

Disability, Parenthood, and Sister/ Brotherhood in *St. Martin's Eve*

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④ parenthood ⑤ sister/brotherhood]

Introduction

This essay will explore the representation of disability in Mrs Henry Wood's *St. Martin's Eve* (1866)¹. Sensation-fiction novels often focus on socially marginalised characters and have thus attracted scholars interested in the Victorian period's social, legal, and political aspects. The emergence of disability studies in the 1970s led to a growing interest in literary descriptions of disability in Victorian literature, an interest that spread to studies of sensation fiction in the 2010s. This has helped to encourage a re-evaluation of the literary output of authors of sensation fiction.

One of the aims of this essay is to shed further light on one of the less-studied of Wood's works from a disability-studies perspective. Anne-Marie Beller argues that sensation-fiction studies are now in their second phase, where the focus has widened to cover writers other than the three leading figures of the genre: Wilkie

Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Wood (463). Despite her place in this ‘core’ group, Wood has attracted much less scholarly attention than the other two members of the triumvirate. Only one monograph focusing solely on Wood and her oeuvre has been published so far: *Mrs Henry Wood* (2020) by Mariaconcetta Costantini. Even though some anthologies and articles offer critical appraisals of Wood’s writings, such as *Women’s Writing*, special issue: ‘Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood’ (2008), they tend to discuss her masterpiece, *East Lynne* (1861). Scholars who study sensation fiction from a perspective of disability studies have tended to focus on the works of Collins and Braddon, whereas, to my knowledge, they have rarely discussed those of Wood.

One of the reasons Wood’s work has been so little appreciated is that her writing style is considered to be more conservative than that of other writers of sensation fiction. For example, Elaine Showalter has analysed that Wood ‘did not believe that literary talents took precedence over the normal obligations of womanhood’ (*A Literature*, 50). Lyn Pykett has pointed out ‘the apparently conservative morality and sexual politics of its ending’ in *East Lynne* (134). In Wood’s work, Henrietta Keddie has regarded ‘the whole scope of it in its unexceptionably moral tone’ as ‘curiously commonplace’ (319). While *St. Martin’s Eve* and Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862) are very similar in setting that both the heroines are diagnosed as ‘madwomen’ and sent to an asylum, only the Braddon’s novel has received scholarly attention.

This essay draws on the argument by Heidi Logan. Summarising previous research, she outlines characteristics of literary disability in sensation fiction, which is distinct from those of canonical Victorian works. Sensation novelists, she writes, presented disability not as a condition to be cured, but as ‘an acceptable or even positive difference’ (17). Sensation-fiction scholars contend that there are

cases of sensation fiction aiming to question or subvert stigmatised representations of disabled characters. Wood scholar Costantini argues that Wood had both 'conservative and innovative' views on gender issues, though her work appears to endorse the conservative values of the time (20). Indeed, the depictions of two disabled characters, Charlotte St. John and Isaac St. John, raise doubts about stereotypes of disabled characters.

This essay will suggest a new way of reading *St. Martin's Eve* as a novel that explores the implications of the parental role of disabled characters. The first section will examine social and cultural contexts surrounding disability and parenthood in the mid-Victorian period. The second section will analyse how the disabled motherhood of Charlotte and the disabled fatherhood of Isaac are portrayed with their disabilities, along with the depiction of various forms of parent-child relationships. The third section will investigate how the parenthoods of Charlotte and Isaac draw support from the sisterhood or brotherhood that they occupy in relation to characters of their own sex. This essay will argue that *St. Martin's Eve* attempts to question the Victorian discourse on the disabled parenthood.

It is necessary at this stage to identify some of the terminology used in this essay. Drawing on the argument of Collin Barnes and Geof Mercer, this essay distinguishes between 'impairment' and 'disability'; while the former refers to 'a medically classified biophysiological condition', the latter 'denotes the social disadvantage experienced by people with an accredited impairment' (11). This essay does not use the term, 'people with disability', which 'implies that impairment defines an individual's identity', and instead uses 'disabled people' (11) to connote that those who have impairments are rendered powerless by society. In addition, this essay uses 'non-disabled' rather than 'able-bodied' to refer to characters with no marked disability to stress the point that they are merely seen as not devi-

ating from a ‘healthy’ or ‘normal’ standard.

1. Disability and Parenthood in Mid-Victorian Contexts

According to the *OED*, the term ‘disabled’ came into common use to describe people with impairments of one kind or another in the second half of the twentieth century (‘Disabled, adj.I.2’). Yet a social category for people with a body and/or a mental state that deviated from the norm had come into being by the nineteenth century. Lennard J. Davis explains that while people with impairments were largely, though not entirely, included in preindustrial societies, they were marginalised as disabled people in postindustrial societies (3). This was the result of the need to split people into non-disabled and disabled categories based on their ability to carry out useful tasks in an industrial economy (131). His analysis shows that the bifurcation between non-disabled and disabled sides led to the creation of a social image of the non-disabled person who was able to work as a positive standard and the disabled person who was unable to work as abnormal and negative.

The medicalisation of disability greatly contributed to the stigmatisation of bodies with an impairment as disabled. The role of the doctor in Victorian Britain was to inspect the body in the context of a sophisticated institutional framework (Faure 31). ‘[T]he medical profession’ standardised the body without impairment as normal (non-disabled) and the body with an impairment as abnormal (disabled); as a consequence, ‘the personal-tragedy view of disability achieved ideological hegemony and has become “naturalized” as common sense’ (Barnes and Mercer 83–84). This idea, now called the ‘medical model of disability’ in disability studies, was dominant in disability discourse from the Victorian period until it was replaced by the ‘social model of disability’ that emerged with disabili-

ty studies²⁾.

It is, however, difficult to say who was considered disabled in the (mid-) Victorian period as it is today because several things determined a body that deviated from the norm, although the norm was also very hard to define. The New Poor Law in 1834 is one of these norms. This law strictly defined who was entitled to public financial support, such as ‘the sick, “mentally ill”, unmarried mothers, the elderly and “the infirm”’ (‘Workhouses and the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834’) and allowed institutions to take in people who met one or more of these criteria. Being institutionalised for inability to work became shameful in people’s minds, thereby justifying the stigmatisation of those in institutions (Harris and Roulstone ch.2). In the light of Davis’s analysis, those covered by the law could be regarded as disabled.

It can be thought that the diseased body also deviated from the norm of the ‘healthy’ body. In the nineteenth century, the development in industry and medicine led to the universal appearance of invalids in various fields, such as the arts (Frawley 13, 32). The invalid came to work ‘as a legitimate authorial identity’ for the person or the character (17). Interestingly, the invalids in fictional work represent not only ‘the threatening or duplicitous’ but also ‘integrity and holiness’ (17); the hypochondriac Mr Fairlie in *The Woman in White* (1860) is portrayed in the former image and Nell Trent in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) in the latter. If, as these characters show, there was an idea that being ill was a large part of identity, then the invalids might be said to be the same as disabled people whose disability was equated with their identity.

To consider people with all types of ‘deviant’ physical and mental conditions as ‘disabled’ would require a more detailed examination and is beyond the scope of this essay. This essay considers both Charlotte, with mental impairment, and

Isaac, with physical impairment, as disabled characters. This is partly because they bear similar characteristics to typical examples of disabled characters in Victorian fiction. The scenes in which Charlotte sneaks into Georgina's bedroom at night and in which she bites Honour's cheek are reminiscent of the most famous Victorian 'madwoman', Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* (1847). The episode where Charlotte locks burning Benja in a room also characterises her as a stereotypical Victorian 'madwoman'³⁾. Isaac is described in such a way as to suggest a resemblance to Philip Wakem in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). They both demonstrate some of the stereotypical features of physically disabled men in the Victorian period: 'hunchbacked', invalid, sensitive, and unsociable. These features signal to Victorian readers that Charlotte and Isaac were to be considered disabled.

Another reason is that Charlotte and Isaac are portrayed as having a certain number of characteristics typical of fictional disabled characters. Disabled characters in literature have often been closely linked with solitude; that is, they are excluded from many or all human relationships. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder contend that disabled characters presented in Western literary culture have functioned as what they term a '*narrative prothesis*': as 'a stock feature of characterization' and 'an opportunistic metaphorical device' (47). In other words, they are often shown to be isolated and, even if they engage with other characters this engagement is not an important plot point. This is because they are merely a means of developing the plot or expressing some messages in the main plot of the non-disabled hero or heroine. During the Victorian period, disabled people were thought inferior to non-disabled people due to medical stigmatisation and exclusion from work. Negative images of disabled people led to the characterisation of disabled characters in mainstream Victorian works being 'lonely, of limited effectiveness, and separated from the ordinary milestones experienced by' non-disabled

characters (Logan 13). This means that disabled characters usually have no profession, few friends, and even fewer family relations.

Another notable commonality among Victorian disabled characters is that they are rarely romantically involved with anyone and are even less likely to marry⁴). This was a consequence of the belief that 'physical illness and impairment' would be inherited (Stoddard Holmes 7), which discouraged people who were diagnosed as disabled from having children. Hence, disabled people were and have been considered unsuitable to be progenitors of their own families (Matsunami 53). Non-disabled people internalised this ideology that affirmed the exclusion and denigration of disabled people. For an instance of a figure who exemplifies this line of thought, it can be turned to Philip Wakem who does not marry Maggie Tulliver despite the affection the two of them feel for each other. In another example, in *The Moonstone* (1868) Rosanna Spearman's love for Franklin Blake is not requited and her broken-heartedness is one reason for her suicide.

St. Martin's Eve seems to characterise Charlotte and Isaac in some ways in line with these conventional portrayals of disabled characters. Yet this novel is unusual in that it attempts to explore what kind of parental role the disabled characters could play in a period in which disabled people were thought to be unsuitable for parenthood.

2. Disabled Motherhood and Disabled Fatherhood

The deaths of Benja and Georgy seem to imply the conservative nature of *St. Martin's Eve* in that the disabled characters fail to play a role as a parent. Charlotte leaves Benja to die in flames after he accidentally sets himself on fire and takes Georgy all over the European continent, eventually leaving him to die of consumption. Isaac too fails to prevent their deaths. Yet considering Wood's 'conser-

vative and innovative' literary style as described by Costantini, this section will discuss how this novel represents the parenthood of the disabled characters, drawing on the Victorian sociocultural discourses on child-rearing, motherhood, and fatherhood.

This essay would like to refer to Charlotte's maternal role as one of 'disabled motherhood' and Isaac's paternal role as one of 'disabled fatherhood'. This essay gives these terms two meanings; the first is that Charlotte and Isaac are ultimately denied their eligibility to be a mother or father by non-disabled characters. The other is that they are portrayed as to some extent incapable of fulfilling the roles of mother and father expected of them in the mid-Victorian context. Before discussing the representations of the disabled parenthood, the first half of this section will analyse how the novel elaborates the plot structure and the characteristics of the disabled characters to explore the theme of the disabled parenthood.

St. Martin's Eve has an experimental plot focusing on the depiction of the parenthood of the disabled characters. This novel consists of two plots, one involving Charlotte and Isaac and the other involving Rose Darling and Frederick St. John. Each pair of characters appears to be the counterpart of the other; that is, the mentally disabled Charlotte is contrasted with the self-indulgent but younger and charming Rose, while the physically disabled Isaac with the 'tall, slender' (110)⁵⁾ younger Frederick. The plot of the younger characters is in the style of a Bildungsroman, with them growing up and eventually getting married. The plot of Charlotte and Isaac, on the other hand, focuses on their parenting and the deaths of Benja and Georgy. As Andrew Mangham assigns Charlotte the role of 'mad-woman' as a result of her involvement in the sensational incident of Benja's death, it may be plausible to regard her as by far the more important character in the novel. If, however, there is a counter-relationship between the four main char-

acters in the two plots, it could be argued that the storyline in which Charlotte participates concerns not only the disabled heroine, but also the disabled hero, Isaac.

Charlotte and Isaac are both characterised in great part by their relation to Benja and Georgy as their parent, step-parent, or guardian. George's first wife says to him on her deathbed, 'Be not allured by beauty ... but take one who will be to him [Benja] the loving mother that I would have been. Some one whom you know well and can trust' (4). Her wish indicates that the next mistress of Alnwick should be chosen based on whether she is worthy of a 'loving mother', though George is attracted to Charlotte's beauty and decides to marry her. Isaac is asked by George to look after the Alnwick children, especially Benja. After George's death, the role of the father is passed from George to Isaac. As a consequence, these two disabled characters are presented to readers in the roles of (surrogate) mother and father to the Alnwick children.

Charlotte and Isaac take on the roles of mother and father despite their disability, but they are by no means equal in the process of becoming a mother and father. Disability studies needs to look at differences within the category of disability, such as impairment, gender, class, and race (Kafer and Kim 124). Indeed, Charlotte and Isaac have different impairments, disabilities, and genders. While it is difficult to say which was considered more 'inferior', mental or physical disability, at the time of the novel's publication, many researchers, such as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, have noted that disabled women were socially disadvantaged compared to disabled men in what was a patriarchal, ableist society (3).

From these studies, it follows that the disabilities inflicted on Charlotte and Isaac are in part related to their gender. One possible explanation for Charlotte's mental disability is that in the Victorian era, this sort of disability was known as the 'female malady' (Showalter, *The Female* 1) as it was believed that pregnan-

cy and childbirth were closely related to insanity. This line of thinking, and the subcategory ‘maternal insanity’, was believed to be ‘occasioned by becoming a mother (puerperal insanity)’ and also occasioned by inheriting ‘from the mother (insanity transmitted through the maternal line)’ (Matus 189). Hence, the plot-line involving the mentally disabled woman becoming a mother could appeal to readers who were concerned about prejudice against this female malady. Another possible explanation could be as a plot strategy. Charlotte has to hide her impairment to avoid being admitted to an asylum. Her impairment would exclude her from the only role considered appropriate for women of the middle class and above during this period: that of wife and mother. Women with impairment were often shut out of reproductive activities and excluded from the world of typical ‘femininity’ (Garland-Thomson 17). Characterising her as having a mental impairment enables Charlotte to hide her disability and furthermore to take on the roles of both biological mother and stepmother. This setting paves the way for the exploration of motherhood undertaken by a mentally disabled woman who is not usually given the opportunity to take on such a role.

On the other hand, disabled men, though perceived as not fully masculine, were often less stigmatised than disabled women. According to Margo DeMello, ‘men ... are expected to be strong, independent, and self-sufficient. Disabled men, however, are often seen as less-than-men because their bodies are not necessarily strong and they are not necessarily self-reliant’ (30). Isaac’s physical impairment severely undermines his ability to fulfil his role as an ‘independent’ man, especially as a father, by the standards of Victorian patriarchal society. Compared to Frederick, who is a good walker, the narrator repeatedly portrays Isaac as being ‘invalid’ (79) almost confined to his home, which was considered a private, feminine space rather than a public one. While Charlotte’s impairment can be

concealed, his physical impairment is visible and prevents him from marrying. Yet it is important to note that he is shown to have high status and fortune with the title of 'Esquire', which sets him apart from the financially dependent Charlotte, who is also born the daughter of an Esquire and remains in the upper-middle class after marriage. Isaac, a gentleman of status and wealth, is able to be a surrogate father without the fear of becoming a biological father; that is, the fear that his impairment would be passed on to his children. This set of circumstances allows the novel to explore the fatherhood of a physically disabled man, a subject that had been little portrayed in Victorian literature.

Charlotte's and Isaac's individual disabilities lead them away from demonstrating ideal mother/fatherhood; in other words, their disabilities mark them out as the disabled mother and the disabled father. The second part of the section will illuminate the representations of disabled parenthood of Charlotte and Isaac.

Charlotte's disabled motherhood is attributed to her mental impairment which results in her childlike character and her much less participation in child-rearing. DeMello points out, 'disabled people are often infantilized—treated as children by well-meaning strangers' (30). Indeed, the narrator repeatedly emphasises her youthful appearance; for instance, she does not look 'to be much past twenty' (14). Mrs Darling 'had allowed Charlotte to have her own way as a child' (186) and the scenes in which Mrs Darling often consults with Mr Pym and Prance to take care of Charlotte also characterise Charlotte as more like an immature girl than an independent adult woman. Additionally, Charlotte's stubbornness in not heeding the warnings of the other characters makes her seem like a spoilt child. For instance, when Charlotte is advised by Mrs Darling and Rose to stop travelling to help Georgy recuperate, she eagerly replies, "'You do not understand them [children] ... It is for him [Georgy] that I move about. He grows so

languid whenever we settle down. What should you know about children?” (240). This characterisation of childlike Charlotte does not accord with middle-class notions of motherhood at the time. ‘The Angel in the House’ embodies the Victorian ideal of the mother. Victorian middle-class mother was expected to have ‘inner purity and religiosity’ as a spiritual salvation and a pillar of morality for their husbands and children (Showalter, *Literature* 12). Patricia Branca argues that due to ‘the ever-expanding range of the press’, ‘there is no question that in the nineteenth century the woman’s responsibility as a mother was more widely manifested than in any previous period’ (77). Charlotte’s child-like quality indicates her own need to be parented rather than her capacity to parent, which signifies Charlotte’s disabled motherhood.

A further problem is that Charlotte has little involvement in parenting. She is rarely portrayed as engaging in child-rearing, except for her being ‘a rather strict disciplinarian as to the children taking their meals regularly’ (143–44). Such a characterisation is also not consistent with the middle-class style of parenting favoured at the time. Tamara S. Wagner in her study of Victorian child-rearing describes, ‘The nobility and gentry generally handed over their offspring to an extensive contingent [of staff]’, whereas middle class people favoured ‘the sanctification of a more involved parenting in the middle-class home’ (36). In other words, with parenting of the type carried out by the upper classes being beyond the financial reach of the middle classes, a less expensive, more hand-on type of parenting was idealised during the Victorian period. Charlotte’s almost non-participating in child-rearing implies her disabled motherhood.

Given that Charlotte’s disabled motherhood and the popularity of the parenting style with the active mother involvement, the Alnwick family’s adoption of an upper-class parenting style is significant to the novel’s setting. The nannies at Al-

nwick, especially the nanny of Benja called Honour, become a means of liberating Charlotte from the middle-class idea of being 'the Angel in the House'. Charlotte's role at Alnwick is to be the 'proper' mistress of the house, as the children are raised by the nannies; this means that she does not need to do housework or childcare. With no such responsibilities, she is depicted to be 'seated alone, near the window, with a work-box before her and some embroidery in her hand, looking as much at home as though she had always lived there' (35). The words of George's first wife: 'take one who will be to him the loving mother' (4), imply that Charlotte is expected only to give love to her children, not to be a moral pillar, as a middle-class mother is required to be. The comment by Mrs Darling, "'It is a great responsibility'" ... 'speaking, not to Honour, but to the ladies around' (15), is intended to relieve Charlotte from her parenting responsibilities. This supportive attitude of Mrs Darling towards Charlotte will be discussed in the next section.

Yet Honour has an ambivalent function because she is also an obstacle to Charlotte becoming even a 'loving mother'. Samuel and Sarah Adams in their handbook on servants explains the qualities required of a nanny; a nanny 'ought to be of a lively and cheerful disposition, perfectly good tempered, and clean and neat in her habits and person. She ought also to have been accustomed to the care and management of young children' (254). These features seem to fit to some extent with the narrator's characterisation of Honour as 'a comely, fair-complexioned, nice-looking young woman' (11) and as a 'conscientious, good' (28) woman. Miho Nishimura argues that the children of the ruling classes were sometimes more influenced by their nannies than by their own mothers (28). Indeed, Benja is hostile to Charlotte and fond of Honour, even saying, 'when I am master of Alnwick ... You [Honour] shall be mistress ... so that mamma can't come near

us' (448). These words eventually push Charlotte towards her indirect murder of him. In contrast to the growing intimacy between Honour and Benja, the relationship between Charlotte and Benja deteriorates. Honour's devotion to Benja emphasises her role as a 'good' mother, thereby acting as a criticism of Charlotte's disabled motherhood.

Mangham contends the novel suggests that 'passionate violence could be avoided with self-regulation and self-control' (74). What is important about the representation of Charlotte's motherhood is her efforts to control her passion and her struggles as a stepmother and a biological mother. Charlotte's insanity consists of her inability to control her passions. She beats Benja because she cannot restrain her resentment towards him, who is an obstacle to Georgy's inheritance. '[M]aternal violence' and 'child murders ... were also associated with forms of female insanity that transcended class borders' (Costantini 113). The contemporary readers could easily have associated her violent attitude towards Benja with insanity. Yet she makes repeated efforts to control her passions; for example, 'The angry emotion had raised a storm within her, and her breath was laboured. But she strove for self-control, and pressed her hand to her heart to still it' (57). Moreover, Charlotte's passion is not always described as bad but also as a source of attachment to her children. The narrator says,

One sole passion seemed to absorb her whole life, to the exclusion of every other; ... it buried even her natural grief for her husband--and this was love for her child. The word love most inadequately expresses the feeling: it was a passion, threatening to consume every healthy impulse. (126)

Before marrying George, 'She carried him [Benja] away into the conservatory, to a remote bench out of sight, sat down, and amused him with her gold neck-chain' (16). This scene certainly presents budding maternal affection. Costantini

points out the contrasting aspects of Charlotte: 'A "demonic mother" to her stepson and extreme ideal mother for her biological son' (118), but no reader would doubt her attachment to Benja. The novel deftly weaves in descriptions of Charlotte's efforts in an attempt to mitigate Charlotte's hatred of Benja and her crime of murdering him. These efforts on her part are appreciated by the other characters; for instance, her maidservant Prance pleads, 'she [Charlotte] is to be pitied; to be pitied more than condemned' (451), and the doctor Mr Pym thinks, 'this poor young woman, who had been born into the world with unwholesome passions ... was really trying to do a good part by her step-son; and she believed she was doing it' (144).

The novel also skilfully weaves in descriptions of failed parenthood of other characters, mitigating Charlotte's disabled motherhood. The beginning of Charlotte's hatred of Benja is triggered by George's preference for Benja as Alnwick's heir. She comes to regard Benja as a monopolist who deprives Georgy of his father's love. Furthermore, Costantini argues that 'Instead of protecting Benja, however, the codicil [leaving Isaac the guardianship of the Alnwick children (especially Benja)] paves the way to his destruction as it stirs more negative feelings in the dispossessed widow' (116). Indeed, George's decision to take full custody away from her is a betrayal of Charlotte's attempt to love her two sons equally. The narrator ironically explains that 'had Mr. St. John been cool enough or wise enough to analyze it [Charlotte's face], might have told him that her heart ... was shaken by jealousy of the child. He was neither cool nor wise just then' (16). Charlotte's motherhood, balanced by her efforts, is disrupted by her husband George. In addition, in Honour's characterisation one can find an example of a surrogate mother failing in her duties, despite the depiction of her 'ideal' motherhood analysed earlier. A Victorian guide for servants states that a nanny should

ensure that ‘dangerous ingredients [are] secured from access’ by a child (Adams 254). Honour’s indiscretion in leaving Benja alone with a piece of paper and a lit candle recalls the typical (literary) image of what Costantini calls the ‘careless nurses’ (113). The novel portrays George as a husband who fails to properly understand the implications of Charlotte’s condition and fails to protect his children, and Honour as a nanny who fails to protect Benja.

The representation of Charlotte’s disabled motherhood is marked by her efforts and by the implication of parental failure by the other characters. Taking all of this into account, this section now turns to how Isaac’s disabled fatherhood is marked as distinct from Charlotte’s disabled motherhood in terms of gender, social status, and stronger influence of fatherhood.

Isaac’s disabled fatherhood is attributed to his physical impairment, resulting in physical weakness, and his non-participation in child-rearing. He has a ‘hunchback’ and does not leave the house much because ‘It was terrible to him to go forth unto the gaze of his fellow-men’ (105). In keeping with Isaac’s aversion to going out, his sickly state of health is repeatedly emphasised. He is described as ‘a delicate-looking man’ (128); we are told ‘Isaac St. John was ill at Castle Wafer’ (265); and ‘he had been seriously ill twice this summer’ (107). His half-brother Frederick often takes on responsibilities in public life that would otherwise fall to Isaac. Frederick, in contrast to Isaac, is described as being a ‘tall, slender, aristocratic man’ (110). When Frederick arrives at the station, ‘The people at the station touch their hats to him and smile a greeting, and he smiles and nods at them in return, kindly’ (110). This is just one example of how Frederick acts in contrast with Isaac’s portrayal as an isolated and damaged gentleman.

The characterisation of Isaac as having little involvement in the parenting of the Alnwick children raises questions about his role as the guardian (surrogate

father). Isaac is too ill to leave Castle Wafer except on very rare occasions and rarely sees the Alnwick children in person after becoming their guardian: 'Mr. Carleton St. John had died in May; it was now September; and Isaac knew little or nothing of the affairs at Alnwick.... for he had been seriously ill twice this summer' (107). Yet this characterisation was not unusual at the time because as Branca explains, fathers were too busy in reality that they were barely involved in child rearing (111). Isaac's non-participation in parenting, therefore, seems to be less problematic than Charlotte's. He is characterised as an upper-middle class gentleman with a fortune, thereby having eligibility for his sole responsibility of being what George refers to as 'proper guardians' (55) for the Alnwick children. The nannies at Alnwick alleviate or release Charlotte from the responsibilities of motherhood to some extent, whereas they emphasise Isaac's privileges as a gentleman whose principal role is to provide the children with financial support and reliable nannies and tutors.

George is, however, portrayed as a father taking part in the rearing of his children, a rarity in the literature of the day (Costantini 110). Take the article 'On the Importance of Parental Consistency and Co-operation.' published in *The British Mothers' Magazine* (1857), as just one example; it repeated 'parents' and 'both parents', indicating that fathers were encouraged to participate in childcare in the mid-Victorian period. George's active involvement in child-rearing could be one of the ideal fatherhoods for Victorian readers. Isaac's lack of direct participation in childrearing might be less problematic, but the novel first shows George's active involvement. George's childrearing emphasises Isaac's inadequate participation in childcare due to his physical weakness.

The most striking feature of Isaac's fatherhood is its stronger influence than Charlotte's motherhood. His role as a surrogate father works on other characters

in a more effective way than in the case of the Alnwick children. By avoiding making him a biological father and having him act as a surrogate father for other characters, the novel demonstrates the wide range of cases in which his disabled fatherhood can be applied. First, Isaac is Frederick's half-brother but usually acts more as a father to his younger sibling than as a brother. The narrator explains, 'Had Frederick St. John ... been less carefully and prayerfully trained by his brother Isaac, things might have been a great deal worse with him than they were.... [he] was deep in debt and embarrassment' (106). As mentioned earlier, Isaac is at a disadvantage in that he is hunchbacked and physically weak compared to the younger and physically stronger Frederick. Yet, if they are evaluated in terms of respectability, Isaac is a more exemplary gentleman than the profligate Frederick. This is a complex feature of Isaac's role as a disabled yet surrogate father to Frederick. Isaac also behaves as Georgina's father at Castle Wafer; the narrator explains, 'Sir Isaac loves her as he would a child of his own; and she venerates him as a father' (429). It should be noted, however, that Isaac's influential fatherhood works to Charlotte's disadvantage. Isaac patronises Charlotte during her stay at Castle Wafer after Georgy's death. His behaviour not only underlines her childlike, immature disabled motherhood but also stresses that he is the more estimable character though they are both disabled figures and further serves to cover up his failure in his responsibilities to the Alnwick children.

It is significant to note that Isaac's paternal role is further reinforced at the end of the novel when 'he is also in stronger health than he has been for years' (376-77) and Frederick even says, 'He is a famous walker now' (384), though his impairment remains unchanged. It could be suggested that Isaac's respectability and relative success in parenthood are both indicative of his disabled fatherhood being more acceptable by the standards of the patriarchal society than Char-

lotte's disabled motherhood.

The ending appears to suggest the novel's positive view on the parenthood of disabled people. Wagner underlines that 'the sensational baby of Victorian fiction draws into question a widespread idealization of infancy and of the mother-child bond, often of course in order to reaffirm this idealization at the end of a novel' (216). Victorian novels often have happy endings, either showing 'good' characters with children or suggesting that they will soon have children; for instance, Jane Eyre says goodbye to her readers, telling them that Jane and Rochester have at least one child. Robert Audley also declares a return to a peaceful life with his marriage to Clara and the birth of their child. Jane's child rejects the 'madwoman' Bertha as unfit to be a mother and instead praises Jane's righteous motherhood. Robert Audley's success as George's surrogate father and the biological father of his own child condemns Lady Audley's disabled motherhood, which results in the abandonment of her son. These two literary examples illustrate the rule in Victorian literature that disabled parenthood should be regarded as 'inferior' to non-disabled parenthood. Looking back at Wood's novel, both Rose and Frederick get married, but the story ends with neither of them having children or foreseeing a future in which they will have children. Unlike other Victorian novels, *St. Martin's Eve* avoids an ending in which disabled parenthood would be replaced by a non-disabled version. This novel does not deny the legitimacy of disabled parenthood; rather it shows the feasibility of parenthood for disabled people.

3. Disabled Parenthood and Sister/Brotherhood

The second section has revealed that *St. Martin's Eve* acts as an exploration of possible parental roles for the disabled characters, but this novel seemingly reproduces a stereotypical image of disabled characters regarding romantic relation-

ships; for example, Mrs Darling does not want Charlotte to marry and tries to keep her apart from George. She explains that this is because Charlotte is her favourite daughter, but the real reason is that Charlotte has, Mrs Darling believes, inherited insanity from her first husband. Charlotte eventually gets married, but the marriage falls apart soon after the birth of her son and her husband dies a year later. There is, meanwhile, no mention of any previous lovers of Isaac. Isaac's stepmother says, 'it does seem next door to an impossibility that Isaac should marry, after all' (391), and the dean also asserts, 'My opinion is that he never will marry' (408).

It is, however, important to note that both disabled Charlotte and Isaac have a close (sometimes good) relationship with their families and other characters despite the contemporary discourses on disability that disabled people had little engagement in human relationships. Charlotte has a close relationship with Mrs Darling and Prance, while Isaac with Frederick, Mr Pym, and the dean. Each of these relationships works to 'protect' Charlotte and Isaac. This essay calls the former 'sisterhood' and the latter 'brotherhood'. According to the *OED*, sisterhood means 'The state, condition, or fact of being a sister (in various senses); sisterly status; esp. ... the relationship between sisters. Also in extended use' ('Sisterhood, 1.a') and brotherhood 'The state, condition, or fact of being a brother ... ; the relation of a brother to a sibling, or the relationship between brothers' ('Brotherhood, 4'). Yet the relationship constituted around Charlotte is not with her sisters, but with her mother Mrs Darling and her maid Prance. The above definition of brotherhood can be applied to the relationship between Isaac and Frederick, but this relationship is also with the doctor Mr Pym and the dean. This essay therefore uses the terms 'sisterhood' and 'brotherhood' to put more emphasis on their relationships with other characters in terms of the same-sex bond rather than family connection.

Also worthy of notice is the seemingly adversarial relationship between the sisterhood and the brotherhood. The third section will examine how these same-sex bonds that Charlotte and Isaac have help them realise their motherhood and fatherhood respectively and how the sisterhood and the brotherhood respond to each other, referring to Sharon Marcus's study on female friendship and Eve K. Sedgwick's study on homosocial relationships.

Marcus argues, 'The complementary relationships among family, marriage, and friendship operated in multiple directions. Family and marriage ... coexisted harmoniously with friendship' (71). Indeed, Mrs Darling and Prance form a sisterhood that complements Charlotte's marital and maternal life. Mrs Darling always loves Charlotte more than any other of her daughters, and often comes to Alnwick to visit her favourite daughter, even after Charlotte's marriage. Prance has also been a reliable and faithful maid to Charlotte. The relationship between Charlotte and Prance is similar to that between Lady Audley and Phoebe Marks in *Lady Audley's Secret*. The latter friendship is damaged when Phoebe's tyrannical husband intrudes on their relationship, further jeopardising Lady Audley's secret position. Wood's women have more of a master-servant relationship than Bradon's women, but it is a stable relationship, free from interference from the men and without betraying each other's faith. *St. Martin's Eve* shows the sisterhood based on a daughter-mother and master-servant bond. More notably, Mrs Darling and Prance collude on Charlotte's behalf. Mrs Darling often asks Prance how Charlotte is doing at Alnwick, to which Prance dutifully responds. During Charlotte's trip to the Continent, Prance is concerned about Charlotte's condition and confidentially sends a telegram to Mrs Darling requesting her to visit Charlotte. As the narrator explains, 'Remember that Prance was, so far as Mrs. Darling was concerned, a confidential servant, and she imparted all she knew' (76), these epi-

sodes explicitly show that the sisterly partnership between Mrs Darling and Prance in the care of Charlotte.

Mrs Darling and Prance help disabled Charlotte look like non-disabled Charlotte. Mrs Darling and Prance strive to keep Charlotte's insanity from becoming public knowledge. Mrs Darling certainly knows Charlotte has hereditary insanity because her first husband died of insanity. Although it is not explicitly indicated, Prance also seems to be aware of Charlotte's insanity because she tries to keep it secret. It has been explained in section one that Victorians who had an impairment were not encouraged to marry and have children due to the anxiety that impairment would be inherited (Stoddard Holmes 7). Mrs Darling and Prance realise that Charlotte actualises this anxiety and that her disability must be kept secret to prevent her being sent to an asylum.

Mrs Darling and Prance also help Charlotte's childlike, disabled motherhood look like non-disabled motherhood. As analysed in section two, Charlotte often fails in her role as a mother due to her childlike character and inability to control her passion. Yet her disabled motherhood is often compensated for by the sisterhood. When Charlotte shows no sign of making arrangements for Benja's funeral, Mrs Darling instead 'wrote letters to apprise friends of the calamity ... [and] made arrangements for the funeral' (175). Charlotte cannot even console her declining son Georgy; he tells the doctor, 'I was to ride it when I went home. Prance said so. Grandmamma said so' (321), but Charlotte does not say so. Moreover, in the scene where Charlotte beats Benja, Mrs Darling persuades and placates George and Honour, who distrust Charlotte's role as a mother. After Benja's death, Prance makes a statement in defence of Charlotte, saying that Charlotte was in the nursery at the time of the accident. Ultimately, the sisterhood hides Charlotte's crime.

The sisterhood between Charlotte, Mrs Darling, and Prance is portrayed as a closed one. A good example of this is the scene when Charlotte comes to Alnwick as the new mistress. Mrs Darling prepares just 'for Charlotte's comfort' (29) but her behaviour 'caused the servants to look upon her as a meddling, underbred woman, who was interfering most unjustifiably in what did not concern her' (29). Prance also antagonises other servants. Costantini argues, Prance 'fuels the many tensions in the house and stubbornly protects her insane mistress' (174). Indeed, Prance's 'cold, you-must-obey-me tones, exasperated, the maids at the Hall almost to rebellion ... it created a prejudice against their new mistress' (29). As a consequence, 'what with the advent of the new wife, the perpetual visitation of Mrs. Darling, and the hatred to Prance, Alnwick Hall was kept in a state of internal commotion' (30). Such unwelcoming attitude of Alnwick's servants makes the sisterhood between the three women increasingly closed and entrenched.

What makes the sisterhood exclusive is that the other female characters are not necessarily supportive of the sisterhood protecting Charlotte. As analysed in section two, Charlotte comes to Alnwick with the responsibility of being Benja's new mother. The maids' antipathy towards Charlotte may be out of loyalty to their former mistress, but it also means that they unconsciously blame Charlotte for not being a non-disabled mother. More importantly, Charlotte's insanity, kept secret in the sisterhood between Mrs Darling and Prance, divulges from woman to man: from Honour to George and from Rose to Frederick. George adds a will separating Benja from Charlotte following 'Honour's advice' (Macdonald 185). Rose, Charlotte's biological half-sister, is sympathetic towards her sister, but does not keep her insanity secret. This is because 'Rose benefits from a flirtation with Frederick and from insulting her proud sister' (187); that is, Rose is able to show

herself to be submissive and trustworthy towards men. These hostile attitudes from the other female characters signify a conservative attitude that does not tolerate Charlotte's disabled motherhood and the sisterhood that tries to hide her disability. The sisterhood therefore must be closed in order to protect Charlotte from the pressures of the Victorian patriarchal, ableist society.

It is therefore significant that Charlotte's insanity begins to worsen when the harmony between the sisterhood is disrupted. It is during the trip when only Prance is with Charlotte that she begins to lose her mental stability. Moreover, on the night when neither Mrs Darling nor Prance is with Charlotte, Charlotte has hallucination of Benja and completely loses herself. During the trip, another woman joins the sisterhood to fill Mrs Darling's absence; this is a female nurse, Mrs Brayford. She helps to take care of Georgy because Charlotte misjudges his health and makes him seriously unwell. This could be seen as Mrs Brayford, as well as Mrs Darling and Prance, contributing to making Charlotte's disabled motherhood seem like non-disabled motherhood. Yet Mrs Brayford sees the possibility of Charlotte's insanity and later lets Frederick and the other men know of her insanity. Mrs Brayford's presence in the sisterhood will be addressed in the discussion of the brotherhood in this section.

What is striking about the sisterhood is that the three female characters have a supportive same-sex relationship that ignores class differences. Nishimura argues that in real-life situations, female servants were commonly treated as children by their employers (33). In the sisterhood in Wood's novel, however, such a relationship is reversed as Charlotte is treated like a child by Prance. Lyn Pykett points out that in some of Wood's novels 'Lower-class women are thus figured as a disturbance of the sexual economy of the middle-class family' (123). Yet *Sz. Martin's Eve* portrays the lower-class woman as a significant member of the sis-

terhood. By working together to protect Charlotte's secret and her position as a mother, Mrs Darling and Prance establish a sisterly relationship beyond the class system. The sisterhood in the novel presents the possibility of disabled motherhood being realised with the support of the other women.

The first half of this section has clarified that the sisterhood surrounding disabled Charlotte conceals her disability and helps her fulfil her role as a mother. Also present in the novel is the brotherhood surrounding disabled Isaac. In her groundbreaking study on the representation of homosocial relationships in English literature, Sedgwick contends that the historical difference in the homosociality of men and women is both a sign and a mechanism of the long-standing inequality of power between the sexes (5). The brotherhood as well as the sisterhood functions to help Isaac play his role as a father, but it has, as Sedgwick points out, different powers and purposes from those of the sisterhood. The brotherhood seeks to exclude the disabled Charlotte from the home and society, whereas the sisterhood protects Charlotte against the brotherhood.

The brotherhood is more powerful than the sisterhood due to the status and occupation of its members. The brotherhood comprises Isaac, Frederick, Mr Pym, and the dean. Unlike the sisterhood, including the lower-class Prance, the brotherhood is made up of gentlemen from the upper middle-class and above, and the setting further strengthens the brotherhood's power, as the doctor, Mr Pym, is also a member of it. The doctor's 'role would no longer be to provide an example of kindness, but rather one of manliness, maturity, and responsibility' (Showalter, *The Female* 120). The brotherhood therefore seems to embody an authority of the discourse on disability, which may threaten the sisterhood made of the upper middle-class women and the lower-class maid (and the nurse).

The main purposes of the brotherhood are to uncover Charlotte's disability

and maintain Isaac's disabled fatherhood. Behind the achievement of these aims lies the inequality of the homosociality of men and women in patriarchal society, as pointed out by Sedgwick. Charlotte's secret, hidden within the sisterhood between Mrs Darling and Prance, is first divulged by Mrs Brayford to Rose. Mrs Brayford specialises in medicine but the episode in which her awareness of Charlotte's insanity does not lead to any official diagnosis implies that only a male doctor has the authority to diagnose insanity. Ironically, thanks to the female nurse's lack of medical authority, Charlotte's secret never goes beyond an extension of the sisterhood. Yet Rose does not hide her sister's insanity and even tells the men about it. As a result, she helps the brotherhood expose Charlotte's insanity. Once 'The curious tale whispered to him [Frederick] by Rose Darling the previous day, touching the fancies of Mrs. Carleton St. John, was connecting' (376) with his suspicion about Charlotte's behaviour, 'the fancies' circulate among the members of the brotherhood, and consequently become an official diagnosis by the male doctor's decision. Mr Pym eventually diagnoses Charlotte's mental disability, though he tries to show a somewhat neutral position, saying, 'I could not see that I was justified in' (426) revealing Charlotte's and her father's disability.

As for the second purpose of the brotherhood, it is no wonder that they try to prevent Isaac and Charlotte from marrying because he can be a surrogate father without the risk of passing on his disability to his children. Charlotte's scheme to marry Isaac can be interpreted as the second attempt to be a biological mother or stepmother despite her disability, but the gentlemen except Isaac feel responsible for preventing the disabled characters from marrying and having children. For the gentlemen of the brotherhood, Isaac's disabled fatherhood is acceptable because it does not subvert the discourse of disability in the Victorian patriarchal, ableist so-

ciety. Furthermore, the gentlemen's act of exposing Charlotte's disability and her disabled motherhood can be seen as helping to cover up Isaac's failure to protect the Alnwick children.

Frederick even helps Isaac's disabled fatherhood look like non-disabled fatherhood. There is a triangular relationship in the relationship between Isaac and Frederick. Sedgwick argues that the exchange of women in the heterosexual regime of patriarchal societies is 'the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men' (25). Georgina's parents are often absent, and Isaac is in the position of a surrogate father for her at Castle Welfare. Isaac hands her over to Frederick, who marries her. Here the exchange of a woman between the men is achieved, thereby strengthening their homosocial bond. Despite his disabled fatherhood, Isaac substantially secures his paternal figure by following this rule. Frederick's support here is in some ways similar to the sisterhood's support for Charlotte. It can be, however, argued that the brotherhood has far more power than the sisterhood, as Isaac does not have to conceal his impairment and has access to the social status and privileges of patriarchal society through the marriage system.

In both the sisterhood and the brotherhood, Charlotte and Isaac are treated like a child or, without saying so, their subjectivity is not taken into account by the other characters. This could recall what Noriko Seyama argues, that disabled people have not been seen as subjects of sexuality or sexual acts (163). It is noteworthy that, apart from Charlotte and Isaac, the members who form the sisterhood and brotherhood seem to have certain stereotypical ideas about the disabled characters, yet they develop new relationships based on same-sex bonds with the disabled characters.

Conclusion

Wood's *St. Martin's Eve* presents innovative and unique aspects concerning the representation of the parenthood of the disabled characters. The theme of a disabled person becoming a parent is perhaps a unique choice for Wood, who always had a great interest in domestic issues. After all, this essay has argued that *St. Martin's Eve* attempts to question the Victorian discourse on disabled parenthood. Wagner makes an insightful and important observation about the Victorian family; 'the widespread practices of non-biological adoption in Victorian society have been interpreted as evidence of "the expandability of Victorian kin"' (19). Wood's novel presents an alternative form of family by giving Charlotte and Isaac the relationship of sisterhood and brotherhood. *St. Martin's Eve* is experimental in that one can read in the novel that parent-child and family forms were flexible and expandable in Victorian society.

Notes

This paper was presented at the annual conference at the English Literary Society of Gakushuin University (6 November 2021) and was later added and modified by the author.

- 1) This essay uses Mrs Henry Wood rather than Ellen Wood, referring to *John Bull* (1866) and *The Times* (1866), in which the advertisements for *St. Martin's Eve* appeared with the name of Mrs Henry Wood.
- 2) According to Satoshi Kawashima, the medical model of disability is the idea that the person is at a social disadvantage because of his/her impairment (294), whereas the social model of disability that a social disadvantage suffered by people who have an impairment is caused by social barriers (291).
- 3) Bertha sets fire to Thornfield Hall and Lady Audley also does to the inn to kill

- Robert. In the Victorian medical discourse, there was a belief that women who were diagnosed as insane were prone to arson (Logan 196).
- 4) Rochester in *Jane Eyre* is an interesting example of a man who marries after becoming a disabled person, but the setting in which he formed a romantic relationship with Jane in the days when he was non-disabled is not completely in keeping with this tradition.
 - 5) All of the quotations from the text of *St. Martin's Eve* in this essay come from the version published by Macmillan in 1901.

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St. Martin's Eve における
「障がい」、ペアレントフッド、シスター／ブラザーフッド

後藤 千宏

本稿は、Mrs Henry Wood の *St. Martin's Eve* (1866) を「障がい」を持つ登場人物の親としての役割を探る小説として読む。本稿の分析対象の精神的「障がい」(狂気)を持つシャーロットと身体的「障がい」を持つアイザックは、実の親、義理の親、代理の親など様々な形の親の役割を経験する。また、彼女たちの親としての役割は同性の登場人物達との「親密な」関係の上に成り立っている。これらの分析を通して、本稿は、*St. Martin's Eve* が「障がい者」のペアレントフッドに関する当時の言説に疑問を投げかけていることを明らかにする。

第1節は、本作品が出版されたヴィクトリア朝中期の「障がい」とペアレントフッドを巡る言説を分析する。医療によるスティグマ化と労働からの排除は、「障がい者」にネガティブなイメージを負わせ、あらゆる人間関係から疎外されているイメージを作り上げた。実際、文学にでてくる「障がい者」は孤独として描かれることが多く、特に、結婚をせず、子供も持たないことがステレオタイプ化した。シャーロットとアイザックにもそれらの特徴が与えられており、彼女たちが「障がい者」として描かれていることが強調されている。

第2節は、シャーロットとアイザックのペアレントフッドの表象を考察する。本作品は、シャーロットとアイザックが自身の「障がい」のために親としての役割を十分に果たせないことを描いている。しかし、シャーロットのマザーフッドは子供への愛情と情熱を抑えようとする努力によって、アイザックのファザーフッドは紳士階級の影響力を持って他の多くの登場人物の「代理」父になることによって特徴づけられていると言える。

第3節は、シャーロットが持つシスターフッド、アイザックが持つブラザーフッドが、それぞれ彼女たちのマザーフッドとファザーフッドの実現を手助けしていることを論じる。シャーロットとミセス・ダーリング、フランスの間で構成されるシスターフッドは、シャーロットの「障がい」を

隠し、彼女の母親としての役割を維持させることを目的とする。アイザックとフレデリック、ミスター・ピム、司祭で構成されるブラザーフッドは、シャーロットの「障がい」を暴き、アイザックの父親としての失敗を隠すこと、そして彼の父親としての役割を維持させることを目的とする。シャーロットとアイザックの意志が考慮されずに物事が動いている点には「障がい者」に対するステレオタイプ的な態度が見られるが、「非障がい者」の登場人物たちが同性の絆に基づいて「障がい者」のペアレントフッドを支えている点は注目に値する。

St. Martin's Eve は、「障がい者」のペアレントフッドが実現する可能性と家族のオルタナティブな形を提示する。ヴィクトリア朝の社会では、親子や家族の形態が柔軟で拡張性があったことを読み取ることができる点で本作品は実験的であると言える。

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