

論 文

‘She Employed Intelligent Means’: Disability and Technology in *Lady Audley’s Secret*

Chihiro Goto (Gakushuin University)

Introduction

This essay explores the representation of disability in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s novel *Lady Audley’s Secret* (*Lady* hereafter) (1862). As one of the founding authors of sensation fiction genre, along with Wilkie Collins, both her works and aspects of her biography have gained the attention of researchers over the past two decades. *Lady* has been regarded as Braddon’s ‘canonical’ work (Tromp et al., ‘Introduction’ xxiv). The novel has often been discussed in terms of feminism since Elaine Showalter, in her groundbreaking study of Victorian women writers, reassessed *Lady* as being ‘certainly equal to the work of Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade’ (*Literature* 135). The novel has also attracted scholars from the field of disability studies, a development that has encouraged a re-evaluation of Victorian literature in general and sensation fiction in particular.

Braddon seems to have transformed Jane Eyre and ‘madwoman’, Bertha Mason, into the heroine Lucy (Lady Audley). Bertha ‘destroys herself’ in the end as the ‘criminal self’ of Jane (Gilbert and Gubar 360, italics original) because Jane ‘must escape through deliberation rather than through madness’ from Edward Rochester’s patriarchal mastery (363). The two-faced Lucy has been considered to indicate that Jane and Bertha are inseparable aspects of one woman. Showalter has famously contended that ‘Lady Audley’s real secret is that she is sane’ (*Literature* 137), an argument followed by many scholars. For example, Lyn Pykett considers Lucy’s hereditary insanity or/

and moral insanity as a metaphor used to portray resistance to ‘the management and control of the middle-class family’ and the internalised ‘self-regulation ... of those broader social forms of control’ imposed upon the (anti-)heroine (*The ‘Improper’* 95).

Nolan Boyd, however, regards Lucy’s insanity as a mental disability. This view takes into account recent research on sensation fiction from a disability-studies perspective that suggests that sensation novelists ‘avoid representing a disabled character as desiring or receiving physical therapy or surgery to lessen or eradicate a disability’ and portray disability ‘as an acceptable or even positive difference’ (Logan 17). Boyd argues that the novel suggests that it is more natural for insanity to be a part of humans than is generally thought and that it may thus be ‘ineluctable’ and ‘desirable’ for society to adopt disability (421).

This essay develops Boyd’s argument, which treats Lucy’s insanity as a disability. It also applies what Kate Flint calls a ‘compensatory mechanism’ (156). In her study of literary disability in Collins’s work, Flint uses this term to describe the method often used by Collins whereby ‘those who suffer from problems with one of the major sensory organs’ develop other advanced abilities (156). It can be argued that the disabled Lucy develops technological literacy as a compensatory mechanism if the time in which the novel is set is taken into account: the time of a rapidly industrialising, increasingly recognisably modern society. Lucy’s technological literacy refers to her ability to use the railways and other technologies efficiently.

This essay argues that *Lady* attempts to question the characterisation of the ‘madwoman’ represented by Bertha and depict women who had disabilities and/or diseases as being socially disadvantaged over men who had disabilities and/or diseases in mid-Victorian society. The first section analyses Lucy’s anxieties about insanity that cause her to develop technological literacy and examines how this technological literacy enables her to conceal her insanity and resist men who try to expose her disability. The second section discusses how Lucy’s technological literacy is also depicted to influence Robert

Audley's use of technology and prompt the alleged 'monomania' and how this undermines Robert's characterisation as a hero. The third section explores how the seemingly conservative ending, wherein Lucy suffers the same end as that of most 'madwomen' in Victorian novels, suggests Lucy's indelible influence over the social order and gender dynamics of the society.

This essay distinguishes between 'impairment' and 'disability'; the former refers to 'a medically classified biophysiological condition', whereas the latter 'denotes the social disadvantage experienced by people with an accredited impairment' (Barnes and Mercer 11). This essay avoids using 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. Additionally, this essay uses the term 'non-disabled' rather than 'able-bodied' to refer to characters with no marked disability to emphasise that they are merely seen as not deviating from a 'healthy' or 'normal' standard.

1. Lucy's Insanity and Her Technological Literacy

Showalter argues that women sensation novelists, including Braddon, 'saw themselves as daughters of Charlotte Brontë rather than George Eliot' (*Literature* 127). This is borne out by the overlap between the characters of Lucy and Bertha. Just as Bertha sets fire to Thornfield Hall, Lucy sets an inn ablaze with the aim of killing her nemesis, Robert. In the context of Victorian medical and socio-cultural discourse, female insanity was likened to 'smouldering fires' (Mangham 44). Moreover, it was believed at the time that women diagnosed as insane were prone to arson (Logan 196).¹ Victorian readers viewed Lucy as a 'madwoman' because of her association with fire, and she reminds readers of Bertha, the most famous 'madwoman' in Victorian literature.

Another similarity with Bertha is evident in Lucy's characterisation as being sexually attractive to men; for example, George Talboys thinks 'she was something too beautiful for earth, or earthly uses' (54), Sir Michael Audley

'could no more resist the tender fascination of those soft and melting blue eyes' (12), and Robert thinks, 'She's the prettiest little creature you ever saw in your life.... I am falling in love with my aunt' (53). While the fire imagery associated with Lucy and Bertha does not contradict the literary tradition, their marriage challenges it. Disabled characters in Western literature often served as a '*narrative prosthesis*': as 'a stock feature of characterization' and 'an opportunistic metaphorical device' (Mitchell and Snyder 47, italics original). Heidi Logan posits that disabled characters in mainstream Victorian works tend to be depicted 'as lonely, of limited effectiveness, and separated from the ordinary milestones experienced' by non-disabled characters (13). Having disability was therefore considered incompatible with being sexually attractive. By using the traits of fire and sexual attractiveness, *Lady* allows its readers to see Lucy's character is modelled on Bertha's.

Lucy is seemingly portrayed as a response to Bertha's character and her portrayal as an excessively angelic woman is thus problematic. Lucy is depicted as having 'blue eyes' (12),² 'fair hair' (13), a 'fragile figure' (50), 'childishness' (50), and 'innocence' (50), and it is indicated that her 'accomplishments were so brilliant and numerous' (11). Madeleine C. Seys states that Lucy consistently 'manipulates the social mechanisms which would construct her as an ideal and angelic heroine in order to practice her deception'. It seems clear, then, that Lucy's physical features and her feminine accomplishments enable her to negate the image of a 'violent and hideous' (Showalter, *The Female* 66) 'madwoman' of the type represented by Bertha after her imprisonment. Lucy appears to meet the standards of the 'ideal' wife of the time to such an extent that she can present herself to be as eligible as the wife of the noble gentleman, Michael.

While the portrayal of the disabled Lucy as an ideal woman is unusual but significant, the novel suggests that femininity alone is not enough to completely mask her disability in a patriarchal, ableist society where gender inequality is a given. This is because patriarchal force, in the form of the male characters George and Robert, actively seeks to expose Lucy's disability.

The novel therefore provides Lucy with a feature to fend off the efforts of these men; she becomes technologically literate. This section first analyses Lucy's fear of insanity, which is a factor in the development of her technological literacy. Then, it argues that Lucy's technological literacy allows her to hide her insanity and resist the men who try to disclose her secret.

Her efforts to conceal her insanity are motivated by her desire to avoid a future in which her personality is stigmatised and she is sent to an asylum on account of her disability. Lucy thinks, 'I was to keep the secret of my mother's madness; for it was a secret that might affect me injuriously in after-life' (298). She is aware of the necessity to keep her insanity hidden for self-protection as it was a requirement in the Victorian era to identify disabilities in order to select individuals who deserved welfare and to exclude disabled persons from reproductive activities. 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.1.2'). By the nineteenth century, however, industrial development, legislation, and medicalisation of disability had led to the creation of a social category that comprised people with a physical and/or mental state that deviated from the norm.³ This phenomenon put disabled people on a lower rung on the social ladder. Amid this, there was a belief that 'physical illness and impairment' were heritable (Stoddard Holmes 7). Hence, disabled people were and have been considered unsuitable to be the progenitors of their own families (Matsunami 53).⁴ During the Victorian period, impairment was treated as a disability and it had to be made public for the non-disabled to exercise control over abnormality and the disabled.

As Logan argues, Lucy 'has a fairly good grasp of the aetiology of forms of madness' (194). Lucy's efforts to conceal her insanity depict her awareness of how mental impairment would make her more easily disabled. It was believed that 'women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because the instability of their reproductive systems interfered with their sexual,

emotional, and rational control' (Showalter, *The Female* 55). As if to prove the validity of that idea, 'the mid-nineteenth century is the period when the predominance of women among the institutionalized insane first becomes a statistically verifiable phenomenon' (52), though it is questionable how many diagnoses were valid.⁵ Women who had physical and/or mental impairments were often prohibited from reproductive activities and excluded from the world of typical 'femininity' (Garland-Thomson 17). Consequently, disabled women were deprived of the only avenue for women belonging to the middle-class and above to gain economic security – marriage. For Lucy, public knowledge of her insanity would have meant either confinement in an asylum or living in poverty as a single person. The attempt to hide her mental impairment is therefore a natural concern.

Lucy gets married twice with the aim of hiding her insanity: first to George and, then to Michael. The novel describes Lucy's strong desire to marry a wealthy man to avoid poverty, which she believes stimulates the onset of her latent insanity. Lucy confesses, 'I knew how far poverty can affect a life, and I looked forward with a sick terror to a life so affected' (299). She first succeeds in marrying George, an upper-middle class gentleman, thus staving off the risk of falling into destitution. Her married status creates another perceived risk, however, when she becomes pregnant; it was widely believed that pregnancy and childbirth were closely related to insanity. This line of thinking led to the subcategory of 'maternal insanity', which was believed to be 'occasioned by becoming a mother' and inherited 'from the mother (insanity transmitted through the maternal line)' (Matus 189). In Lucy's mind, her pregnancy puts her at great risk given that she was told that her mother's 'madness was an [sic] hereditary disease transmitted to her from her mother, who had died mad' (298), and that she 'had been, or had appeared, sane up to the hour of my [Lucy's] birth; but from that hour her intellect had decayed' (298). Hence, Lucy was horrified when her 'mind first lost its balance, and for the first time ... [she] crossed that invisible line which separates reason from madness' (301) after giving birth in poverty.

Abandoned by George, who shows no sign of reappearing and whom Lucy presumes dead, she is compelled to find a wealthy man to provide her with financial security.

Thus, Lucy marries Michael in order to prevent the onset of insanity caused by childbirth and poverty. It is important to note that her marriage to Michael is not about producing an heir, as he has an heiress and is looking for spiritual fulfilment in his second marriage to Lucy. She is thus not required to bear children. In other words, Lucy does not have to worry about the manifestation of insanity brought about by childbearing. Boyd persuasively argues, 'this new, bigamous relationship deviates from the linear reproductive script' (412). This deviation is, however, what makes Lucy's marriage to Michael possible. As long as she remains married to Michael, Lucy is able to control the onset of her insanity. Even so, Robert and George, as patriarchal forces, attempt to reveal her insanity and disable her despite her 'perfect' wife behaviour.

To oppose these threats to her second marriage, Lucy develops technological literacy. She can hide her disability well because she not only uses technology but also understands the nature of technology. Well aware of the newspaper's wide circulation and its public credibility, Lucy places a fake obituary for herself just as George is returning home, thus successfully convincing him of her death. On another occasion, she takes advantage of the anonymity that a telegraph's sender can maintain, making up a reason for going out and arranging not to see George again. In another example, when Robert tries to uncover her identity, her mastery of the speed and timetable of the railway allows her to carry off evidence of her past identity in the space of a few hours. Louise Lee cites the absence of a single description of her checking the timetable as evidence of Lucy's high level of technological literacy (135). Robert is unsure why Lucy takes the train to London and says, 'Has she baffled me by some piece of womanly jugglery? Am I never to get any nearer to the truth; but am I to be tormented all my life by vague doubts, and wretched suspicions' (127). In these words, one can read that Lucy's

technological literacy overwhelms him. Through these attempts, Lucy manages to conceal her bigamy and insanity.

These efforts are successful also because only Lucy possesses technological literacy in the novel. This is because the novel depicts two types of society. The 'JOURNAL' (90) Robert keeps as part of his detective work reveals that the events take place over several years in the late 1850s. Industrial modernity in the 1860s was represented by 'the response to new technologies' (Daly, *Literature* 5), such as the railways, telegraphs, and media. The late 1850s was therefore a period of parallelism and conflict between the still largely extant pre-modern way of life and a more modern society that was taking shape with the technological and industrial developments. Pykett contends that sensation fiction is 'The product of a machine age' ('Introduction', xxv). Indeed, Braddon seems to have been attentive to the social changes brought on by modern industrial technology and changes in the daily habits of the Victorians. The novel was published in 1862, but the events that unfold in the novel may have deliberately been set in the late 1850s.

The novel employs clocks to illustrate the characters' degree of adaptation to the modernisation around them. This trope is adopted against a backdrop of social changes that accompanied the railways; the railways were bringing 'standardized time', with the same timetable serving all areas (Schivelbusch 43). Train departure times are given in minutes in the novel, such as 'the 12.40 train' (125) and 'the train will start in two minutes' (127). Lucy's clock has 'the minute hand' (267). This clock demonstrates her familiarity with modern society and suggests that she is accustomed to using the railways. At Audley Court, however, 'there was an old ... clock-tower, with a stupid, bewildering clock, which had only one hand; and which jumped straight from one hour to the next, and was therefore always in extremes' (7). This one-handed clock signifies that the master of the household, Michael, occupies 'a pre-modern world free from specificity of times' (Seltzer 49). George, who does not have a clock, also appears to belong to the same society. In contrast, Robert looks at his watch and is 'surprised to find that it

was a quarter past four' (73). This signifies that he possesses a two-handed watch as Lucy does but his sense of time is not in line with the precise timekeeping of modern society. He is in the middle of his transition to modern society, which will be discussed in the next section. The male characters who belong to pre-modern society and lack technological literacy are obviously unable to cope with the actions taken by Lucy. The novel places only the heroine in a modernised lifestyle and endows her with technological literacy, thereby enabling her to keep her disability a secret.

Lucy's technological literacy, a product of a compensatory mechanism, is so advanced that she can almost hide her use of technology from the other characters. Ultimately, she masks her disability by concealing her use and literacy of technology. Andrew F. Humphries insightfully suggests, 'The speed with which Lucy manipulates the railway and telegraph connection is evidence of how the modern transport system has become integrated into her strategic instincts' (61). Admittedly, her technological literacy and disability are closely linked; in other words, uncovering her use of technology is synonymous with uncovering her disabled identity. Lucy therefore conceals that she employs the newspaper or the telegraph and she only lets Robert know that she uses the railways. The narrator explains, 'so complete was the dominion which Lady Audley had ... obtained over her devoted husband, that it was very rarely that the baronet's eyes were long removed from his wife's pretty face' (52). Even Michael, who pays almost uninterrupted attention to Lucy, is unaware of her use of technology. These events illustrate Lucy's high level of technological literacy.

Elizabeth Langland points out 'the homology ... between country house and madhouse' (12). At Audley Court, Lucy is always watched. In addition to Michael's constant looking at Lucy, Robert also 'amused himself by watching her ... white hands' (79). Their observations of her body appear to allude to Audley Court as an asylum and Lucy as a female patient there, a 'madwoman'. Yet, Lucy is able to exploit the technology under the watchful eye of the male characters and even to conceal the traces of its use and her

insanity. It can be argued that Lucy is characterised as an unprecedented ‘madwoman’ who uses technological literacy to counter the patriarchal forces that seek to expose her disability.

2. Lucy’s Technological Literacy and Robert’s ‘Monomania’

There is no doubt that Robert is the hero of the novel because he is an example of what John Kucich calls ‘cultural intellectuals’ such as ‘drawing masters, writers, actresses, amateur painters and philosophers’ (81). This new type of gentleman appears in the form of various protagonists in works by Collins and other writers of sensation fiction. Despite his principal profession as a barrister, his preference for ‘German pipe’ and ‘French novels’ (33) presents Robert as an example of such a protagonist. It is therefore not surprising that he is given a heroic role in exposing Lucy’s insanity and criminal behaviours. *Lady* suggests, however, that Robert may be suffering from a mental vulnerability, ‘monomania’. His ‘monomania’ provides a new perspective on the characterisation of Lucy as a ‘madwoman’ because it is related to Lucy’s technological literacy, a relationship that questions his heroism. Section 1 has discussed how the heroine’s technological literacy, as one means of resistance, conceals her insanity from the men. Section 2 examines how, as another means of resistance afforded to her, her technological literacy undermines Robert’s characterisation as a hero by triggering his use of technology and his ‘monomania’.

Several scholars have discussed the relationship between Robert and technology; for example, one reading points to the overlap between Robert’s process of developing into a respectable gentleman (hero) and his acquisition of technological literacy (Martin 135; Humphries 62). Robert, like similar characters in other sensation-fiction works, can be physically characterised as less than fully masculine in the traditional sense, with various feminine characteristics. Descriptions of Robert often include terms such as ‘worn out’ (86), ‘wearily’ (134), and ‘fatigue’ (209). These are in contrast to the portrayals of Michael as displaying ‘rugged masculinity’ (Martin 138); he is

'a big man, tall and stout, with a deep sonorous voice ... and one of the hardest riders in the county' (10). It is, however, interesting to note that their physical conditions are reversed later in the novel. Robert takes the train to investigate outside Audley Court on behalf of Michael who is 'lying weak and ill' (197) in bed. Robert's mastery of technology transforms him from a 'lazy, care-for-nothing' man (32) into 'a rising man upon the home circuit by this time, and [a man who] has distinguished himself' (378).

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that Robert's process of becoming a 'monomaniac' is related to his acquisition of technological literacy. The *OED* defines the term 'monomania' as 'A form of mental illness' in a psychiatric context, and otherwise 'In extended use: an exaggerated or fanatical enthusiasm for or devotion to one subject; an obsession, a craze' ('Monomania, n1.2'). The decisive cause of his 'monomania' is not made clear in the novel. When Lucy asks Alicia if she feels Robert is 'eccentric' (237), Alicia answers, 'I suppose he was generally thought a little eccentric' (237) and 'I believe Robert inherits all his absurdities from his father' (237). In this scene, the novel implies that Robert, like Lucy, may have inherited some kind of mental vulnerability from his father. Meanwhile, it must be added that he describes himself as being burdened with 'monomania' (217) several times and that symptoms of Robert's proclivity for 'monomania' are evident in his obsession with finding out Lucy's past identity. The novel hints that his monomaniacal behaviour may have been brought on by his repeated use of technology, particularly the railways, during his inquiries into Lucy's identity. Concern about the possibility of physical and psychological damage caused by rail travel was widespread at the time. In one example, the nerves were thought to be disturbed by '[t]he rapid series of jolts experienced' when riding a train (Daly, *Literature* 43). In the novel, Robert's use of technology is linked to his 'monomania'.

Prior to meeting Lucy, Robert had lived a life unconnected to technology and did not have monomaniacal symptoms. The narrator repeatedly uses similar words to describe his character; 'The idea of turning his cousin's

girlish liking for him to some good account never entered his idle brain' (33) and 'these documents ... elicited neither vexation nor astonishment in the lymphatic nature of that gentleman' (34). These expressions denote a lack of any sort of obsession. His character is manifested in his habit of procrastinating, whether intentionally or unintentionally. During his time with George, Robert keeps rescheduling. Victorians were forced to be punctual to ensure that they could catch the train (Daly, *Literature* 46). Hence, his habit is incompatible with a railway that operates according to a precise timetable, which shows how technology-free his life initially was. Lee analyses that his first characterisation is expressed in terms of 'slowness' (136). Robert is incapable of keeping up with Lucy, who is shown to move with relative fleetness, and of acting in accordance with the timetable; things do not go as he plans. At this stage, he is not concerned about Lucy's identity.

Lucy's technological literacy seems to trigger Robert's use of the railways. As noted in the previous section, Robert has a two-handed clock. While this setting suggests his heroism in catching up with Lucy's abilities, it also implies a disturbing future in which he is induced by Lucy to use technology. On a visit to Lucy's father after George's disappearance, Robert notices that her father has received a telegraph from someone (Lucy). This leads him to deduce that George's disappearance is suspicious, and he begins to use technology extensively in his investigation. When he finds out that Lucy went on the train, he too rushes to get on the train. He also travels without a break to Audley Place, London, Southampton, Portsmouth, Liverpool, Dorsetshire, and Yorkshire to gather information about Lucy. Therefore, Lucy's struggle provokes Robert's use of technology.

It is worth noting that Lucy's technological literacy prompts Robert's 'monomania' before her secrets are revealed by him. Robert's monomaniacal symptoms begin with the 'railway fatigue' (Martin 133) that he feels on his rail journeys in the initial phase of the investigation. He 'was worn out by a long day spent in hurrying from place to place.... His mind was beginning to

grow confused upon the point of time' (86). Robert's dream about the grave at Ventnor shortly after this scene indicates that his obsession with Lucy's identity had already begun. Robert no longer feels the railway fatigue as he becomes more familiar with train travel in his detective work. Beth Seltzer contends that *Lady* demonstrates 'the incompatibility of the timetable with human physicality' (55). She sharply points out that the novel implies that Lucy and Robert, who ride the train without feeling railway fatigue, do not have non-disabled bodies. Robert is driven by anxiety during the course of his investigations: 'Why did that unaccountable terror seize upon me?... Was it a monition, or a monomania?... What if this edifice of horror and suspicion is ... the nervous fancies of a hypochondriacal bachelor?' (217). This line is significant as it shows that Robert is aware of his mental defect.

Lucy is also sensitive to the possibility that she might be triggering the onset of Robert's 'monomania' and tries to disclose it by saying, 'do you select me as the victim of your monomania?' (227). Robert wants to hide his mental defect because it makes his non-disability questionable. Robert is anxious and thinks, 'The mask that she wears is not to be plucked away. My uncle would rather think me mad than believe her guilty' (234) and 'She would be capable of using her influence with my uncle to place me in a mad-house' (233). Robert is overwhelmed by Lucy's influence, who can 'make' him into a hospital patient. In order to prevent her plot, Robert tells himself, 'It remains for me to discover the darker half of my lady's secret' (217). These words imply Robert's recognition that he needs to hide his mental vulnerability by exposing Lucy's insanity and posing as a respectable, non-disabled gentleman. This is investigated in the next section.

On the one hand, Robert's relationship with technology could be interpreted as indicative of his development as a hero. On the other hand, the influence of Lucy's technological literacy on Robert reveals that technology actually causes his mental defect. The scene of confrontation between the two is crucial in that Lucy makes Robert fear that his 'monomania' might be exposed. Lucy tries to prevent her insanity from

being revealed by Robert by questioning his role as a hero and weakening his patriarchal power.

3. The Confinement of Lucy and Closure of Audley Court

Despite her attempts using technological literacy, Lucy eventually ends up living in an asylum. *Lady* does not, however, leave the disabled heroine powerless against the men. This section first discusses that an indictment of how socially vulnerable disabled women were in mid-Victorian society can be read in the process of Robert imprisoning Lucy and hiding his ‘monomania’. This section also explores the novel’s suggestion of Lucy’s indelible influence over the social order and gender dynamics within the framework of the conventional and conservative ending, which Bertha and other ‘madwomen’ could not escape.

Robert relies on a doctor to disclose Lucy’s insanity and to conceal his mental defect, a method not employed by Lucy. It is not uncommon for male characters in sensation fiction to call in doctors to diagnose women as ‘mad’ because doctors were expected to be custodians of women’s bodies in the mid-nineteenth century (Murayama 240-41). It is noteworthy, however, that the doctor initially thinks Robert is his disabled patient: ‘He is wondering whether I am the patient, ... and is looking for the diagnoses of madness in my face’ (319). Robert thus directs the doctor to examine Lucy to divert the doctor’s attention away from himself. The doctor initially diagnoses that ‘there is no evidence of madness’ in Lucy (321). Yet, he makes the second diagnosis that ‘There is latent insanity!’ (323) shortly after he is informed by Robert of her bigamy and other transgressions. Robert tries to get the doctor to treat Lucy as a ‘madwoman’ in order to hide his mental vulnerability. Showalter argues, ‘The psychiatrist’s role would no longer be to provide an example of kindness, but rather one of manliness, maturity, and responsibility’ (*The Female* 120). Robert puts himself in the position of examining her through the eyes of the doctor, thereby emphasising his identity as a non-disabled gentleman.

More interestingly, *Lady* does not present the Victorian discourse on disability as consisting of a simple male versus female dichotomy. In a patriarchal society, female characters also work in Robert's favour. Robert is more often assisted by female characters than by male characters in his pursuit of Lucy's secret. To illustrate, Alicia allows Robert and George to enter Lucy's room through a secret means despite Lucy having locked the room from the outside. This episode triggers the disappearance of George and Robert's investigation into Lucy's past. Clara Talboys also persuades Robert to return to the detective work when he gives up looking for her brother George. In another example, Lucy's maid Phoebe Marks tells her husband that Lucy secretly holds her son's shoes, which ultimately leads Robert to discover her crimes. Tara Macdonald examines that women who were excluded from the market economy in Victorian society turned to the exchange of gossip as an alternative economic activity that 'could prove vital to social status, community regulation, and the marriage market' (181). These female characters benefit by gossiping about Lucy to the men; that is, they show themselves to be submissive and trustworthy towards the men. Each of these women has their personal reasons for gossiping, but their hostile attitudes towards Lucy signify a conservative attitude that endorses patriarchal values. These women's assistance enables Robert to behave as the hero who uncovers Lucy's insanity and ultimately masks his 'monomania'.

Daniel Martin points out that Lucy's impressive and rather daunting ability to use technology and 'her transgressive mobility' are simply regarded as a consequence of her insanity, undermining her advantage over the male characters (148). Yet, this perceived connection between Lucy's insanity and her use of technology presents a challenge to Robert; he wants to conceal his use of railways and such technologies to prevent his 'monomania' from being made public. Robert, therefore, wants to hide both Lucy's use of technology and her technological literacy, as exposing them would reveal his use of the railways to unearth Lucy's secret employment of technology. This desire leads him to place her in an asylum. More importantly, it is not just

any asylum but a *maison de santé* in Belgium to which Lucy is sent; this asylum is described as being ‘out of the track of all railway traffic, and as only approachable by diligence’ (325). Lucy loses her connection to the modern industrial technology by being placed in such a facility and thereby loses one of her main advantages over the patriarchal framework that seeks to stigmatise and control her. Her comment in the *maison de santé* on the passage of time there clearly indicates her anger and despair at having been made into a mere ‘madwoman’ with no capacity to utilize her technological literacy: ‘How slow the time is... how slow, how slow! Shall I grow old like this, I wonder, with every minute of my life seeming like an hour?’ (285).

After sending Lucy to the asylum, Robert strives to distance himself from both technology and mental vulnerability. In order to put all traces of his extensive use of technology behind him, Robert moves to ‘a fairy cottage ... where, amid a little forest of foliage, there is a fantastical dwelling place of rustic woodwork, whose latticed windows look out upon the river’ (378). His cottage seems to have no connection with technology. Furthermore, Robert lives in this cottage with his wife, their son, and the only son of George and Lucy. V. A. Pallo analyses that in this scene Robert solidifies his identity as ‘a pattern member of society: a successful barrister, a landholder, and a husband’ (475). In addition to this, his role as a father is also important because it is the most privileged role in a patriarchal, ableist society. These characterisations in the last part of the novel allow Robert to conclude by emphasising that he is an exemplary, non-disabled gentleman. Moreover, his position as the guardian of Lucy’s son appears to deny her role as a mother and underline her disabled identity.

Lady presents both Lucy and Robert as individuals trying to hide their mental defects but differentiates between the strategies undertaken by them. Lucy has only one helpless accomplice: her father. Her accusation of Robert’s ‘monomania’ does not lead to any official diagnosis. Robert, meanwhile, enlists the help of several women and borrows the authority of the doctor to make an official diagnosis of Lucy’s insanity. By describing the process by

which he 'makes' Lucy a disabled woman and masks his mental defect, *Lady* reveals how gender inequality in Victorian patriarchal society extends to the discourse of disability. In a discourse that contains such arbitrary criteria, Robert is able to pass off the pretence of being non-disabled more easily than Lucy.

Despite the somewhat trite and conventional nature of the novel's ending, many scholars have contended that it cannot simply be read as a victory for Robert.⁶ It is significant to note that Audley Court is eventually 'shut up' (379). It can be argued that shutting up Audley Court, a symbol of pre-modern society, signifies the end of that society. The cause of this end is Lucy's compelling influence on Robert's use of modern industrial technology. The closure of Audley Court represents the complete transition of the pre-modern society to something akin to our present-day existence. In this society, technology can no longer be separated from daily life and disability. Daly persuasively contends that the plots of most sensation-fiction works tend to return to rural life in the end but they also imply that 'the repercussions of modernity [wrought by industrial technology] are felt even there' ('Railway' 465). Lucy offers a hint that the society was evolving in a way as to allow technology to become a means of both concealing and exposing people's physical/mental vulnerabilities and disabilities.

Conclusion

It is no exaggeration to say that in literature it has traditionally been the role of male characters to expose mental disabilities and mental disorders. Scenes where a man discloses a woman's insanity and locks her up in asylums/homes are also present in numerous works of Victorian literature. Some examples include Bertha and Rochester in *Jane Eyre* (1847), Anne Catherick and Sir Percival Glyde in *The Woman in White* (1860), and Frederick St. John and Charlotte in *St. Martin's Eve* despite the question of whether these male characters are really portrayed as non-disabled. These scenes highlight the dichotomy of mentally disabled women who are imprisoned in

asylums/homes and non-disabled men who imprison these women. *Lady* also follows this convention. The ending of the novel, in which Lucy's resistance is captured within the traditional and conservative dichotomy, depicts how male privilege allows Robert to cover up his 'monomania'. The novel thus shows that women who had disabilities and/or diseases as more socially vulnerable than men who had disabilities and/or diseases in mid-Victoria society.

Yet situating *Lady* in recent studies of sensation fiction from the perspective of disability studies highlights an interesting aspect of the representation of disability in the novel. This essay has clarified that *Lady* includes the idea of a compensatory mechanism, providing the disabled Lucy with a compensatory ability to make use of modern industrial technology: a high level of technological literacy. Lucy is well aware that her insanity can easily be viewed as a disability and that disabled people are socially stigmatised. The disabled heroine therefore attempts to prevent her mental impairment from being exposed by the men through her technological literacy. Furthermore, she also tries to prompt the onset of the hero's mental vulnerability and disclose it. Lucy could be a threat in mid-Victorian patriarchal society in that she threatens Robert with revealing his 'monomania' and attempts to subvert the gender power relations in literary conventions. Although Lucy's insanity is eventually uncovered by Robert, the ending leaves traces of Lucy's resistance in the future lives of the other characters, including Robert. The doctor says to Robert, 'She [Lucy] has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence' (323). Indeed, *Lady* shows its readers the 'madwoman' who has the intelligence and ability to question and resist the stereotypical representation of the Victorian 'madwoman'.

Notes

- 1 Charlotte St. John from Mrs Henry Wood's *St. Martin's Eve* (1866) is also portrayed in a way similar to Bertha and Lucy. Charlotte leaves her stepson to die in flames after he accidentally sets himself on fire.
- 2 All of the quotations from the text of *Lady* in this essay come from the version edited by Pykett.
- 3 In a society where industry was coming to the fore, there was a need to split people into non-disabled and disabled categories based on their ability to carry out useful tasks in the industrial economy (Davis 131). The New Poor Law in 1834 strictly defined who was entitled to public financial support due to inability to work such as 'the sick, "mentally ill", unmarried mothers, the elderly and "the infirm"' ('Workhouses and the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834'). '[T]he medical profession' standardised notions of the body without impairment as normal (non-disabled) and the body with an impairment as abnormal (disabled) (Barnes and Mercer 83-84).
- 4 In *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Philip Wakem 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. Rochester 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 An article titled 'M.D. AND M.A.D.' in *All the Year Round* published in the same year as *Lady* made an important statement; 'There is no clear dividing-line between sickness and health of mind; unsoundness of mind is, no doubt as various and common as unsoundness of body' (511). The author of this article may have had the 1858-59 lunacy panic in mind; as Jill L. Matus explains, the public found it terrifying that not a few women had been wrongfully diagnosed as mentally disabled and confined to asylums (200).
- 6 Mari Suzuki points out that in spite of an ostensible victory for Robert, it could be argued that Lucy is actually superior in wisdom (160). Kaoruko Sakata claims that the victory belongs to Lucy because Michael surrenders Audley Court to her by abandoning it himself, and her son enters the family tree of a gentry class family, the Talboys, as a legitimate child (43).

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