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Crip-Philia and Family-Making in Wilkie Collins's *Hide and Seek**

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Choi, Jung Sun. "Crip-Philia and Family-Making in Wilkie Collins's *Hide and Seek*." *Studies in English Language & Literature* 48.1 (2022): 119-138. This essay would deal with the ways in which Wilkie Collins explores his idea of crip-philia in the character of Mr. Valentine Blyth whose paternalistic affection and care is always oriented toward women with disabilities, particularly his wife with incurable spinal disease and his adopted daughter with deafness and dumbness. Differing from Victorian hegemonic forms of male gender, muscular masculinity and entrepreneur manliness, Mr. Blyth, a vicarious character of Collins, embodies moral sensibility and domestic masculine virtues that lead him to change the lives of women with disabilities as well as those of anyone who asks for his help. Mr. Blyth's crip-philia is realized by domesticating women with disabilities and assigning them to the roles of a wife and a daughter, in spite of the relatives' concerns and opposition and the public's mockery and criticism acts. As this article points out, Collins sets Mr. Blyth as an ideal paternalistic gentleman to elucidate the changing ideas of Victorian family and furthermore, to redefine the idea of family to include not only biological ties but also non-blood relations, which could be manufactured through accidental or unlikely affiliations. The Victorians viewed family as a shelter that provides comfort and protects the family members from the harsh realities of social life. Just as conceptual changes concerning an idea of the home in the Victorian context took place, social and cultural understandings of the Victorian family underwent renovations in the changing composition of family members. This essay argues that gauging the social anxieties surrounding "artificial" family-making, *Hide and Seek* elucidates Collins's interest in fostering social toleration of "living differently." (Soongsil University)

Key Words: Wilkie Collins, *Hide and Seek*, crip-philia, female disability, family-making

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[1] This article has been developed from part of my dissertation chapter that focuses on Collins's idea of ideal manliness. It would become part of a bigger project in exploring Collins's persistant assertion of his crip-philia in *The Dead Secret* (1857), *Poor Miss Finch* (1872), and *The Law and the Lady* (1875).

I. Introduction

Over the nineteenth century, many novelists portray various kinds of characters with disabilities[1], yet Wilkie Collins is persistent in expressing his crip-phil position toward disabilities[2]. In his oeuvre, Collins has represented a lot of characters with bodily differences, non-normal and non-abled. Collins's *The Dead Secret* (1857) sets Leonard Franklin as an ideal husband with blindness, and *The Woman in White* (1860) capitalizes on debility in the characters of Anne Catherick, Laura Fairlie, and Frederick Fairlie. His second-best selling novel *The Moonstone* (1868) also carries characters with disabilities, Rosanna Spearman with a deformed shoulder and her friend Limping Lucy with a misshapen foot. Collins's *Poor Miss Finch* (1872)

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[1] To name a few, there are Tiny Tim in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843), blind Bertha in *A Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), Silas Wegg and Jenny Wren in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864). Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) features amputated and blind Rochester, as Dinah Craik's *Olive* (1850) sets Olive as a character with a deformed body and Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856) makes Phineas Fletcher deformed. There appear Philip Wakem in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Ermine Williams in Charlotte Young's *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865), Geraldine Underwood in Young's *The Pillars of the House* (1873) and Colin in Francis Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911).

[2] As voices for rights of people with disabilities has become a movement, the disability rights movements of the 1960s began to gain momentum. Consequently, the disability right movements came to the academic community and met Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" and Judith Butler's "Critically Queer" (McRuer 2, 41). Also, scholars and activists of disabilities are aware of the significance of naming, taking the word "crip," which was used as a derogatory term as in "cripple," both for a proudly assertive self-definition and for resistance to the compulsory able-bodiedness (McRuer 2). In the same light, this essay will use the word "crip" in exploring Collins's complex affective response toward women with disabilities, naming it as "crip-philia." Collin's idea of philia toward disability often manifests in his construction of characters with disabilities, who does not differ from those of non-disabled bodies. Likewise, his position is identifiable with that of recent disability scholars who ask "for equal rights of disabled individuals and for social recognition of their homogeneity by dismantling disability as an ideological idea, regulatory category, and demeaning name" (Choi 69). For instance, Lennard J. Davis defines disability as "a social process that intimately involves everyone who has a body" (2). Sharon L. Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, and Rosemaire Garland-Thomson claim that even though disability is commonly seen "an alien condition" (2), it is "the fundamental aspect of human embodiment" (4).

centers its plot on Lucilla Finch's blindness and Oscar Dubourg's blue-skinned face, and *The Law and the Lady* (1875) relies on Miserrimus Dexter, a man in a wheelchair as a key to approach secrecy and mystery.

This essay will focus on Collins's 1854 novel *Hide and Seek*, a text that also carries characters with disabilities, exploring the possibilities of "living differently" on the part of an individual man who "chooses" to affiliate with people with disabilities. Therefore, his living style involves in escaping from the expectations of Victorian society. The novel consists of two sections; Valentine Blyth's attempt to hide his adopted daughter, Mary, from strangers' gaze, and Matthew Grice's attempt to find the whereabouts of his missing sister and her baby girl. In the opening chapter, the narrator begins with a domestic scene in which Mr. Thorpe as the head of the household is constructed as the figure of strictly enforcing middle-class norms and rules. Against Mr. Thorpe's oppressive domesticity, the narrator introduces the protagonist, Mr. Blyth, whose house is frequently crowded with relatives, friends, and visitors. Well-respected by everyone, he is also portrayed as the figure of eccentricity because he is often choosing unexpected and non-normative paths. While not taking an easy life offered by his wealthy merchant uncle, he chooses to become an artist, but soon he finds out that he does not possess any artistic talent. After several commercial failures, he is given a chance to sell a small-size painting. On gaining some money, he immediately visits his beloved, Lavinia-Ada, and makes an offer of marriage to her. His marriage is strongly opposed by his relatives because he would be the life-long caregiver for a woman with a "bad spinal malady" that is incurable and worsening (35). At last, with his father's blessing and financial aid, Mr. Blyth starts his own family at a small middle-class house on the outskirts of Baregrove Square. After marriage, he works industriously as a portrait painter. One day, he happens to make a business trip to a remote place and spends time on watching a circus performance in which he is fascinated by a girl performer with disabilities. He is told a story of an abandoned baby from Mrs. Peckover, a clown's wife, who was entrusted with an infant by her dying mother, and hereafter, has

taken care of the baby. Mary, a name of the baby, becomes deaf at the fall of an equestrian performance, and consequently she becomes dumb. Hearing Mrs. Peckover's worries about male performers' abusive treatment of Mary, Mr. Blyth decides to rescue her from the circus. He expresses his plan to adopt Mary as his daughter, and safely brings her in to his house in which Mrs. Blyth welcomes Mary as her adopted daughter. Mr. Blyth renames her as Madonna, offers her homely family life and proper education, and moreover, teaches her to express herself through her drawings. But he makes sure that Madonna should be hidden from any stranger's eyes, keeping Madonna's story a secret.

As the first part of the narrative is about Mr. Blyth's hiding of Madonna with unidentifiable fear that someone may come and claim his rightful ownership of her, the second part of the narrative is about someone's seeking of his lost sister and her missing daughter. Matthew Grice, alias Mat Marksman, successful gold-digger, comes home from America and is told that his loving sister was abandoned by the villain, Arthur Carr, ran away from home, and died and buried in a distant village church. Carrying a bundle of family letters and his sister's belongings, Grice visits his sister's grave, while seeking whereabouts of little Mary. By coincidence, Grice encounters Zack in a public house and happens to get him out of trouble. Being grateful, Zack, Mr. Thorpe's son, and also Mr. Blyth's protégé, brings Grice to Mr. Blyth's house and introduces each other. Having already known about a hair-bracelet left by his sister, Grice accidently sees a hair-bracelet hidden in Mr. Blyth's cabinet and begins to suspect his fatherly position toward the girl. From then on, Grice devises to confirm the true identity of the hair-bracelet by breaking in Mr. Blyth's house and unlocking the cabinet door. Once confirming the identity of Madonna as that of Mary due to the identification of the hair-bracelet, Grice seeks whereabouts of Arthur Carr, but fails. Meanwhile, Grice makes a friend with Mr. Blyth who protects Mary/Madonna and provides her with a home and family, enjoying his peaceful time in Mr. Blyth's friendly circle. Grice begins to recognize the resemblance between Arthur Carr's hair in the hair-bracelet and his friend Zack's

hair, and soon he is able to pinpoint Mr. Thorpe as Arthur Carr. Grice visits Mr. Thorpe's house and confronts him about the death of his sister and informs him of the existence of his niece, but chooses forgiveness over revenge. Grice asks Mr. Blyth to father Mary/ Madonna, who is a loving daughter to Mrs. Blyth. In the end, Grice takes Zack in exploring a new world, and sometime later both men come back home to live with their family.

While critics have paid most attention to Collins's popular novels, *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, a few try to analyze *Hide and Seek* concerning Collins's narrative skills and plot structure. For instance, Alison Milbank points out that Collins relies on gothic elements of female confinement and male rescue in order to construct the plausible relationship between Mr. Blyth and Mary (56). In analyzing the novels' plot structure, Peter Thomas claims that Collins's novels often abound in the protagonist's quest in "seeking for solution and significant design" (5). In *Hide and Seek*, Zack Thorpe and Matthew Grice are considered to be the one who need to take a quest for what one is lost before or what one would find (Thomas 31). Recently, critics tend to shift their attention from Collins's narrative skills to his interest in social issues in gender, sexuality, class, and race. Critics agree that when he deals with these social issues, Collins clarifies where his stance is, that is "running against the grain of popular opinion" (Kucici 77). John Kucici defines Collins's position as that of a "prototypical outsider" against the mass market endorsed by the middle-class bourgeois (75). In the same light, John Sutherland evaluates that Collins often appears to "drive towards unrespectability" (ix), and Daniel Martin claims that "[t]o 'run a risk' in Collins novels is normal behavior" (184). Even though he is being part of the socio-economic system that he persistently criticizes, Collins seems to be satisfied with the identity of a social-cultural dissident, an identity that often makes him eccentric.

This essay would explore the ways in which Collins constructs Mr. Blyth as his vicarious character that can offer comments on social issues and he relies on Mr. Blyth to demonstrate his idea of crip-philia that signifies devoted attraction to people

with physical difference, particularly in this novel to women with disabilities. As this article wants to point out, it is Mr. Blyth who is fascinated by women with disabilities, brings them home, provides them with the space of family home in which they are able to play a family role of a wife or a daughter. Doing these, he is disregarded by his wealthy family, criticized for his eccentric decision, and moreover, his gender character is accused of his being morally corrupt. Even though he becomes an object of social ridicule, as Collins sets, Mr. Blyth is turned out to be an ideal paternalistic gentleman. Also, this essay will examine the ways in which Mr. Blyth's crip-phil acts help to explain the changing ideas of Victorian family and furthermore, redefine the idea of family to include not only biological ties but also non-blood relations, which is manufactured through accidental or unlikely affiliations. The Victorians viewed family as a shelter that provides comfort and protects the family members from the harsh realities of social life. Just as conceptual changes concerning an idea of the home in the Victorian context took place, social and cultural understandings of the Victorian family underwent renovations in the changing composition of family members. This essay argues that gauging the social anxieties surrounding "artificial" family-making, *Hide and Seek* elucidates Collins's interest in fostering social toleration of "living differently."

II. Collecting of Disabled Bodies and Family-Making

Over his literary works, Collins tries to explore the ways in which bodily difference is categorized and discriminated against common sense or social norms. But his interest in marked bodies often attracts criticism. For instance, Winifred Hughes argues that like other sensation fiction writers, Collins relies on characters with bodily difference, such as "hulking idiots, hunchbacks, and deformed villains," and female characters with insanity, in order to cater to the public's interest in sensational bodies (26). In other words, Collins is criticized to capitalize on

characters with non-normal bodies in order to increase the sale of his novels. Catherine Peters reiterates harsh criticism of Collins's representation of marked bodies, criticism that Collins's interest could be defined as perverse (ix). Meanwhile, more recently, critics pay adequate attention to Collins's construction of characters with disabilities against the idea of the normal body. For instance, Casey A. Cothran rebuts an allegation that Collins is either a mere entertainer or a writer of perversity, pointing out that his idea of non-normal bodies as the "extraordinary gallery of bizarre figures" aims to undermine cultural prejudice against bodily difference (194). Over his writing life, Collins seems to try to challenge social prejudice and "common sense" against people with bodily difference. As he offers detailed descriptions on a variety of disabilities each character embodies, Collins wants to propose the feasibility of an ideal community that embraces any "lack" or "flaw" in bodily appearance.

As *Hide and Seek* carries individuals differently marked, Mr. Blyth is one of them. He lives as a decent gentleman next door in "the dullest, the dreariest, the most oppressively conventional division of the whole suburb," displaying the middle-class stability and respectability (40). While he appears conventional, Mr. Blyth is considered as somewhat different in the eyes of his neighbors. He conspicuously stands out as an eccentric individual when he is seen with his close friends, he talks to his servants, or he does business with traders. Yet as the narrator highlights, his eccentric characteristics can be considered as an advantage in his socialization: his "interactive oddities of thought, speech, and action, [· · ·] made all his friends laugh at him and bless him in the same breath" (40). Just as he often becomes object of a friendly joke, he knows that "[e]verybody shakes hands with [him] but nobody bows [to him]" and rather he seems to enjoy his position in relation to the others (43).

Yet Collins's narrator throughout the novel tries to show how Mr. Blyth's difference can be valorized in indicating moral male virtue. His father has made fortune in a commercial business that is entirely devoted to money-making, and is

now ready to hand it in to his only son. As the promising future of Mr. Blyth is prearranged, he now ought to marry a decent girl from a respectable family, has his own children, and supports his family by working in the City. But differing from his father's idea of marital bliss in a sweet home, Mr. Blyth announces his engagement with Lavinia-Ada, who has serious physical afflictions that could compromise her becoming a mother of a child. The news surprises his father who eventually accepts his son's decision. When he is informed of the serious nature of his wife's illness, as the narrator emphasizes, Mr. Blyth does act bravely towards her by showing that his marriage proposal is made with his sincere heart in "a perfect firmness of manner" (36). His father is gradually moved by his son's manly act and begins to understand his son's conviction that physical disability does not indicate the defect of either mental health or moral competence. In the novel Collins constructs a crip-phil figure in the character of Mr. Blyth to deal with the prejudice against disability and revise the social convention of ideal physicality.

But the same news irritated his relatives and some friends who in turn severally scold for his rashness. As the narrator points out, people around Mr. Blyth appear to be resentful and their emotional reactions are something to do with Mr. Blyth's marriage with a woman with disabilities on the surface. Yet at the deeper level, their bitter resentment is directed towards his violating of Victorian middle-class marriage norms that define the roles and functions of women as helpers in establishing and maintaining male authority, since woman is "the guarantor of truth, legitimacy, property and male identity" (Poovey 80). Victorian society expects women to become wives and mothers within legal marital relations. When they act as wives and mothers, women are supposed to create a comfortable domestic environment that helps husbands/fathers to be rejuvenated after an exhausting day of work. In this light, the healthy body and mind of women are the expected condition for the sake of their husbands' social performance. In other words, her physical incompetency would lessen her husband's social position as well as manly gender identity. However, In the novel, Mr. Blyth's establishment of Victorian family home seems to

succeed, not in spite of, but because of his marriage to Lavinia-Ada whose moral mind strengthens in supporting her husband, while her spinal disease gets worse. Unlike many other female characters with disabilities, Lavinia-Ada is allowed to enjoy a domestic life as a wife whose dominant duty is to emotionally support her husband, manage a house party, and take care of her adopted daughter. Even though she is an invalid bound to her chair or bed, Lavinia-Ada is placed at the center of the Blyth household, overlooking each family's activities. By showing establishing women with disabilities in her rightful place, Collins seems to assert that the body is not the sign of an individual's worth and bodily afflictions as an diseases or illness could not determine the worth of her or his moral character and status.

The narrator continues to highlight Mr. Blyth's own way of home-making that validates his manliness. As John Tosh claims, a Victorian man's gender identity was closely related first to his being the head of a household, and second to his being provider and protector of his family (62). Just as Victorian men and their social status were consistantly measured in terms of their economic abilities, they must display their economic competency inside their homes. Especially the exotic and luxurious things in the drawing room were often used to show a "husband's capacity to keep his wife in leisure and luxury" (Tosh 24). In the novel, My. Blyth is aware of his duties as the head of his household as well as a loving husband. With "noble heart" and "high soul," he has been diligently working in order to support his wife (40). As his income increases, Mr. Blyth desires to decorate his wife's space with beautiful things, but he chooses his wife's bedroom for the space of display. He furnishes "the rarest flowers, the prettiest gardens under glass, bowls with the gold and silver fish in them, [and] a small aviary of birds" to make his wife's private space more brighter (39). His choice of a wife's bedroom does stand out because it signifies that his economic abilities do not need to be displayed to the public, but to his wife alone.

Understandably Mr. Blyth has considerable difficulties in proving his manliness. Refusing a path of a successful business man and choosing that of an painting artist,

Mr. Blyth must demonstrate that his decision is valid; his artistic vocation itself is productive and meaningful as well as sufficient in supporting his family (32). In his earlier career, however, his efforts are not rewarded and his artistic talent is often ignored. Facing the reality of an unrecognized artist Mr. Blyth decides to be efficient by dividing his time and labor between "the production of great unsaleable 'compositions,' which [are to be] hung near the ceiling in the Exhibition, and [the production] of small marketable commodities, which [are] invariably hung near the floor" (39). His plan that prioritizes his supporting of his family is soon rewarded in providing his wife with a more comfortable home and it gradually brings out the public recognition of his artistic worth. When he is established as one of the recognized artists in his community, he attributes his success to his wife's emotional and moral support that makes him exert himself as the head of a household and a gentleman artist. The narrator, in spite of his teasing tone, valorizes Mr. Blyth's productive labor and the utility of his energy, which is realized in his own way. His public recognition is slow, but his manly gender character as an ideal husband as well as a gentleman artist is achieved by converting his labor into a decent income.

Once he starts his own family, Mr. Blyth devotes his time and energy to his beloved wife, enjoying small-scale popularity as an artist. He now needs to add one or two to his family in his journey of family-making, which will complete a conventional picture of Victorian middle-class family. As if reflecting Collins's crip-philia, Mr. Blyth encounters a little girl who has disabilities and immediately decides to adopt her as the daughter in the Blyth household. One day during a business trip, he happens to attend a circus performance. In one of the several programs, a little girl appears and performs her role in front of the circus audience. Her presence attracts attention because she is so little and completely deaf and dumb. Seeing her on the circus ground, Mr. Blyth seems to be seriously affected or too excited. During her performance, he feels that he cannot control his self as he constantly fidgets or incoherently mutters something (62). His obvious affective reaction is soon noticed and becomes another spectacle in the eyes of the audience.

The audience immediately demands some explanation of this strange gentleman's eccentric behavior. Because Mr. Blyth is oblivious of where he is and could not hide his unnerved feelings, people begin to imagine that this gentleman could be the long lost father of the little girl and finally return from somewhere (63). In the audience's imagination, whoever he is, this gentleman is someone who must have reason to care for her, which sounds feasible in explaining his affective reaction and excessive excitability in seeing the girl.

In the character of Mr. Blyth, Collins endeavors to construct a masculinity based on Victorian middle-class men's sensibility and moral behavior, not based on muscular physicality. While Collins's concept of manliness is often criticized for its antiquated element, as it recalls the sentimental heroes with delicate physicality of the late eighteenth century (Wagner 47), it is clear that Collins tries to "establish an image of the laborious, gentlemanly artist" with ability to feel for others in the character of Mr. Blyth (Denisoff 51). Yet, Collins's construction of his male protagonist with hyper-sensibility often demands an explanation about the nature of male sensibility. In a case of Mr. Blyth, his difference from the others can be comprehended as his individuality, but his "suffocating sensation" in relation to Mary defies classification, which is itself provoking (62). Concerning the manifestations of his acts, Mr. Blyth is referred to by Mrs. Peckover as a gentleman who is "taken queer" at Mary (63)[3]. When Mrs. Peckover demands the nature of

[3] The word "queer" is worth noting since it has been used for a long time to reflect a social and cultural aspect of individuality that embodies a difference from what is normal. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) records the entrance of the adjective "queer" into the English language around the early sixteenth century, when it had English spellings such as "queir" (1508), "queyr" (1513), "quere" (1550), "queere" (1598), and "quer" (1621). To the present period, the word has addressed certain characteristics of individual behavior that are regarded as "cross," "oblique," "squint," "perverse," or "wrongheaded," and the word has been used on various occasions in which something is not right or not fitting.

The word "queer" was frequently used by both male and female Victorian writers; it appears in fiction, poetry, and prose, and was casually used in realist and popular novels. The word was also popular in non-fiction writings on a variety of diverse issues, including economics, law, arts, architecture, urban planning, music composition, and fishery. The problem or/and benefit about this pervasive use is that Victorian writers did not mean the same thing in using the word, so that there can be no single precise

Mr. Blyth's queer interest in a girl with disabilities, she could provoke concerns that his non-normativity lies not primarily in his adoption of a girl with disabilities and his efforts to endure a scandalous attack on his moral value, but in the excessiveness of his affective reaction when he encounters Mary in a circus performance. In her book *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities*, Holly Furneaux points out the excessiveness of Mr. Blyth's anxiety to protect Mary and of his "compulsive desire to make her his own child" (59). The excessive feeling is usually associated with maternal parenting, but his excessiveness can be viewed as "manly," "a product of his extreme but chaste desire to have a daughter" (Furneaux 60). Mr. Blyth's domesticity seems fragmented, unstable, and "counterfeit" of the real but offers, as the narrator validates it, an alternative way of making a Victorian family.

In the descriptions of Mr. Blyth's excessive reaction to Mary, the narrator reiterates the frame of a father-daughter relationship by denaturalizing his erotic sensation. He, queered in the audience's eyes, concentrates on meeting Mary and finds her in a private tent. There he witnesses and is shocked by Mary being brutalized by a circus manager (68). Instantly Mr. Blyth decides to rescue Mary from the circus and takes her to his friend's safe residence. In doing so, he is informed of the story of Mary that she is an orphan girl with disabilities and is raised by Mrs. Peckover who due to a dying mother's desperate plea has become a surrogate mother for Mary. As he discovers from Mrs. Peckover that Mary is often abused and may be helpless to another violence by male performers, Mr. Blyth urgently carries out adopting Mary as his daughter, providing her with a home and

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definition. Nevertheless, the Victorians used the word "queer" widely in conversation to describe anything related to the inarticulable and indescribable, such as "strange," "odd," "peculiar," "eccentric," or in appearance or character of "non-normal" condition. More generally, Victorian novelists relied on the word "queer" in representing the counter-normative categories that describe a difference from the ordinary, the majority opinion, the casual, the traditional and customary, and the normal in areas of political opinion, religious choice and practice, fashion, and the body (or body parts). Such was the popularity and pervasiveness of Victorians' use of the word "queer" in referring to something different or variant from the so-called normal that it can be said to be a key nineteenth-century term. Collins also seems to signify a non-normal state in Mr. Blyth's affective reaction to Mary.

protecting her from danger. His genuine reason is soon revealed to Doctor Joyce, his close friend: that he would protect Mary by adopting her as his and his wife's daughter. His desire to domesticate Mary is immediately justified by Mrs. Peckover's testimony about a unwritten scene of Mary being beaten by a circus manager. At the Doctor's drawing room, Mrs. Peckover's vivid description shakes Mr. Blyth's nerves against the infliction upon a girl and provokes Doctor Joyce's repulsive response, which legitimates the idea that Mary is pitiable and vulnerable to the danger, and then she is urgently in need of a male protector, a father figure.

In the process of his adopting of an orphan girl, Doctor Joyce emerges as an authority in guaranteeing Mr. Blyth's qualification as the paternalistic father figure. When he has a closeted conference with Mrs. Peckover concerning the rightful position of Mr. Blyth, Doctor persuades her about the sincerity of Mr. Blyth's good wills. He explains to her that "[i]f ever man was in love with a child at first sight, he was that man. As an artist, a gentleman of refined tastes, and as the softest-hearted of male human beings, in all three capacities, he was enslaved by that little innocent, sad face" (64). As his old friend understands, Mr. Blyth is a "little cracked" when it comes to little people and often "go[es] on in this way about children before" (64). Therefore he is the man who is trusted with Mary. In tandem with the narrator's favorable comments that appreciate Mr. Blyth's gentlemanliness, Doctor Joyce persuades Mrs. Peckover and the reader that he is not in any way harmful to the girl. In finalizing Mrs. Peckover's consent to the adoption, Mr. Blyth's financial fitness and his stable domestic setting play a crucial role. His home is endorsed as the space of protection and safety differing from that of the circus, a space that is susceptible to the violent acts of an unmanly man. His domestic setting would enable Mary to enjoy a life of a middle-class woman by becoming a shelter to protect her.

Yet in spite of several favorable testimonies about his character, the question of the genuineness of his actions still remains unanswered. His having a "suffocating sensation" in encountering Mary in the circus seems to defy conjecture (62). The

obvious point is that he plays a role as an ideal male hero in a rescue story as the effect of his "suffocating sensation." For that reason, Doctor Joyce (and the narrator) valorizes Mr. Blyth's deep interest in Mary as humanistic rather than erotic and naturalizes that his suffocating sensation is related to his attraction to human frailness that is marked as a difference, but to be acceptable as such. Throughout the narrative, Mr. Blyth is described as the gentleman who has his own way of doing things and does not conform to the social standard of values, manners, and behavior. Nevertheless Mr. Blyth is guaranteed for being a paternalistic gentleman figure who shows his warm-hearted concerns towards people in distress. In other words, it is more persuasive that his excited emotion in relation to Mary is a proof of his moral sense and of quite humanistic interest.

Mary is embraced by Mrs. Blyth as a loving daughter as well as the family treasure and begins a new chapter in her life. Regardless of what his friends say in favor of him, however, Mr. Blyth becomes a target of harsh criticism concerning his living arrangement in which he marries a woman with disabilities and adopts as a daughter a girl with disabilities. In the eyes of the public, Mary appears into the community out of nowhere and Mr. Blyth refuses to explain the adoption process. Her obscure origin aggravates the public opinion against Mr. Blyth's eccentric morality. When "whispered calumnies" are spread against him, they refer to Mary as the cause to his moral failure (34). Pointing out the Blyth household, people grimace in disgust, let out a sigh, or raise their shoulder (34). The narrator describes how Mary is situated in the community:

> she happens to be the only person in Mr. Blyth's household at whom prying glances are directed, whenever she walks out; whose very existence is referred to by the painter's neighbours with an invariable accompaniment of shrugs, sighs, and lamenting looks; and whose 'case' is always compassionately designated as 'a sad one,' whenever it is brought forward, in the course of conversation, at dinner-tables and tea-tables in the new suburb. (48)

Mr. Blyth's act of bring a poor girl to his home and adopting her as his loving daughter is not blamable. In society's opinion, however, his decision allows the anonymous public to speculate about the existence of a secret (sexual) inside the Blyth household and Mary could be considered as the embodied evidence of Mr. Blyth's extramarital sexuality.

It can be said that the public gossip about Mr. Blyth's ways of living is something to do with Victorian prejudice against women with disabilities. As Julia Miele Rodas points out, Victorian novels try to represent female disability in their reflecting the presence of people with disabilities, but end up showing social anxieties concerning female sexuality (372). Victorian social anxieties can vary, but the most fearful one is women with disabilities settled at the domestic sphere and sexually functioning. Kate Flint claims that Victorian novels, thus, tend to construct female and male characters with disabilities to be "rarely sexualized" (155). In Victorian novels, female characters with disabilities are conventionally excluded from their participation in courtship, marital relationship, and child-birth. It is because that female disability is, as Cindy LaCom argues, viewed as a threat to the Victorian domesticity and heterosexual marriage whose objective is to reproduce British citizen with able bodies (190). As Martha Stoddard Holmes says, toward the late nineteenth century, Victorian novels begins to represent women with disabilities in romantic relationships and marriage plots, but they still show lack of enthusiasm in assigning them to the roles of biological mothers of a child (*Fictions of Affliction* 6). Consequently, women with disabilities are often constructed either in the character of a permanent child (Klages 3) or in that of an extra-domestic position ("Bolder with the Lover" 61). They are accepted as long as they are not part of any heterosexual relationship[4]. However, defying Victorian prejudice, Collins constructs his female

[4] Critics of Victorian disability point out that female disability is represented to be anxiety-provoking, but it is somehow useful in narrative-making. Victorian novels capitalize on female characters with disabilities as a plot device, employing female disability in correlation with emotion as "melodramatic machinery" in the Victorian imagination (*Fictions of Affliction* 3). Often, the emotional excessiveness in female disability is considered morally positive. As Holmes points out, women with disabilities are

characters with disabilities as sexually active agents who could attract men's attention as well as claim their romantic feelings. As much as that Lavinia-Ada's physical disabilities compromise the evaluation of Mr. Blyth's manly social position makes people invidious, female disability brings out people's bitter criticism that is closely related to cultural fear against "dysgenic" reproduction (Holmes 62)[5]. Against Victorian prejudice against female disability, Collins creates a space in which women with disabilities functions as the way they are born with.

The presence of Mrs. Blyth and Mary, thus, would be a challenge to Victorian prejudice against female disability. In the novel, Lavinia-Ada, who is taken to be a wife of a gentleman, becomes a central object of Mr. Blyth's attention and care as well as an object of pity of Mr. Blyth's close friends. It can be said that Lavinia-Ada is erotically objectified in the gazes of people who attract to her ("Bolder with Her Lover" 63). Mary can be said to be objectified in "erotic terms" as her complexion, lips, hair, and eyes are perused and praised in Mr. Blyth's artist coterie ("Bolder with Her Lover" 64). Unlike Lavinia-Ada who cannot be a biological parent of a child, Mary is considered as the one that could have that chance. Mary shows symptomatic signs of sexually activated feelings oriented towards Zack, who is one of young men who frequently visits Mr. Blyth, a long-lasting friend and mentor (68). She secretly sighs, blushes, and heaves her bosom whenever she thinks of him or she talks to him (126). But unfortunately, she does not have any chance to start a romantic relationship with him as Grice, Mary's

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viewed as "empathic agents in their own right" since they are configured as moral agents who are able to build moral sentiment in the heart of the public (*Fictions of Affliction* 37). Meanwhile, Mary Klages claims that when they cannot serve as a moral muse, women with disabilities could make money by converting the public's sympathy into economic earnings (73). Holmes's moral muse and Klages's sentiment sellers are to indicate that women with disabilities could be accepted as family members or community members as long as they do not participate in sexually active relationships. Yet when they should participate in those relationships, women with disabilities would be tolerated as long as their participation does not produce marriage and its consequent reproduction.

[5] Victorian society tends to see disability in women and men in a gendered way. Female disability is often correlated with monstrous reproduction, while male disability is credited with generative resource in men's creativity (Neutsch and Nussbaum 11).

uncle, traces the secret path of Zack's father and finally identifies him as Arthur Carr. It turns out that Mr. Thorpe is her biological father and Zack is her step-brother. Just as her first love fails, Mary would be given a second chance.

In undermining a deep-rooted prejudice against disability and pointing out the liminal relationship between disability and non-disability, Lennard Davis claims that both are byproducts and "part of the same system" (2) that "regulates and controls the way we think through the body" (3). In other words, it is not that disability exists, but a custom-built and ideology-driven idea of disability hangs around us. Collins's position toward disability, particularly female disability, seems to be reiterated in Davis's stance. As Lillian Nayder argues, Collins intentionally constructs female disability sexually activated in the character of Mary because he considers disability configured in the figure of social marginality, violating "gender norms and class boundaries" in bodies (42). Likewise, Holmes claims that Mary's being sexually enabled is a direct challenge to Victorian prejudices of disabled women, prejudice that tends or desires to consider disabled women as nonsexual and non-woman ("Bolder with the Lover" 63). While his experiment is very risky as well as engaging, it is to recognize that Collins is an advocate for the sexual rights of the disabled ("Bolder with the Lover" 72). In other words, Collins proposes an idea that disability can be sexually attractive, not defective, through his construction of "numerous characters with a range of physical, psychological, and social disabilities" ("Bolder with the Lover" 61). Later, Cothran points out that Collins relies on disabled characters to highlight his idea that disabled subjects share the same sexual longing with non-disabled subjects (197). In agreeing with Nayder, Holmes, and Cothran, this article argues that Collins successfully constructs the figure of disabled women as sexual agents in challenging Victorian prejudices against bodily difference. Mrs. Blyth and Mary whose disabilities are never considered a lack, defect, or problem are assigned conventional women's roles such as wife and mother, and girl with a possible romantic lover.

III. Conclusion

The representation of female disability itself can be said meaningful. Yet Collins seems to want more; he desires to challenge the issue of normalcy by inserting disability in his literary representation (Laurence 95). Moreover, he wants to create an affiliation between individuals with various disabilities and between the disabled and non-abled. Collins uses Mary's deafness as a metaphor of "the enforced innocence and voicelessness of all Victorian woman" (Nayder 47). It is because he wants to argue that disability is not personal, but rather social so that it must be dealt with its affiliation with human rights. Yet he appears to understand that social codes and norms are unstable and contingent, requesting the presence of the Other to be contrasted with the norm. As he understands that social norms are all about corporeal fitness, his novel *Hide and Seek* shows that people with disabilities, the Other on the other side, must be accepted into the society. In most of his literary works, especially in *Hide and Seek*, Collins clarifies that he wants to criticize Victorian bourgeois society for its deafness and blindness when it comes to the voices of people with bodily differences. For Collins, these individuals with disabilities are often placed outside the boundary of social norms because they are represented as people who are not "us" in the public's view. Recognizing a striking resemblance between otherizing disability and constructing non-normality, Collins shows in his novels his concerns about the social oppression of individuality even in faith, opinion, conviction and taste. Therefore, his novels try to replace the oppressive concept of difference as deviation with that of difference as variation. As his novels elucidate, Collins validates people with disabilities as variation written on the body, and furthermore celebrates an affiliation with people with disabilities by pointing out to the reader the moments in which we find wholeness, a complete well-being, in the bodies of imperfection.

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