Longmore, for example, says that the "compassionate regard" of people who contribute money to modern telethons on behalf of people with disabilities is "inextricably intertwined with the social stigma inscribed on people with disabilities" (134). However, Collins's depiction of the compassion people showed for Madonna was innovative for his time; page 26 of my thesis describes the ways in which authors typically portrayed figures with disabilities in the Victorian period.

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