

“My Own Still Shadow-World”:
Melancholy and Feminine Intermediacy
in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*.

A thesis submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of English
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

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Abstract

Lucy Snowe, the heroine of *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë's final novel, is in constant conflict with the dichotomies of patriarchal culture. As she is perpetually torn between the opposing forces of patriarchy, Lucy Snowe inhabits what she calls her own "still shadow-world" (Brontë 164). This thesis explains the nature of the intermediate space Lucy Snowe occupies and examines its repercussions on her mental state. Chapter One theorizes the effect of patriarchal dichotomies on Lucy Snowe to demonstrate that her mental conflict has its roots in the female experience of the opposition between nature and culture. Chapter Two's analysis of the nineteenth-century medical understanding of madness shows that Lucy Snowe's melancholy is a symptom of the intermediacy created by conflicting patriarchal expectations. Chapter Three compares Lucy Snowe to the female figure in patriarchal master narratives, which draws attention to the serious consequences of patriarchal culture on women and demonstrates that Lucy is representative of women in conflict with patriarchal expectations. Ultimately, as part of Charlotte Brontë's endeavor to represent "truth" rather than "reality," *Villette* challenges patriarchal expectations of women and presents a different vision of womanhood.

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking my thesis supervisor, Professor Hilary Clark, for her insight, kindness, and encouragement over the years. I am obliged to the members of my committee—Professors Lisa Vargo, Wendy Roy, and Gerald Farthing— for their advice and for the discussion that made my thesis defense surprisingly enjoyable. I would also like to thank the Department of English for its generous support that allowed me to complete my studies and for giving me the opportunity to share my passion for literature through teaching.

On a personal note, I am indebted to my husband, Lindell Veitch, who fought alongside me in the trenches of graduate school; he kept me sane, and for that I am eternally grateful. I could not have completed my thesis without Lindell's editorial skill and his willingness to discuss my ideas. I am deeply grateful to my parents, Hugo V. Machuca and Janet D. Machuca, my dad encouraged me to read “all the classics” and my mom gushed over everything I ever wrote—their encouragement gave me the strength to pursue my passion. I also would like to thank my brother, Alejandro Machuca, who gave me the great pleasure of reading bedtime stories and sharing my love of books. I am also grateful to my dear friend, Amanda Faz, who kept my spirits up with her kindness and ready laughter. I would also like to thank my friend and colleague Katherine Skipsey. We met on the first day of our M.A. program and I knew we'd always be friends. Kate shared her books and ideas with me and always made time for tea. Thanks also go to Miguel Nascenta for innumerable coffee breaks, his willingness to listen to me go on about my work, and for his paella. Special thanks go to the family and friends who read *Villette* in order to better understand my work: Lindell Veitch, Janet Machuca, and Katherine Skipsey. Finally, I would like to posthumously thank Charlotte Brontë for writing a beautiful novel.

Dedication

I always loved arguing with my abuelita (grandmother), Blanca Lidia Romero, about politics, religion, and literature. But she always ended our debates by proclaiming, “When you’ve read more books we can continue this discussion.” After this decree was issued, I would go home and read as much as I could on the subject so that the next time I saw her we could continue the discussion. Yet, every debate ended the same way.

My abuelita Blanca taught me that there is *always* more to learn. I would like to dedicate my thesis to her memory.

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Introduction

The first reviewers of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* varied in their opinions; while most applauded the careful portrayal of its characters, many excused their tepid review by citing the slowness of the plot and the excessiveness of description (Allott 177-9). But perhaps *Villette* is simply "too subversive to be popular" (Millett 192). Harriet Martineau, for instance, took great offense to the portrayal of women in the novel:

All the female characters, in all their thoughts and lives, are full of one thing, or are regarded by the reader in the light of that one thought—love. . . . It is not thus in real life. There are substantial, heartfelt interests for women of all ages, and under ordinary circumstances, quite apart from love: there is an absence of introspection, an unconsciousness, a repose in women's lives—unless under peculiarly unfortunate circumstances—of which we find no admission in this book. (qtd. in Allott 172-3)

The implication is that women have a much wider field of life pursuits than merely acquiring a husband. But, even though Charlotte Brontë herself admits in *Villette* that a "great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives . . . idle, basking, plump, and happy" (46), Martineau's assertion that women's lives are unexamined and unconscious seems more belittling than the idea that women seek love. Moreover, Martineau seems to have believed that orphanhood and poverty are not sufficiently "unfortunate circumstances" to excuse introspection and the search for love. Martineau's review of *Villette*, which in addition to the above objections also exclaimed that "the author has no right to make readers so miserable" (qtd. in Allott 172), ended her friendship with Charlotte Brontë.¹ Unfortunately, criticism of *Villette*, and other works by Brontë

¹ As Gilbert and Gubar explain, Martineau's view is ironic since Lucy's story suggests that "the woman who allows herself to experience love is betrayed and destroyed, for once her best self is buried with her love, she is condemned to endure, alone, in the tomblike cell that is her mind" (406). Charlotte Brontë's response to Martineau is also

and her sisters, has customarily reflected the bias against female authors that is part of the male-dominated literary tradition (Millett 202). William Makepeace Thackeray's views on *Villette* serve as a prime example of this prejudice against female authors. In an 1853 letter to Lucy Baxter, Thackeray, who had an antagonistic relationship with Charlotte Brontë, belittled the novel's literary value by construing *Villette* as the wishful thinking of an unattractive, lonely woman:

And it amuses me to read the author's naïve confession of being in love with 2 men at the same time; and her readiness to fall in love at any time. The poor little woman of genius! the fiery little eager brave tremulous homely-faced creature! I can read a great deal of her life as I fancy in her book, and see that rather than have fame, rather than any other earthly good . . . she wants some Tomkins or another to love her and be in love with. But you see she is a little bit of a creature without a penny worth of good looks, thirty years old I should think, buried in the country and eating up her own heart there, and no Tomkins will come. . . . here is one a genius, a noble heart longing to mate itself and destined to wither away into old maidenhood with no chance to fulfil the burning desire. (qtd. in Allott 197)

Thackeray's patronizing vision is an attack on the person of the author, whom he apparently did not highly esteem. But Thackeray is not alone in his belief that *Villette* is autobiographical, as other critics have also read the novel in this way.² While there most certainly are

interesting: "I know what *love* is as I understand it; and if man or woman should be ashamed of feeling such love, then there is nothing right, noble, faithful, truthful, unselfish in this earth" (qtd. in Allott 171).

² See, for instance, an anonymous review from the *Examiner* 5 February 1853: we find it difficult to disconnect from . . . [*Villette*] a feeling of the bitterness of experience actually undergone, and that a real heart throbs at such times under the veil of Lucy Snowe. We do not know that it is so, but the world brings much trial to many of us, and if the author be numbered among those who have been sorely tried, she may feel that she has cause to accuse fate, to account happiness an accident of life to

autobiographical elements to the novel, *Villette*'s literary value surpasses the curiosity of autobiography. Therefore, it is not surprising that it was only in the 1970s and 1980s that critics, influenced by the rise of feminist criticism, began to study *Villette* earnestly and in terms other than Charlotte Brontë's second-best novel.

More recently, *Villette* has been interpreted through a variety of lenses. E.D.H. Johnson's "‘Daring the Dread Glance’: Charlotte Brontë's Treatment of the Supernatural in *Villette*" is a thorough and well-developed discussion of the gothic in the novel, especially Brontë's use of traditionally gothic elements to reinterpret the genre. But critics have also approached the novel through examinations of the narrative; Jessica Brent's analysis of Lucy's evasiveness in relating crucial details of her life in "Haunting Pictures, Missing Letters" is especially interesting. Psychoanalytic criticism of *Villette* has centered on the creation of selfhood. One particularly fascinating approach to this question is Beverly Forsyth's interpretation of Lucy as a sadomasochist in "The Two Faces of Lucy Snowe: A Study in Deviant Behavior." The creation of selfhood in *Villette* has also garnered significant attention from feminist critics. Laura E. Ciolkowski's discussion of the creation of the feminine self in "Forgeries of Sex and Self" is particularly of interest as she argues that "rather than formulating a stable and coherent narrative of female identity..., Brontë *forges* a subject marked by the misbehavior of Victorian fictions of sex and self" (218). Similarly, in "Are You Anybody, Miss Snowe?," Maureen Peeck addresses the difficulty of making a character like Lucy Snowe who is not "a normal woman in, let us say, the patriarchal sense. Lucy has no social status..., no family, no money, and thus has to work for her living, and, perhaps worst of all in Ginevra's eyes, she has no looks" (224). But it is precisely

some who are more fortunate than others, to lapse occasionally into a tone of irony a little harder than is just and now and then to give vent to a little morbid wail. (Anonymous qtd. in Allott 175-6)
And also Pauline Nestor's "Charlotte Brontë's Ambivalence towards Solitude and Society: 'Content with Seclusion' or 'Craving Companionship'?"

in this position as outsider that Peeck argues Lucy is able to observe so incisively her own society. Also useful to a discussion of *Villette*'s creation of selfhood are Ruth Robbins' "How Do I Look? *Villette* and Looking Different(ly)," Margaret L. Shaw's "Narrative Surveillance and Social Control," and Robyn R. Warhol's "Double Gender, Double Genre."

Kate Millett and Barbara Hill Rigney, however, have blended the problem of Lucy Snowe's mental state with traditionally feminist interpretations of the effects of patriarchal society on women. In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett argues that Lucy's mental state can be perceived as evidence of the negative effects of patriarchy: "In Lucy one may perceive what effects her life in a male-supremacist society has upon the psyche of a woman. She is bitter and she is honest; a neurotic revolutionary full of conflict, back-sliding, anger, [and] terrible self-doubt" (192). Millett's argument is among the first attempts to link Lucy Snowe's melancholy³ state to patriarchy; Barbara Hill Rigney follows Millett's contention to suggest that "Lucy...is, when driven, capable of 'unfeminine' outbursts of temper and even of violence, and in these acts, at least partly, lie her survival. The Victorian adjuration to the female, 'suffer and be still,' is to Brontë's mind yet another weapon of patriarchal domination" (29-30). While Rigney appears to see Lucy as Brontë's protest of society's treatment of women, Millett goes farther. Her argument states that *Villette* is, over all, a documentation of Lucy's attempts to escape patriarchal expectations that women be beautiful, wealthy, and well connected—none of which apply to Lucy. Moreover, Millett contends that Lucy is successful in that the narrative of her life resists the imprisonment of the male master narrative when Lucy does not marry Monsieur Paul (201).

³ In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud argues that melancholy involves the unconscious loss of an aspect of the ego, i.e. Lucy's loss of her self between the forces of nature-imagination-desire and culture-reason-duty (245-7).

Villette, of course, deals with Victorian, patriarchal culture, which was ruled by a litany of binary codes that subordinated women to men: women were seen as “the angel in the house,”⁴ and were required to behave reasonably, even while they were believed to be ruled by their passions. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the effect of patriarchy’s conflicting demands on Lucy Snowe: “‘Reason’ and ‘imagination’ are the terms [Lucy] uses to describe the conflict between her conscious self-repression and the libidinal desires she fears and hopes will possess her. . . . the fragmentation within...will eventually lead to her complete mental breakdown” (411-2). Indeed, it is not difficult to imagine that any person pulled in opposite directions at one time should suffer a mental breakdown, but for Lucy the pull of opposing forces is continuous, permanent. So these pervasive and ever-present contradictory demands wreak havoc on Lucy’s mind; unable to find her place on either side of the binary, Lucy is always in between. This in-between space she calls her own “still shadow-world” (Brontë 164).

Before Hélène Cixous lists the binaries that govern patriarchal society in “Sorties,” she asks: “Where is she?” (63). Indeed, woman’s actual place between patriarchal binaries—nature and culture, imagination and reason, desire and duty, pathos and logos— is ambiguous. While woman is largely associated with one side of these binaries—nature, imagination, desire, and pathos, for example— to say that woman is *not* cultured, reasonable, dutiful, or logical is certainly false. Yet, patriarchal narratives rely on these binaries for their logical structures, which is why a truthful representation of woman is impossible within patriarchal narratives. As Cixous explains, woman’s place in the logic of patriarchal discourse is ambiguous: “Where is she, where is woman in all the spaces he surveys, in all the scenes he stages within the literary enclosure? We know the answers and there are plenty: she is in the shadow. In the shadow he throws on her;

⁴ This phrase is borrowed from Coventry Patmore’s 1854-62 poem *The Angel in the House*.

the shadow she is” (67). Lucy Snowe anticipates Cixous when she says, “I . . . opened my own casement . . . , and leaning out, looked forth upon the city beyond the garden, and listened to band-music from the park or the palace square, thinking meantime my own thoughts, living my own life in my own still shadow-world” (Brontë 164). Moreover, Dr. John Bretton (also known as Graham Bretton from Lucy’s childhood) calls Lucy “a being inoffensive as a shadow” (Brontë 454). So we see that Lucy is both located in the shadow and is the shadow itself.⁵

In contrast to Lucy’s shadowy identity, we have M. Paul’s descriptions of her character; in this passage Lucy reflects upon the conflicting estimations of her character:

You deemed yourself a melancholy sober-sides enough! . . . Dr. John Bretton knows you only as “quiet Lucy”—“a creature inoffensive as a shadow;” he has said, and you have heard him say it. . . . Such are your own and your friends’ impressions; and behold! there starts up a little man, differing diametrically from all these, roundly charging you with being too airy and cheery—too volatile and versatile—too flowery and coloury. This harsh little man—this pitiless censor—gathers up all your poor scattered sins of vanity, your luckless chiffon of rose colour, your small fringe of a wreath, your scrap of ribbon, and calls you to account for the lot, and for each item. You are well habituated to be passed by as a shadow in Life’s sunshine: it is a new thing to see one testily lifting his hand to screen his eyes, because you tease him with an obtrusive ray. (Brontë 482-3)

These two representations of Lucy as shadow and obtrusive ray are paralleled in the gallery scene when Lucy is caught between the image of the *Cleopatra*, definitely an obtrusive ray, and the shadow-like women in *La vie d’une femme*. However, Lucy cannot be fully identified with

⁵ Throughout the novel there are scenes in which Lucy sees herself in mirrors and believes the image reflected is not her own; Ginevra verbalizes Lucy’s insubstantial representation by asking, “Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?” (Brontë 440). For more on Lucy’s image of self, see Maureen Peeck, “Are You Anybody, Miss Snowe?” and Ruth Robbins, “How Do I Look? *Villette* and Looking Different(ly).”

either representation of womanhood; in contrast to the excitable and dramatic reactions of the male observers of *Cleopatra*, Lucy looks on both portraits calmly and points to their flaws. This is the whore/Madonna dichotomy, a patriarchal creation, with which Lucy does not correspond though the men in the novel try to fit her into it. Lucy generally resists and rejects these binaries as they are too limited, too one sided; but, occasionally, she tries them on for size, playing the stolid governess to help Paulina and Dr. John in their romance or playing the coquette by allowing Madame Beck, who searches her drawers for billet-doux, to imagine her embroiled in a romance (Brontë 166). Yet these attempts to comply with patriarchal demands are confusing and, as a result, she dwells in the confused, conflicted location between the values of the binaries—an intermediate⁶ region. This in-betweenness in *Villette*, which is symptomatized by Lucy's melancholy, therefore, constitutes a starting point for an analysis of the problem of female space in patriarchal constructs.

Chapter One explores the nature/culture binary and explains how it creates intermediacy—the ambiguous space women inhabit in the logic of patriarchal discourse. While the nature/culture binary is pervasive, its parameters are unique to each social group. The three major characteristics of the nineteenth-century European understanding of the nature/culture binary are that nature and culture are opposite, that culture is superior to nature, and that they are gendered—nature being feminine and culture being masculine. But these characteristics create conflict and contradiction for women. Since it is difficult to demarcate the boundary between nature and culture, female and male, opposition creates conflict.

As Lévi-Strauss demonstrates, attempts to force a differentiation between nature and culture create an intermediary region for all those attributes of humanity that cannot be easily categorized into either polar opposite. Similarly, the difficulty of assigning either gender to

⁶ The term “intermediate” is borrowed from Sherry B. Ortner’s “Is Female to Nature as Male is to Culture?”

nature or culture raises questions regarding the hierarchy of the dichotomy. In *Émile*, Jean Jacques Rousseau⁷ argues that, contrary to the traditional view of the nature/culture dichotomy, nature is in fact superior to culture. However, Rousseau refuses to follow out the logic of his own theory and claims that while nature is superior to culture, and women are associated with nature, female is not superior to male. Finally, both the oppositional and hierarchical understandings of the nature/culture dichotomy rely on the gendering of the binary, but this gendering leads to a confusion of social roles. Men, for instance, are predominantly associated with culture, but are also related to the destructive aspects of nature such as hunting or brutality, and women, though predominantly associated with nature, take part in the continuation of culture, not only through bearing children, but also through the acculturation of children into society. As both genders can be associated with nature and culture, the confusion lies in the positive valuation of masculinity and the negative valuation of femininity, which exacerbates the confusion of cross-association for women.

The effect of conflict, contradiction, and confusion arising from patriarchal views of the nature/culture binary is that women are pushed farther from the center of human society toward the boundary between culture and nature. Once women reach this boundary they become intermediaries between culture and nature. In *Villette*, Lucy Snowe's mental and emotional condition exemplifies the problems that result from this state of being in-between. Chapters Two and Three apply the concept of female intermediacy to enlighten *Villette*'s representation of melancholy as symptomatic of the contradictory patriarchal expectations that have their source in the European views of nature and culture.

⁷ As nineteenth-century thought is founded on principles that arose during the Enlightenment, Rousseau's views of the nature/culture dichotomy are useful for understanding how intermediacy is created and how it affects Lucy Snowe.

Chapter Two explains the Victorian medical belief that madness is a matter of the will or self-control; a choice, in other words, not to control one's emotions. Through Lucy Snowe, *Villette* challenges these views; for example, Lucy's melancholy illustrates what Victorian physicians had not considered: that excessive self-control can also cause illness. From a Victorian medical perspective, Lucy correctly decides to suppress her emotions, a decision which *should* prevent insanity, but this action has the opposite effect on Lucy. In addition, Victorian physicians advocated solitary confinement in the treatment of insanity, but *Villette* also undermines the perceived benefits of solitude. Lucy's solitariness is partly forced on her as a poor, unattractive, unconnected woman and partly is her own choice, which she very likely intends to induce self-control, but in practice the solitude adversely affects Lucy's emotions. In her failure either to fully exert self-control or to give herself over to insanity, Lucy's solitude enacts her state of in-betweenness. Hence, Lucy's melancholy, characterized by the demand that she exert self-control in solitude, is a symptom of intermediacy.

Building on Chapter One's exploration of the patriarchal construction of intermediacy and Chapter Two's discussion of melancholy as a symptom of the intermediate state, Chapter Three confirms that *Villette* ultimately illustrates the serious mental repercussions of patriarchal culture on women. Through a comparison with H el ene Cixous' analysis of women's function within patriarchal master narratives in "Sorties," we see that *Villette* paints a portrait of a woman trapped between two worlds. Chapter Three explores the psychological implications of imprisonment in the shadows. Lucy suffers from melancholy, a symptom of her in-betweenness, or the condition of being caught between patriarchally constructed binaries. Like Sleeping Beauty slumbering in her coffin, Lucy, in her melancholy, represents women suspended between culture's demands and nature's urges, between reason and imagination. For Lucy, a life of reason

is an artificial existence in which she never actively participates; she is an onlooker, an “inoffensive shadow.” On the other hand, imagination causes suffering, turbulence, uncertainty, pain, and disappointment; but it also actively involves Lucy, allows her to feel connections and to love. As such, Lucy is faced with a choice between the absence of pain through obedience to reason, or the experience of both positive and negative emotion through surrender to imagination. For Lucy, however, there is no clear choice; when she chooses one, she regrets not having chosen the other. In other words, she is always at odds with her decisions and is always between worlds; this intermediacy is expressed psychologically and physically through her melancholy and it is through this representation of Lucy’s painful mental states that *Villette* depicts the grave consequences of patriarchal culture for women.

Chapter One

“Now ally, now enemy”: The Role of the Nature/Culture Dichotomy in Women’s Intermediacy

The nature/culture dichotomy, present across many human societies, is at the root of nineteenth-century European society’s understanding of women. This chapter explores the nature/culture dichotomy from a nineteenth-century European perspective in order to show that women have been constructed as intermediary persons. In *Villette*, Lucy Snowe’s mental and emotional state exemplifies the problems that result from the contradictory expectations placed on women by patriarchal society, and this state of being caught between contradictions is intermediacy. This in-betweenness will, in later chapters, enlighten *Villette*’s use of melancholy as symptomatic of contradictory patriarchal expectations that have their source in nineteenth-century European views of nature and culture.

Each human culture constructs the idea of nature and the idea of culture according to its own terms (MacCormack 6). That is why although most, if not all, human societies employ this dichotomy, each view of the relationship between these concepts is unique.⁸ For this reason, Sherry B. Ortner’s claim that women are pan-cultural and universally devalued due to their connection with nature has been challenged within her discipline.⁹ Nevertheless, as the devaluation of women was pervasive in Victorian society due to their connection with nature,

⁸ As the nature/culture dichotomy is fundamental to human cultures, the scope of this discussion must necessarily be limited. This thesis focuses on nineteenth-century European understandings of the dichotomies as the author, setting, and protagonists are all of this time and region.

⁹ Other anthropologists, citing ethnographic evidence, have taken issue with Ortner’s claim to the universality of women’s devaluation: “If the distinctions we examine in other cultures are the product of a specific historical and cultural transformation they must be examined with great caution in their own right without too hasty an assumption that we are in every case dealing with the same phenomena” (Bloch 25). See also L.J. Jordanova who says:

Ortner speaks of women as lower than or subordinate to men, stemming from her belief that ‘the secondary status of women is one of the true universals.’ This way of speaking assumes a model of society where there are unambiguous, rigid hierarchies, and so clear criteria for assigning their rank to any individual. Even if we clearly separate issues of value...from those of control..., there are no simple scales on which men and women can be ranged. Women are deemed both good *and* bad, and both evaluations may be represented as stemming from their naturalness. (65)

Ortner's views on the subject are invaluable to the exploration of intermediacy and its effects as seen in *Villette*. Nineteenth-century European society understood the nature/culture dichotomy as having three major characteristics: that nature and culture oppose each other, that culture is superior to nature, and that nature is gendered female and culture is gendered male. Each of these characteristics creates problems which contribute to female intermediacy: opposition creates conflict, hierarchy and gendering create contradiction. To explore the nineteenth-century European understanding of the nature/culture dichotomy that informs the representation of the in-between state in *Villette*, this chapter discusses the oppositional nature of the dichotomy, then the problems of culture's perceived superiority to nature, and, finally, the gendering of nature and culture.

An exploration of the culture/nature dichotomy requires an examination of the antipodean relationship between these two realms. Neither culture nor nature can be understood in isolation, as the boundaries of human culture exist only in relation to nature. Nature, as opposed to culture, requires the passive acceptance of circumstance: creatures in the natural world do not control their environment; they acquiesce to the demands of their habitat—sleeping during the day if it is hot or hibernating during months of scarcity. Culture understands nature as the province of mystery; it is the source of life and death—both of which humans are subject to, neither of which is fully understood. Each concept is, therefore, defined in opposition to the other. So it is that human society's relationship with nature is in constant flux; at times nature is dominated—forests are cut away to make way for industry—and at other times humanity is bested by nature's will, as in cases of severe weather and “natural disasters.” But even when one concept dominates the other, humanity perceives an interdependence, an amity and enmity without which the concept of human culture cannot exist. The interdependence identified here is one of

definition—the concept of culture relies on an opposition to the concept of nature for definition and vice versa.¹⁰ But the reality of the relationship between nature and culture is much more complex. Ortner explains that the prevalence of culture across human societies confirms a uniquely human capacity to shape and control nature (65). However, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it, “mankind” can never fully transcend nature; he may exploit nature,

but she crushes him, he is born of her and dies in her, she is the source of his being and the realm that he subjugates to his will; Nature is a vein of gross material in which the soul is imprisoned, and she is the supreme reality; she is contingency and Idea, the finite and the whole; she is what opposes the Spirit, and the Spirit itself. Now ally, now enemy, she appears as the dark chaos from whence life wells up, as the life itself, and as the over-yonder toward which life tends. (144)

De Beauvoir points out the intimate interrelation of nature¹¹ and culture; nature is not simply the opposite or enemy of culture as de Beauvoir shows that nature can also be an ally, that nature is not necessarily *outside* of culture, but perhaps contains culture within itself. In a sense, de Beauvoir suggests that culture and nature cannot be separated.

The opposition between nature and culture relies on the assumption that nature and culture are separate, but Lévi-Strauss, like de Beauvoir, disagrees. He suggests that the relationship is more complicated than a simple opposition because culture seems to be humanity’s natural state, which implies that these two concepts are not at all separate. Lévi-Strauss explains that while the culture/nature opposition is based upon a logic that is of value to certain analytic approaches, the opposition relies on an oversimplification. Lévi-Strauss points

¹⁰ Moreover, the culture/nature relationship mirrors the male/female relationship, which also relies on opposition for definition as well as upon amity and enmity.

¹¹ Note that Simone de Beauvoir genders nature feminine.

out that it is human evolution—a function of nature—that has enabled the creation of culture; for example, Neanderthal man, “with his probable knowledge of language, his lithic industries and funeral rites, . . . cannot be regarded as living in a state of nature” (3). A further obfuscation of the opposition between culture and nature appears when, as Lévi-Strauss suggests, one attempts to identify the biological or social causes of human behaviors, for “Where does nature end and culture begin?” (4). Indeed, if culture and nature can be said to be distinct, then a human in a cultural context should differ from a human in a natural one. To illustrate this point, Lévi-Strauss explains that while domesticated animals (that is, animals who are part, however tangentially, of culture) that are lost or isolated from their human owners “will return to the natural behaviour of the species prior to the outside interference of domestication, such cannot be expected of man, since the species has no natural behaviour to which an isolated individual might retrogress” (5). Therefore, according to Lévi-Strauss, humans cannot be fully outside the realm of culture as this realm is humanity’s natural state, which suggests that nature and culture are not distinct states.

Yet Lévi-Strauss, perhaps unwilling to accept the idea of a nature-culture continuum, develops a means of differentiating between nature and culture by proposing that cultural rules are normative, meaning that they change from one culture to another, while natural rules are universal. Culture, he says, is governed by a set of rules, independent of nature. Language, for example, is restricted by a set of rules that establishes which sound groupings will constitute words; even though humans may be anatomically capable of producing other types of sound, only a small range of sounds are deemed language in any particular cultural context. Cultural rules are, therefore, normative; that is, they change from group to group indicating a somewhat arbitrary nature. On the contrary, natural rules appear to be universal: that all human beings must be born from women and that all must die is true regardless of cultural factors (Lévi-Strauss

8). Lévi-Strauss believes that “the double criterion of norm and universality provides the principle for an ideal analysis which, at least in certain cases and within certain limits, may allow the natural to be isolated from the cultural elements which are involved in more complex syntheses” (8). However, as Lévi-Strauss himself has argued that these concepts are indistinguishable, he is forced to create a third category: the universal norm which is both natural and cultural.

Universal norms are rules that occur across all known human cultures and are, therefore, universal (natural), but whose interpretation varies from culture to culture making it normative (cultural). Lévi-Strauss identified the incest taboo as one of these universal norms because it occurs pan-culturally but has varying limits and definitions depending on the particular culture in question. Similarly, one might argue that the devaluation of women may be a universal norm. Ortner has argued that the devaluation of women is indeed pan-cultural, though other anthropologists argue that this is an Eurocentric view.¹² In any case, as anthropologists have not yet conclusively determined that there are or have ever been cultures in which women are not devalued in some way, it is fairly safe to say that women are *widely* devalued. Lévi-Strauss, according to his own definition of universality, would interpret this widespread devaluation of women as a universal norm. But the specific parameters and means of that devaluation—how women are devalued, the extent of the devaluation, and its repercussions—differ from one society to another, which, consequently, implies that it is normative or cultural (Lévi-Strauss 8-9). Lévi-Strauss’ category of universal norm is, in effect, a sort of catch-all where problematic

¹² Take, for example, MacCormack’s argument that “[t]here is no way to absolutely verify that the nature-culture opposition exists as an essential feature of universal *unconscious* structure, and there is ethnographic evidence to suggest that in the form in which Europeans now conceive it, the contrast is not a universal feature of consciously held fold models” (10). So, if the European understanding of the nature/culture model is not a universal cultural structure, then Ortner’s understanding of the devaluation of women is specific to cultures that associate women with nature. And if the devaluation of women as Ortner sees it is specific to only those cultures with the same nature/culture model, then Ortner’s claim that female devaluation is “pan-cultural” is Eurocentric.

behaviors can be placed when they do not clearly fit in either the nature or culture categories.

Therefore, phenomena classified as universal norms, such as the devaluation of women, can be said to be conceptually intermediate as they belong exclusively to neither culture nor nature.

Thus, attempts to separate nature and culture, to differentiate or to set up an oppositional relationship between them, seem to result in the creation of an intermediary region between the two concepts. As the universal norm of female devaluation shows, women are caught between culture and nature in an intermediary region that can be supposed to result from the artificiality of the dichotomy itself, which differentiates between ideas that are, perhaps, indistinguishable.

Another characteristic of the nature/culture dichotomy is nature's perceived inferiority to culture. The western understanding of this hierarchy can be traced back, at least, to its biblical roots:

Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have *dominion* over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. . . . God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and *subdue* it." (Genesis 1:26-28, my emphasis)

In the divine proclamation of human dominion over the natural world, the superiority of human culture over nature appears justified. So it is that human culture has taken on the role of transcendence in that culture counteracts the perceived resignation and ambiguity of natural life through the creation of transcendent objects and systems of thought. Because culture relies on active creation rather than the passive germination of nature, it allows human beings to transcend their environment and shape their world, which is, purportedly, the primary reason for culture's superiority.

The active/passive dichotomy that appears here as another layer of the culture/nature dichotomy is based on certain phallogentric assumptions. As Freud comments in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, “though anatomy . . . can point out the characteristics of maleness and femaleness, psychology cannot. For psychology the contrast between the sexes fades away into one between activity and passivity, in which we far too readily identify activity with maleness and passivity with femaleness, a view which is by no means universally confirmed in the animal kingdom” (62n). Activity then (culture or transcendence) is associated with maleness and passivity (nature or immanence) with femaleness simply because this association justifies patriarchy. It should come as no surprise then that human procreation, largely the province of women, is considered an inferior form of creation to the creation of culture:

The woman who gave birth . . . did not know the pride of creation. . . . giving birth and suckling are not *activities*, they are natural functions; no project is involved; and that is why woman found in them no reason for a lofty affirmation of her existence—she submitted passively to her biologic fate. The domestic labors that fell to her lot . . . imprisoned her in repetition and immanence; they were repeated . . . in an identical form . . . from century to century; they produced nothing new.

Man’s case was radically different; he furnished support for the group, not in the manner of worker bees by a simple vital process, through biological behavior, but by means of acts that transcend his animal nature. (de Beauvoir 63)¹³

¹³ Freud makes this point in *Civilization and Its Discontents*:

[W]omen soon come into opposition to civilization and display their retarding and restraining influence. . . . Women represent the interests of the family and of sexual life. The work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable. . . . [The libido] he employs for cultural aims he . . . withdraws from women and sexual life. . . . [, which] estrange[s] him from his duties as a husband and father. Thus the woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilization. (59)

Here again, activity, which is associated with maleness and culture, is ranked above passivity, which is associated with femaleness and nature. It is significant to note the role of the gendering of nature and culture in the dichotomy at this point before going into greater detail later in this chapter.

Although the relationship between nature and culture can be traced back to classical times when humanity was understood “in terms of a before—nature—and an after—society” (Bloch 26), it was during the Enlightenment that, along with the rise of science and technology, the belief in culture’s superiority to nature gained prominence in Europe and, eventually, developed into an important aspect of the dichotomy at work in *Villette*.

In general, eighteenth-century thought—despite its varying definitions of nature¹⁴ and the contradictions that, of course, ensued—presented nature as the greatest hope for all facets of human society, but especially in the areas of morality, education, medicine, and government. As legitimacy before this period was believed to be derived directly from God, in the guise of monarchy and religion, the idea that the established source of legitimacy could be replaced by nature as an “antecedent and therefore superior basis for morality and society” (Bloch 31) was revolutionary. Indeed, as the eighteenth century no longer understood nature simply as “a hypothetical pre-social better state but . . . [as] a guide for future society, a rejuvenating and purifying source which is able to develop man’s essential ‘nature’ and harmonize it with environmental physical nature” (Bloch 30), the perceived superiority of culture over nature was undermined.

¹⁴ During the eighteenth century, the term “nature” was used in several different senses, which Bloch has identified as: 1) “a pre-social state,” 2) “the internal processes of the human body,” 3) “the universal order which implies the harmonious co-existence of human nature and the external world,” and 4) “the way of life of primitive peoples” (27). However, the uncertainty of the term “comes from the fact that it is mainly defined in opposition to something else” (Bloch 31).

Questioning culture's superiority to nature, however, had profound implications for the social order. This is especially true with regard to the role of women, who were subordinate to males, according to the widely accepted biologically reductive view that parallels nature's perceived inferiority to culture.¹⁵ Women's close association with nature served to secure male supremacy while nature was inferior to culture, but eighteenth-century attempts to raise nature's profile brought women's roles (by association) into question. Indeed, if nature was superior to culture, then, logically, women must be superior to men. Yet, Rousseau, the primary proponent of elevating nature's standing, was unwilling to extend the benefits of nature's new status to women; thus, the position of women remained unequivocally inferior to that of men, despite possible arguments for the improvement of their roles.¹⁶

In order to understand Rousseau's reluctance to grant that women might be at least equal, if not superior, to men, we must understand his attitude toward nature and culture.¹⁷ In *Émile*, Rousseau argues that culture corrupts human nature and that nature should guide every aspect of human life: "All things are good as their Creator made them, but everything degenerates in the hands of man. . . . The influence of prejudice, authority, necessity, example, and all those social institutions in which we are immersed, would stifle in him the emotions of nature, and substitute nothing in their place" (1:2). In other words, the cultural imperative to dominate and shape the

¹⁵ "[The] association of woman and nature [is] justified by notions of biological maternity and of the female bodily processes. . . . [which] is used in a variety of ways as justification for subordination in the political and intellectual spheres. . . . But it is also worth noting how well such a position accords with a pervasive ideology which devalues nature generally as being something to be conquered and mastered" (Bloch 33).

¹⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft argues against Rousseau's idea in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*:
Reared on a false hypothesis, [Rousseau's] arguments in favour of a state of nature are plausible, but unsound. I say unsound; for to assert that a state of nature is preferable to civilization, in all its possible perfection, is . . . to arraign supreme wisdom; and the paradoxical exclamation, that God has made all things right, and that evil has been introduced by the creature, whom he formed, knowing what he formed, is as unphilosophical as impious. (20)

¹⁷ Rousseau's eighteenth-century views of the nature/culture dichotomy are significant to my thesis because he "is probably the first writer to make the opposition between nature and something else, whether it be 'society' or the 'arts and sciences', a central tool for thinking out the human condition" (Bloch 25-6).

natural world leads, in Rousseau's view, to human degeneracy in the sense that culture also drives the suppression of natural feelings and instincts. One of Rousseau's most significant points is that in suppressing nature, culture does not offer an adequate substitute so that humans are left with a spiritual or emotional deficit. One possible solution is to bow to both masters, but Rousseau explains that if we are

Impelled by nature and custom contrary ways, and forced to yield in a degree to both impulses, we take a route in the mean direction of both, that leads us neither to the end of one or the other. Thus held in suspense, and wavering, during the whole course of our lives, we end our days without being able to render ourselves consistent, and without ever being good for anything to ourselves or others. (1:10)

Thus, a simultaneous and equal devotion to both nature and culture results in paralyzing intermediacy. However, Rousseau offers hope to mankind in expressing the need to harmonize the two elements, that "by adding the knowledge of art to nature, [we] become more ingenious without being less dextrous" (2: 32). In other words, Rousseau advocates the creation of a third category of natural culture in which the best of each element will be combined for the improvement and health of man. Despite the need for harmony between opposites, Rousseau suggests that because culture without nature is a corrupting influence on man, nature is superior to culture.

However, Rousseau believes that women are so much a part of the natural world, that they are not capable of blending nature and culture. Rousseau saw women as natural beings who lived within cultural confines, but who were not agents of change, progress, or transcendence. According to Bloch, Rousseau suggests that women "must stay close to nature within the unnatural order which is society" (36). In order to cure society's corruption, men are enjoined to

reshape culture according to their nature, which Rousseau tells us is a superior guide. Women, however, must control and reshape their nature to accord with a culture Rousseau has called corrupt. One possible explanation for such a gross double standard is that Rousseau ascribes a greater degree of passion to women, so women need confinement and restriction (4:8, 66). But desire, Rousseau argues, does not originate in nature; consequently, desire and passion must be restrained because any impulse that does not have its source in nature is corrupt (4:105).

Following this logic, if passion and desire are corrupt, and women are characterized by passion and desire, then women must be corrupt as well. Moreover, if one accepts the idea that women are constitutionally corrupt, then one would not wish to allow women to further aggravate the corruption already rampant in society. But Rousseau does not claim that women are wholly corrupt; in fact he goes to great lengths to prove the merit and nobility of the feminine character in its natural modesty, servility, and attention to duty. The result is a duality inherent to the characterization of women as both supreme and base, which suggests that women must live with disharmony. But in so doing, women are doomed to the intermediacy Rousseau sees as damning for men.

Revolutionary as the concept of nature's superiority was for political theory, Rousseau and his contemporaries did not condone extending the implication of their theories to women. Rousseau asserts that only male nature is superior to culture; female nature—on the one hand servile and on the other, corrupt—is generally considered inferior. The problem for women then is that their task is inherently discordant: they must repress passions that are an allegedly natural part of their characters, but society does not replace that lost emotion. Religion may be supposed to be an adequate substitute, but Rousseau points out that “Always in extremes . . . [women] are either libertines or devotees: none of them being capable of uniting wisdom and piety” (4:47),

which implies that passion at either extreme required suppression. Therefore, women are thrust into the in-betweenness that Rousseau warned men against, except that women are expected to enjoy their situation which results from natural implications or, at the very least, bear the pain of it because “Woman was formed to yield to man, and even to bear with his injustice” (Rousseau 4:86). As nature itself was not superior to culture, or else women’s nature could not be inferior to men’s culture, eighteenth-century theorists were forced to “negate their valuation of nature in order to accommodate the position of women” (Bloch 32).

Villette illustrates the effects of these contradictions on Lucy who, because she is associated with nature, swears a secret allegiance to her emotions—a feminine, and therefore, natural characteristic—but must exist within the framework of society, which forces her to obey reason—a masculine and, therefore, cultural characteristic. This conflict between her emotions and her reason is central to Lucy’s mental strain, which is discussed at length in chapter three.

The third aspect of the nature/culture dichotomy is the gendering of nature as female and culture as male. The oppositional relationship attributed to nature and culture has contributed to the gendering of these terms. The passivity, fertility, and mystery of nature are characterized as feminine attributes, whereas the activity, productivity, and knowledge of culture are considered masculine attributes. But the strictness of this opposition leads to conflict, which appears to exacerbate intermediacy. Furthermore, as the eighteenth-century debate on the culture/nature hierarchy shows, women’s association with nature is a part of the complex, sometimes contradictory, patriarchal system of logic that can cause a kind of psychic disharmony: intermediacy. As the nature/culture dichotomy is understood as being characterized by culture’s superiority to nature, patriarchal culture determined that men are related to culture and women are related to nature, in other words, that culture is superior to nature as men are superior to

women. Patriarchal society has, consequently, allied women with nature since they have been considered inferior to men and objects for men's use, while men are allied with culture because they are considered superior to women and are the agents of change and progress. Therefore, both the oppositional and hierarchical understandings of the nature/culture dichotomy have relied upon the gendering of the dichotomy.

The gendering of nature and culture is related to the means of creativity associated with masculinity and femininity. Although all of humanity takes part in the interdependent, somewhat adversarial relationship with nature, historically it has been men who create the culture that allows humanity to transcend nature. Ortner suggests that men have focused on symbolic creation, which is the creation of culture, because they have been perceived as playing little or no role in the creation of humans¹⁸:

woman's body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life; the male, in contrast, lacking natural creative functions, must (or has the opportunity to) assert his creativity externally, "artificially," through the medium of technology and symbols. In so doing he creates relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables—human beings. . . . And hence, so the cultural reasoning seems to go, men are the "natural" proprietors of religion, ritual, politics, and other realms of cultural thought and action in which universalistic statements of spiritual and social synthesis are made. (67-71)

Women *do* have a natural means of creation, but since women are perceived as existing in a more natural state—subject to their bodies by creating human beings, and, therefore, subject to nature—they have been perceived as being *unable* to create symbols or technology, which encourages the assumption that women have (or should have) no *desire* to create culture. More to

¹⁸ Interesting that the "right" to create culture stems from a perceived lack or inability.

the point then, the gendering of nature and culture is related to the valuation of each gender's means of creation: the creation of cultural objects being more valued than the creation of persons.

The devaluation of biological creation is central to the gendering of nature. Although woman is seen as an important member of society through the production and education of children, as well as through the preservation of tradition and morality in the home (for which she is not paid), in terms of cultural production woman has been almost completely absent due to the perceived limitations of her body. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf ironically addresses the issue of woman's allegedly meager contribution to culture:

Young women . . . you are, in my opinion, disgracefully ignorant. You have never made a discovery of any importance. You have never shaken an empire or led an army into battle. The plays of Shakespeare are not by you, and you have never introduced a barbarous race to the blessings of civilization. What is your excuse? It is all very well for you to say, pointing to the streets and squares and forests of the globe swarming with black and white and coffee-coloured inhabitants, all busily engaged in traffic and enterprise and love-making, we have had other work on our hands. Without our doing, those seas would be unsailed and those fertile lands a desert. We have borne and bred and washed and taught, perhaps to the age of six or seven years, the . . . human beings who are...at present in existence, and that . . . takes time. (132)

Woolf stresses the importance of the work of birthing and rearing the human race, but she also ends her address by extolling women to become engaged in the production of culture so that the female poet may be born from her forerunners.¹⁹ However, the few avenues for contribution to

¹⁹ This raises the questions that feminist discourse grapples with: whether adopting male culture and revaluing traditional women's work are conquests over patriarchy or other forms of submission to it.

culture open to women are devalued because they are understood as being based on “natural ability” rather than acquired skill. Women’s bodies have limited their place in society by confining them to the particular roles that are consequently seen as closer to nature (Ortner 69). The circular logic employed in this explanation illustrates the seeming inescapability of women’s association to nature. The perception that women are closer to nature relies on shifting an individual’s ability into that individual’s duty: i.e. as women are *able* to birth and care for children, then it is their *duty* to do so. Here is the crux of the matter, for the difference between one’s ability and one’s duty is related to the difference between nature and culture. In the same way that a dog may guard a house, not because it values the property but because territoriality is in its nature, patriarchal society considers women to be performing their social duty out of natural tendencies. Consider, for example, occupations open to women during the nineteenth-century: wife, mother, governess, wet nurse, midwife, seamstress, domestic servant, and teacher of girls. Such occupations revolve around the raising of children and the maintenance of a home—the *natural* province of women. So, women’s cultural duties are based on natural abilities, which are understood as inherent abilities that are of less cultural value than acquired skills.

However, it is not simply women as individuals, but also women’s primary social context, the family unit, that is devalued as a result of the gendering of nature.²⁰ Woman’s primary role in the family unit is seen to be the production and care of children because she is apparently physiologically equipped for these duties. Her connection to children means that woman is subject to the “limitations” and skill levels of her children and, as a result, she is restricted to the family unit (Ortner 70). Women’s continual association with children, according

²⁰ Freud makes a similar point in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (59), see note on page 17.

to Ortner, is a key factor in their association with nature since children are perceived as the least human of all members of society: infants have no control over bodily functions, do not speak, do not walk upright, and even older children have little understanding of cultural norms and practices. Therefore, children appear to be animal-like and women, by association with children—through parturition, nursing, and rearing—are increasingly likely to carry this label as well (Ortner 70).²¹ As Rousseau puts it, “By the law of nature itself, both women and children lie at the mercy of the men” (4:19), so women’s connection to children bonds them further with nature.

As a consequence of its association with women and children, the family unit is seen as a “lower order of social/cultural organization” (Ortner 71). Contrasting the family unit’s position to “public” society, Ortner explains that the

domestic is always subsumed by the public; domestic units are allied with one another through the enactment of rules, which are logically at a higher level than the units themselves; this creates an emergent unit—society—that is logically at a higher level than the domestic units of which it is composed. (71)

While the social laws that govern family units are of a higher order than the family units themselves, this hierarchy neither explains nor justifies the devaluation of the essential work that women do within family units to promulgate society physically and culturally through parturition and the teaching of social laws. In raising children, women are responsible for the acculturation of human beings without whom society would, of course, cease to exist.²² Despite the

²¹ See, for example, Monsieur Paul’s description of Lucy: “You remind me . . . of a young she wild creature, new caught, untamed, viewing with a mixture of fire and fear the first entrance of the breaker-in” (Brontë 332).

²² Even if a woman was not a wife/mother she worked toward the transmission and maintenance of society through the occupations that were open to her, which I have previously mentioned. Lucy Snowe, for example, is first a nurse/companion to Miss Marchmont, then a nursemaid to Madame Beck’s daughters, and finally an instructor of young girls.

indispensable nature of this task in which women are representatives of culture, “there is a point at which the socialization of boys is transferred to the hands of men. The boys are considered, in one set of terms or another, not yet ‘really’ socialized; their *entrée* into the realm of fully human (social, cultural) status can be accomplished only by men” (Ortner 72). Traditional women’s work—the responsibility of physically producing members of society and acculturating children—is continually seen as a lower order of work than male cultural production; so, although “fundamental,” the aspects of culture that women pass on have been seen as unsophisticated.

As Lévi-Strauss’ theories have illustrated, efforts to impose difference on nature and culture result in the establishment of intermediate regions—dwelling places for anything that cannot be easily catalogued as either natural or cultural. This problem extends to the gendering of nature as female and culture as male, because in actuality it is difficult to attribute either gender exclusively to one category or the other. Nevertheless, Victorian society took man’s relationship to nature and categorized it as cultural: even before hunting was a sport, it was an acquired skill and the brutality of war was taken on as a means of political action. Therefore, the culturally prescribed role of males in Victorian culture is exclusively concerned with the production of culture. Women, too, can be associated both with nature and culture; however, unlike the clarity with which Victorian culture assigned roles to males, the roles of women were far more ambiguously placed within the culture/nature dichotomy. Women, though predominantly associated with nature, took part in the continuation of culture, not only through bearing children, but also through the acculturation of children into society. But, as I have already discussed, these cultural roles were understood as natural abilities, not acquired skill sets. Therefore, despite women’s role in human acculturation, Victorian society believed women had

a greater affinity toward nature. So, while the gendering of culture as male is problematic, the positive valuation of this gender mitigates any resulting in-betweenness; however, the gendering of nature as female is negatively valued and, therefore, the resulting intermediacy is exacerbated.

Because of their bodies and social context that are limited by their bodies, women have been seen as less human (or less valuable) than their male counterparts; as Simone de Beauvoir explains, woman “was no fellow creature in man’s eyes; it was *beyond* the human realm that her power was affirmed, and she was therefore *outside* of that realm. Society has always been male; political power has always been in the hands of men” (70). Patriarchal perceptions of women as *beyond* and *outside* the human overlook woman’s humanity and essential role in the perpetuation of society. The effect of this culturally prescribed oversight is that women are pushed farther from the center of human society toward the boundary between culture and nature, and once women reach this boundary they become intermediate in culture’s ancient struggle for domination over nature. Therefore, patriarchal perceptions of womanhood have created an intermediate realm where the line between culture and nature is blurred, and women, belonging fully to neither, are trapped therein.

Both Ortner and Edwin Ardener have described women’s domain beyond and outside the human. Ortner’s view describes culture as a “small clearing within the forest of the larger natural system. From this point of view, that which is intermediate between culture and nature is located on the continuous periphery of culture’s clearing; and though it may thus appear to stand both above and below (and beside) culture, it is simply outside and around it” (77). Though the intermediate region is outside and around culture, it is not in nature either, for even in relation to that larger system this space is intermediate (See Fig. 1.). Ardener’s diagram of male and female regions is, perhaps, more useful (See Fig. 2.).

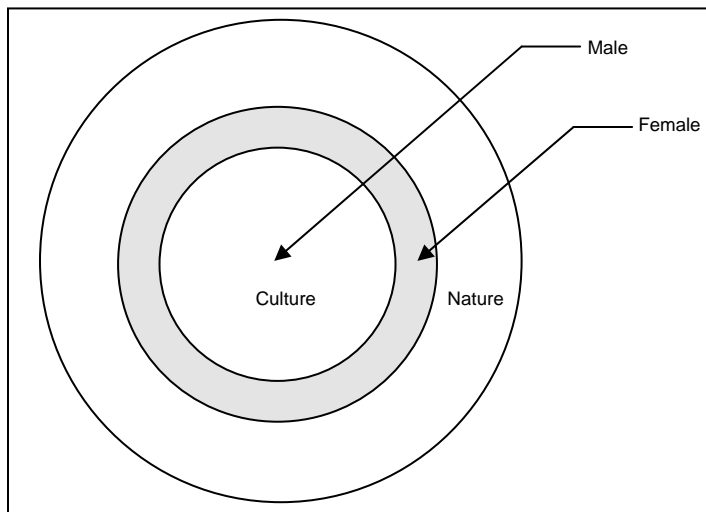


Fig. 1. Diagram illustrating Sherry B. Ortner's description of female intermediacy.

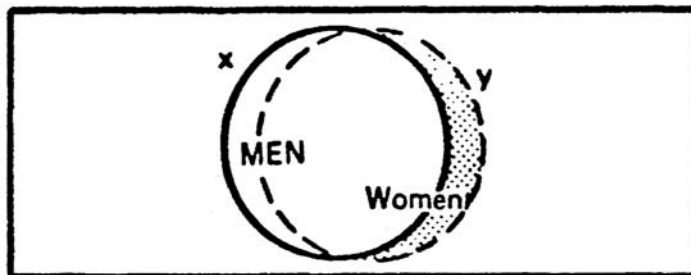


Fig. 2. Ardener's model of women's culture (Ardener 23).

In Ardener's model the male realm is dominant and the female realm is muted, which means that the female interacts with the male realm although each realm has a space that is untouched by the other. Edwin Ardener calls the female untouched space the "wild zone" (qtd. in Showalter "Wilderness" 199), but there is no corresponding "wild zone" in the male realm because

all of male consciousness is within the circle of the dominant structure and thus accessible to or structured by language. In this sense, the “wild” is always imaginary; from the male point of view, it may simply be the projection of the unconscious. [But] . . . women know what the male crescent is like, even if they have never seen it, because it becomes the subject of legend. . . . [,while] men do not know what is in the wild.

(Showalter “Wilderness” 200)

Ortner illustrates women’s in-betweenness, but Ardener attempts to illustrate that woman is trapped in intermediacy because, unlike men, patriarchal language and symbolization are alienating for women. In terms of exclusion and experience, the male crescent parallels the female in that both are gender exclusive regions where certain activities or experiences proper to each gender take place, but if we examine these crescents in terms of consciousness only the female space is a “wild zone” because the male crescent is clearly within the dominant circle. According to Ardener, then, female intermediacy does not only exist spatially and experientially, but also metaphysically in the imagination (Showalter “Wilderness” 200).

The three aspects of the nature/culture dichotomy in patriarchal culture (opposition, hierarchy, and gendering) contribute, each in its own way, to the creation of the female intermediate state. The interpretation of the nature/culture dichotomy as an opposition is based on a false assumption, which leads to a paradox. If culture and nature exist only in opposition to one another, placing women in both realms would situate them at the core of a constant struggle between these forces. Therefore, understanding woman’s association with nature as a “*mediating* element in the culture-nature relationship, account[s] in part for the cultural tendency not merely to devalue women but to circumscribe and restrict her functions, since culture must maintain control over its (pragmatic and symbolic) mechanisms for the conversion of nature into culture”

(Ortner 78). The hierarchical approach to the nature/culture dichotomy also destines women to disharmony. As Ortner explains, woman's association with nature and the view that nature is "seen as lower than culture . . . accounts for the . . . assumption that woman is lower than man in the order of things" (78). Thus, the inherent contradiction arising from the discourse of hierarchy is a source of female intermediacy. Although, according to Rousseau, women are closely linked with nature, they are constitutionally corrupt. This means that female nature cannot act positively upon society and must, consequently, not be permitted to interfere with wholesome male nature. Rousseau's support of the negative view of women contradicts his positive view of nature and is, consequently, detrimental to the female psyche which must live with this double standard.

The contradiction inherent to the patriarchal view of the nature/culture dichotomy, however, is most apparent through its gendering. Women's "*ambiguous* status between culture and nature . . . [might] account for the fact that, woman can occasionally be aligned with culture, and in any event is often assigned polarized and contradictory meanings within a single symbolic system" (Ortner 78). Thus, the devaluation of "natural ability" and valuation of acquired skill results in the contradiction inherent to the ambiguous gendering of nature and culture: women's work, being both natural and cultural, is fundamental to culture, but not as valuable as men's work. Therefore, each approach to the nature/culture dichotomy contributes to female in-betweenness, which, as Ardener shows, is manifest in women's lives, bodies, and consciousness or psyche.

Women's in-betweenness, characterized by the constant internal struggle between nature and culture (desire/duty, imagination/reason), causes mental strain which is denominated melancholy by Victorian culture. In *Villette*, Lucy Snowe suffers from a mental conflict that has its roots in the female experience of the nature/culture dichotomy. Continually torn between

emotion-nature and reason-culture, she belongs fully to neither. Lucy inhabits an intermediate realm that is neither nature nor culture, and it is her residence there that is at the root of her mental anxiety. As Gilbert and Gubar explain, “Resulting sometimes in guilty acquiescence and sometimes in angry revolt, the disparity between what is publicly expected of her and her private sense of herself becomes the source of Lucy’s feelings of unreality” (419). Through Lucy, *Villette* illustrates how the experience of intermediacy, a state created by patriarchal society’s contradictory expectations, has devastating effects on the female psyche.

Chapter Two (Un)Willing Sanity: Intermediacy and Victorian Medical Views of Melancholy

Chapter One proposes that women's intermediacy causes a mental conflict that Victorian society considered melancholy. This chapter examines the nineteenth-century's views of madness and demonstrates how *Villette* represents and challenges these views. Most importantly, this chapter argues that, in terms of the Victorian understanding of mental illness, Lucy's melancholy is an intermediate state between sanity and insanity.

While there is a temptation to approach female melancholy in *Villette* from a Freudian perspective, this chapter takes a medical and historical approach because although the traditional critical image of Charlotte Brontë is that of an intuitive genius who seems to belong more to the Freudian than to the Victorian era. . . . Brontë's fiction actively encodes the language and preoccupations of mid-nineteenth-century social, psychological and economic thought. (Shuttleworth 1-2)

Drawing on the historical studies of madness and melancholy presented in Roy Porter's *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady*,²³ Sally Shuttleworth's *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, and Vieda Skultans' compilation of nineteenth-century medical treatises *Madness and Morals: Ideas on Insanity in the Nineteenth Century*, this chapter grounds Charlotte Brontë's representations of melancholy firmly in the mid-nineteenth-century.

²³ Although *Female Malady* deals primarily with hysteria, Showalter also treats women and madness more broadly in her chapter "The Rise of the Victorian Madwoman." Showalter explains that

[Moral managers] . . . were no more sensitive than others to the way that madness expressed conflicts in the feminine role itself, or to how women experienced their condition. . . . Women did not have access to the pages of the professional journals that discussed the statistics and the theories of insanity. There were no female medical officers to speak about the psychology of women, and the few women who seem to have had significant careers as matrons or proprietors of private asylums have not left records. We do not hear the voices of female lunatic patients, either. . . . To find the female perspective on insanity, we must turn to Victorian women's diaries and novels. Although this literature deals exclusively with the experience of middle-class and aristocratic women, [they] . . . give us a more subtle and complex way of understanding the crises of the female life-cycle than the explanations of Victorian psychiatric medicine. (60-1)

Nevertheless, *Villette* challenges nineteenth-century medical thought on mental illness, perhaps with the intention of portraying its effects on women (Showalter 69). Consequently, this chapter explains the Victorian medical belief that madness is a matter of the will or self-control, madness being a loss of the will to control one's emotions and sanity being a willful exertion of self-control (Shuttleworth 35). As a result of this understanding of madness, Victorian physicians saw insanity as a conscious (or semi-conscious) *choice* not to control one's emotions. Lucy's melancholy can be seen as madness in the hallucinations and nervousness it produces; but we cannot say that Lucy lacks the will to control her emotions—on the contrary, she works very hard to do so. In Victorian medical terms, then, Lucy's melancholy would be neither insanity nor sanity: an intermediate mental state. Therefore, I propose that Lucy's melancholy can be understood as a symptom of her intermediacy.

Madness before the Victorian era carried a mysterious power; its origins were unknown and although many theories sought to understand its etiology, no one theory was able to provide a satisfactory explanation. Consequently, treatment of madness spanned various sectors of society. Before the nineteenth century, “victims of frenzy or melancholy would typically seek aid from people who did not deal exclusively in mental disorders [including]... unorthodox healers, astrologers, cunning-men, wise-women, or quacks” (Porter 173). However, Porter explains, most commonly people sought priests²⁴ or regular physicians who often prescribed treatment for the bodily symptoms, but left the mental disturbance untouched (173). As physicians began asserting the physical nature of madness, calling it a disease rather than the more ambiguous “affliction,” the treatment of the insane came almost entirely within the jurisdiction of the medical profession: “Mental disorders are neither more nor less than nervous diseases in which mental symptoms predominate, and their entire separation from other nervous diseases has been a sad hindrance to

²⁴ Especially “conscience-racked souls seeking solace and succour” (Porter 173).

progress” (Maudsley qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 60-1). The assertion made here is that mental disease is a component of the well-known nervous diseases, such as hysteria.²⁵ A link to a purportedly well-established and, so far as Victorians were concerned, thoroughly understood nervous disease, such as hysteria, decreased the mystery attached to mental disorder. In fact, Maudsley points out that the (undeserved) mystery of mental disease has been a “hindrance” to medical progress, which suggests that placing madness, as a mental disease, within the body is the more progressive approach to its understanding.

Thus, placing a disease of the *mind*, whose nature and location are unclear, in the *brain*, which is a tangible and identifiable space within the body, justifies its medical study. But to move madness effectively from intangible to tangible, physicians needed to define the *mind* more concretely. Maudsley’s 1874 definition of mind is carefully crafted to support his belief that mental disease is an entirely physical problem: “Mind may be defined physiologically as a general term denoting the sum total of those functions of the brain which are known as thought, feeling, and will. By disorder of mind is meant disorder of those functions” (qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 191). Using Maudsley’s definition, the *mind* becomes a vague term for what is in fact believed to be a function of the brain. Hence, the mind becomes a somewhat inaccurate term to describe the physiological fact of brain function.²⁶

With the establishment of the importance of the brain in mental disorders, physicians like Andrew Wynter, who in 1875 cried out for the inclusion of the brain in general medical study,

²⁵ Which was considered a disease of the reproductive organs/muscles and nervous tissue, not a mental disease.

²⁶ See Maudsley’s further explanations of the nature of mental disease in terms of the *mind*: “Whatever opinion may be held concerning the essential nature of mind, and its independence of matter, it is admitted on all sides that its manifestations take place through the nervous system, and are affected by the condition of the nervous parts which minister to them. . . . Insanity is, in fact, disorder of brain producing disorder of mind. . . . [I]t is a disorder of the supreme nerve-centers of the brain. . . . producing derangement of thought, feeling, and action, together or separately, of such degree or kind as to incapacitate the individual for the relations of life” (qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 191).

said that its omission is “the most fruitful cause of incipient insanity being suffered to degenerate into confirmed lunacy. The sentinel who is at every man’s door, be he rich or poor—the general practitioner,—is the one who should be able to foresee the approach of an attack” (qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 129). Nonetheless, *Villette* gives voice to the problem of insanity’s intangibility through Dr. John’s medical inability to help Lucy after her breakdown. Following Lucy’s explanation that “low-spirits,” not her nervous system, were the cause of her breakdown, Dr. John replies: “Which disables me from helping you by pill or potion. Medicine can give nobody good spirits. My art halts at the threshold of Hypochondria²⁷: she just looks in and sees a chamber of torture, but can neither say nor do much” (Brontë 261). It was precisely this sort of frustrated medical impotence that sent nineteenth-century physicians searching for the physiological origins of mental disorder and asserting their right to treat the insane. Hysteria lent itself rather well to this sort of agenda since it was believed to be caused almost exclusively by the female reproductive organs—the womb in particular. With its clear physiological origin, physicians could assert that in cases of female madness, medical men were the rightful authorities:

It ought to be fully understood that the education, character, and established habits of medical men, *entitle* them to the confidence of their patients: the most virtuous women unreservedly communicate to them their feelings and complaints, when they would shudder at imparting their disorders to a male of any other profession; or even to their own husbands. Medical science, associated with decorous manners, has generated this

²⁷ Hypochondria was believed to be a nearly exclusively male disease, caused by a solitary, sedentary life and was believed to be incurable once established. Its symptoms revolved around the determination to cure an imagined disease (Veith 242-3). Dr. John’s use of the term “hypochondria” to describe Lucy’s symptoms has more to do with his medical impotence to cure any psychological disease than with Lucy herself.

confidence, and rendered the practitioner the friend of the afflicted, and the depository of their secrets. (Haslam qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 223, my emphasis)

However, such assertions of entitlement raised doubts in the general public, which saw in the act of depositing secrets something all too reminiscent of the role of a Catholic priest (Shuttleworth 44).²⁸ These demands from the medical community to oversee the treatment of the insane, especially the female insane, were a consequence of a larger agenda to professionalize medical care, the outcome of which was the increasingly prominent role of doctors in the community. Through connections to the patient's body, the influence of physicians in the home grew (Donzelot 118-9) until they took on "the position of the priesthood of former times, assume[d] . . . the same airs of authority . . . and enter[ed] . . . every family with a latch key of private information" (Cobbe qtd. in Weeks 53). For evidence of this we have not far to look in *Villette*. Just after Lucy first sees the nun in the garret, she proclaims, "I never will tell exactly what I saw . . . otherwise, I shall be discredited and accused of dreaming" (Brontë 355). To Lucy's adamant statement, Dr. John replies, "Tell *me* . . . I will hear it in my professional character: I look on you now from a professional point of view, and I read, perhaps, all you would conceal. . . . Come, Lucy, speak and tell me" (Brontë 355). Dr. John successfully coaxes a confession from Lucy, showing the power that his "professional character" and ability to "read" Lucy's face have to bring down her resolution to keep her vision secret. There is, indeed, a priestly air to Dr. John's statement, an authority and a seemingly magical or other-worldly ability to know people's secrets; however, in Lucy this authority inspires something other than respect: "[Dr. John] was so obstinate. . . . Of course with him it was . . . all optical illusion—nervous malady, and so on. Not

²⁸ Frances Power Cobbe outlined the similarity between priest and physician in "The Little Health of Ladies," *Contemporary Review*, January 1878. An extract of her argument can be found in Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (42).

one bit did I believe him; but I dared not contradict: doctors are so self-opinionated, so immovable in their dry, materialist views” (Brontë 368). Lucy complies with Dr. John’s recommendations not out of a respect for his “professional character,” but simply, it would seem, to avoid the daunting task of countering what he believes he already knows. Despite such reservations, the prominent role of physicians in the community was established and scientific forays into the corporeal nature of insanity advanced.

Still, the correction of the mentalist view of insanity was not fully integrated into medical thought. Rather than clinically identifying the physical etiology of mental “disease,” physicians continued to speculate on abstract, theoretical causes. Victorian medical literature delved into the definition of insanity and began to conjecture that reason was not the standard by which to judge sanity. Increasingly, physicians identified the inability to control one’s emotions as a kind of insanity that does not preclude the ability to reason: “There are . . . cases of a different description, in which the intellectual faculties appear to have sustained but little injury, while the feelings and affections, the moral and active principles of the mind, are strangely perverted and depraved” (Cowles Prichard qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 181). Bucknill went so far as to classify three types of madness: “Intellectual, Emotional, or Volitional” (qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 174), but he was careful to stipulate that these three types are not mutually exclusive. The inclusion of disorders of emotion and will in the understanding of insanity was relatively new to medical thought; the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had placed the entire weight of sanity squarely on the shoulders of reason.²⁹ Skultans points to Pascal “who could conceive of a man without

²⁹ Porter discusses Foucault’s assertion that “madness. . . had . . . enjoyed a liberty and truth of its own, engaging in dialogue with reason—[but during the period between 1600 and 1800 it] came to be disqualified, abominated and reduced to pure negation (‘unreason’). . . . Unreason was an affront, a threat to order, demanding ‘reason’s subjugation of unreason’” (6). Porter goes on to quote John Ferrier, who admitted that “We are ignorant by what laws the body possessed a power of representing the most hazardous disorders, without incurring danger; of counterfeiting the greatest derangement in the circulating system, without materially altering its movements; of producing madness, conscious of its extravagancies, and of increasing

hands, feet, a head, but claimed ‘I cannot conceive of a man without thought; that would be a stone or a brute’” (*English Madness* 37). The Victorian inclusion of emotion and will can be seen as a departure from, though not an abandonment of, earlier understandings of insanity as a “loss of reason.”³⁰

The effect of this inclusion of emotion and will in the understanding of insanity is that the pool of potential madmen grew larger. This nineteenth-century definition of insanity encouraged physicians to see the condition “less as an inescapable physiological destiny, than as a partial state, to which anyone under stress is liable” (Shuttleworth 35). The widened definition presented its own problem: if insanity is comprised of strong emotions and a weakened will (traits traditionally associated with women), then a much larger proportion of the population might be called mad:

Nothing can be more slightly defined than the line of demarcation between sanity and insanity. . . . Make the definition too narrow, it becomes meaningless; make it too wide, the whole human race are involved in the drag-net. In strictness, we are all mad when we give way to passion, to prejudice, to vice, to vanity; but if all the passionate, prejudiced, vicious, and vain people in this world are to be locked up as lunatics, who is to keep the key of the asylum? (Anonymous excerpt from *The Times*, 22 July 1853, qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 172)

the acuteness of sensation, by oppressing the common sensorium . . . Nature, as if in ridicule of the attempts to unmask her, has in this class of diseases, reconciled contradictions, and realized improbabilities, with a mysterious versatility, which inspires the true philosopher with diffidence, and reduces the systematic to despair.” . . . In other words, what was so maddening about madness was that it was simultaneously real, terrifying and catastrophic, yet also chimerical, duping both its victims and society at large. (17)

³⁰ Accounting for madness through the emotions and will is reminiscent of eighteenth-century psychology which, according to Michael V. DePorte in *Nightmares and Hobbyhorses*, decreed that people have three souls: “the rational, the sensitive, and the vegetative” (12). However, the distinction here is the shift from locating madness in something as ephemeral as the soul, to locating it in a tangible organ of the human body (despite the inherent mystery of the human brain).

The suggestion that individuals could easily slip into madness also implies that the condition is transitory; otherwise everyone would be mad all of the time. As physicians began to identify cases of temporary insanity, which could stem from stressful situations such as sudden poverty or the loss of a family member, it became clear that the condition could be cured³¹ (Veith 193). However, believing that anyone can become insane, either temporarily or permanently, also meant that “all individuals (but particularly women) lived under the constant threat of mental derangement” (Shuttleworth 35). In speaking with Dr. John, Lucy feels this threat acutely: “‘You think then,’ I said, with secret horror, ‘she [the nun] came out of my brain, and is now gone in there, and may glide out again at an hour and a day when I look not for her? . . . I shudder at the thought of being liable to such an illusion!’” (Brontë 358). This constant and widespread threat demanded a greater focus on the treatment of insanity.

As larger segments of the population were seen to suffer from varying degrees of insanity, and as the population at large began to perceive a widespread threat, the focus of treatment shifted from cure to prevention. In fact, Lucy’s horror at the possibility of becoming insane illustrates this shift: “Is there no cure?—no preventative?” (Brontë 358). Although physicians attempted to discover physiological causes of insanity such as poor circulation, weak nervous tissue, or, in women, disturbed reproductive functions, it was the emotional causes of insanity that gained widespread appeal as somewhat manageable variables. Through treatises intended for the general public, physicians encouraged the belief that

excesses of the excitements of joy, sorrow, watchfulness, weariness, unexpected losses, the unexpected accession of wealth, the excitements of love, mortified ambition, pride or

³¹ Baron Ernst von Feuchtersleben (1806-49), for example, “had the courage to speak of hysteria and, indeed, of all mental aberrations, as transitory stages between health and disease, while others of his period established rigid classifications that allowed little leeway for recovery or change” (Veith 193). Feuchtersleben’s view implies that the transitory nature of mental illness allowed for a hope of recovery.

vanity, sudden and unexpected honour, and every other cause of great excitement or heavy depression, will, by degrees, operate as most powerful predisposing causes.

(Mosley qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 44-5)

These “predisposing causes” reinforce the idea that anyone can suffer from insanity since most human lives are filled with alternating moments of joy and sorrow. However, “excess” is the key word in Mosley’s description of predisposing causes; excess is seen as countering moderation of feeling, which stems from will power or self-control. Lucy suffers under the internalized demand for moderate feelings when she attempts to write a reply to Graham’s letters. Unchecked by Reason, Lucy would have written a charming, warm, perhaps even passionate, letter to Graham, but she tells us Reason declared:

“At your peril you cherish that idea, or suffer its influence to animate any writing of yours!”

“But if I feel, may I *never* express?”

“*Never!*” declared Reason.

I groaned under her bitter sternness...Reason...would *not* let me look up, or smile, or hope: she could not rest unless I were altogether crushed, cowed, broken-in, and broken-down. (Brontë 327)

Lucy suffers under the “bitter sternness” of her own reason;³² her own will forbids the feelings she longs to experience. George Man Burrows believed that excessive emotion, one of the three kinds of insanity, was in fact due to a lack of self-control: “All passions and emotions are said to be modifications of the will” (qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 35). Lucy shows what Burrows and other

³² It is interesting to note that the personification of Reason is female and, moreover, is (like Lucy) a schoolmarmish, punishing figure. This seems to contradict the idea that Reason is regarded as a male attribute and Imagination a female attribute, but Reason here is the voice of what society requires of women, and not a voice of what women require for themselves. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

physicians had not considered, that excessive self-control can also cause illness due to an excessive subordination of the emotions.³³ From a medical perspective, Lucy has correctly decided to suppress emotions, a decision which *should* prevent insanity, but as *Villette* shows, this action has the opposite effect.

However, physicians believed that because excessive emotion indicates a weak will, then the three kinds of insanity (Intellectual, Emotional, and Wilful) become grouped under two broad headings: insanity of the intellect and insanity of the will. The broadened definition of insanity, the newly recognized category of temporary insanity, and the idea of universal vulnerability to madness required a clear differentiation between sanity and insanity. Physicians sought a diagnostic tool for this purpose and found the concept of self-control; as Shuttleworth explains:

If all individuals were liable to eruptions of insanity, the only visible sign one could cling to that one was not insane would be one's capacity to exert self-control. Social conformity thus became an index of sanity; the only measure available to the individual fearful of his or her own normality would be a willing obedience to designated social roles. (35)

Recognizing that all persons experience strong passion, physicians determined that the only difference between a madman and a sane man was how each reacted to his passions. As such, the ability to control oneself constitutes sanity, and the converse, insanity. Following this logic, self-control took on a significant role in the nineteenth-century study of insanity as it became associated with a higher order of human civilization: Self-control is “the foundation of all that is high and excellent in the formation of character. He who does not earnestly exercise it...endangers his highest interests both as an intellectual and a moral being” (Abercrombie qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 158). However, the prestige allotted to self-control becomes a problem when

³³ The internal conflict arising from the suppression of emotion is discussed in Chapter Three.

the converse is examined: if self-control is “the foundation of all that is high and excellent,” then, logically, the lack of self-control would represent a process of debasement. It is this line of thought that allowed physicians to associate a lack of self-control with insanity, which is itself perceived as a condition outside the human and, perhaps, in some cases, approaching the animal.³⁴ This association permitted Maudsley to assert that “Suicide or madness is the natural end of a morbidly sensitive nature, with a feeble will, unable to contend with the hard experiences of life” (qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 211). As people with a feeble will and overly sensitive nature are unable to cope with the difficulties of life, suicide or madness is their destiny; furthermore, in saying that this is the “natural end” of the feeble-willed, Maudsley hints that this is their *rightful* destiny. The result of the association between self-control and sanity is that the insane are either wilfully so, and therefore malingering, or fated to madness by their weakness.

A strong will could prevent insanity and bring an individual back to health, but physicians had little understanding of the process by which an individual’s will could be used to cure insanity. Tuke stresses that the “power of the Will in resisting disease, apart from the influence of the Imagination or the concentration of the Attention, is unquestionable” (qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 175). This belief in the power of the will led other physicians to assert that if this power could be understood, then mental illness could be prevented entirely (Noble qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 171). Regardless of the faith in will power, it was still unclear *who* should better understand and act upon the importance of the will: the patient, through an intuitive enforcement of will, or the physician, through medical knowledge. The implication, considering

³⁴ As Porter explains, “A key condition for this ‘subjugation of unreason’ (runs Foucault’s argument) lay in the insane being perceived as animals rather than as human, hardly needing clothes, and being oblivious to climate and environment: ‘In the classical period . . . the madman was not a sick man. Animality in fact protected the lunatic from whatever might be fragile, precarious or sickly in man’” (6).

the individualistic nature of the will, is that it is the patient's responsibility to exercise his will in such a way as to prevent insanity from occurring. However, Noble outlines the physician's indirect role in the exercising of will to return health:

When a patient begins to recover the natural control over his ideas, he should be *reminded* of the power which every person possesses, and should exercise, over his own current of thought; and how, by *voluntary efforts*, he should direct his attention to objects and pursuits calculated to establish states of mind antagonistic to his melancholy. (qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 146, my emphasis)

According to Noble, the physician's role is limited to reminding the patient of his or her own ability, through "voluntary efforts," to cure insanity. However, the nature of these "voluntary efforts" or how exactly they should be "exercised . . . over [the patient's] own current of thought" is still unclear. To Lucy's plea for a cure or preventative, Dr. John answers, "Happiness is the cure—a cheerful mind the preventative: cultivate both" (Brontë 358). The exasperating vagueness of this recommendation confirms Dr. John's earlier admission of medical impotence (Brontë 261), but in this instance Lucy, at least internally, rejects the advice saying, "No mockery in this world ever sounds to me so hollow as that of being told to *cultivate* happiness. What does such advice mean? Happiness is not a potato" (Brontë 358). Pointing out the ridiculous implications of Dr. John's recommendation, Lucy contradicts the notion that a person can will herself into sanity or that sanity can be created out of melancholy. Lucy's short but powerful statement shows that this view was a point on which physicians had much to lose: the respect of their patients. The ambiguity of medical advice on the use of the will has a relatively simple explanation—physicians had not studied the process of creating or using the

will, but rather had relied upon anecdotal evidence of patients who, in a sense, claimed to have “refused” to go mad.³⁵

Within the medical profession there were, however, critics of the (over-) importance given to the will in matters of insanity. Maudsley explains that moral philosophers and physicians had not considered the lengthy process by which will is created:

No one can resolve successfully by a mere effort of will to think in a certain way, or to feel in a certain way, or even, which is easier, to act always in accordance with certain rules; but he can, by acting upon the circumstances which will in turn act upon him, imperceptibly modify his character. (qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 212)

Though rejecting the overly simplistic suggestion that the insane can will themselves into sanity, Maudsley believes that a person can alter her character by changing her reactions to certain experiences. The will, according to Maudsley, is “the development of the power of co-ordinating ideas and feelings for the achievement of a special life-aim” (qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 212); as such, the will is a power that can help one achieve a specific aim, but it is not innate; rather, it is a learned skill that must be developed and honed.³⁶

Physicians began advocating the use of *moral management* in the treatment of the insane because will power is difficult to develop in people while they are chained and tortured in a madhouse. In contrast to earlier doctrines that may have seen the insane as possessed, demoniacal, violent, or dangerous, the general method of moral management involved the exercise of

³⁵ See Noble’s account of his patient, a gentleman, who is a “strong-minded man, with a firm and resolute will. . . . [who] has often told me that, but for strong volitional efforts, he believes that he should have been insane” (qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 171-2).

³⁶ “Great then as the power of will unquestionably is, when rightly developed, we ought not to lose sight of the fact that its development is effected only by the gradual education of a continued exercise in relation to the circumstances of life” (Maudsley qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 213). In light of Chapter One, this suggests another possible reason for the importance of the will in Victorian society: that it is valued because it is an acquired, cultural skill and not an innate, natural skill.

kindness, with a view to calming the insane individual, feeding him well, and giving him a therapeutic occupation (Gardiner Hill qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 142). However, this is not to say that the insane were quite human to their physicians; though physicians by and large denounced the use of chains and torture, an element of fear remained. Accordingly, constant vigilance and a strict classification of patients (especially at night) were necessary (Gardiner Hill qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 142). Moreover, as Porter remarks of the term “moral management,” “the analogy with disciplining a work force in early industrialization is not misplaced” (222). So, keeping in mind the perceived deliberate aspect of madness—that the mad are *unwilling* to exert control over their emotions—the kindness, comfort, and occupation granted to the patient are a means of subduing the rebellious insanity, a means of disciplining will and returning the patient to a suitable degree of self-possession: “*Moral treatment with a view to induce habits of self-control, is all and every thing*” (Gardiner Hill qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 144). Moral management then appears to be an answer, though perhaps an unsatisfactory one, to Maudsley’s claim that physicians had not considered the long and arduous process by which will is created.³⁷

Although practitioners of moral management rejected the use of chains and torturous treatments, the necessity to induce self-control engendered new and innovative means by which more rebellious patients were subdued. By mid-century, English prisons had popularized the use of solitary confinement, which then spread to lunatic asylums as a moral means of inducing self-

³⁷ I say that moral management was unsatisfactory because it was, in its own way, just as problematic as previous, perhaps, crueler treatment toward the insane. Shuttleworth provides a useful illustration of the differences between moral management and earlier treatment of madness by comparing the treatment of girls at Lowood and of Bertha Mason at Thornfield in *Jane Eyre*:

The system at Thornfield represents the vestiges of a prior era, when the “animal” insane were kept hidden and mechanically restrained (as Bertha is after each outbreak and no attempt was made at cure or recuperation). “Nature” was given free rein, but the inmates were in consequence cast out from the ranks of humanity. Lowood, by contrast, conforms more to the system of moral management (with a leaven of physical violence); individuals are to be “saved” for society by the careful regulation of their inner impulses. As Brocklehurst declares “we are not to conform to nature.” (160)

Although moral management succeeds in not dehumanizing its charges, it fails to cure or recuperate people; instead it manufactures a false kind of sanity that is reliant upon fear and pain.

control (Showalter 69). Physicians believed that—because solitary confinement removed patients from those elements of his surroundings that triggered outbursts—delusions could be mitigated, self-control could be induced, and even shy and melancholy natures could gain confidence (Morison qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 139). However, after a decade of widespread use, it was clear that the negative side-effects of this treatment far outweighed any benefit physicians thought it could produce; it created “nightmares and hallucinations. . . . bouts of hysterical crying, or else . . . listless torpor” (Showalter 69). Despite these disturbing consequences of solitary confinement in prisoners, physicians continued to advocate its use in the treatment of the insane: “There is no general maxim in the treatment of insanity wherein medical practitioners, ancient or modern, foreign or domestic, are so unanimous as that of separating the patient from all customary associations, his family, and his home” (Burrows qtd. in Skultans, *Morals* 128). But, as *Villette* demonstrates, solitary confinement by any name has serious consequences for those who suffer under it.

Essentially, Lucy Snowe’s solitary confinement is symbolic; Lucy is “not a prisoner She is only alone, only unloved, only ‘superfluous’ and ‘odd,’ an ‘inoffensive shadow’ in the background of other people’s lives” (Showalter 70). As a woman lacking in family connections, wealth, and beauty (that is, reproductive value), Lucy has no place in society: “All at once my position rose on me like a ghost. Anomalous, desolate, almost blank of hope, it stood. . . . What prospects had I in life? What friends had I on earth? Whence did I come? Whither should I go? What should I do?” (Brontë 62). Lucy’s description of her position is significantly filled with questions, not answers; her life is one of seemingly endless want. But Lucy becomes so resigned to her loneliness that she begins to choose it: “I lived in a house full of robust life; I might have had companions, and I chose solitude” (Brontë 175). Although Lucy claims that

solitude is her choice, it is not a choice that brings her pleasure or, at least, peace; Lucy's solitude brings on "attacks of agonizing depression, loneliness, and anxiety, leading to hallucinations and breakdown" (Showalter 70). Finally, Lucy describes her experience in terms of prisoners under solitary confinement; following a seven-week silence from her only acquaintances, the Brettons, Lucy says,

The world can understand well enough the process of perishing for want of food: perhaps few persons can enter into or follow out that of going mad from solitary confinement.

They see the long-buried prisoner disinterred, a maniac or an idiot!—how his senses left him—how his nerves first inflamed, underwent nameless agony, and then sunk to palsy—is a subject too intricate for examination, too abstract for popular comprehension. (Brontë 392)

Though Lucy's loneliness is partially caused by the social devaluation of women (especially the devaluation of women of Lucy's position who lacked reproductive value), it is also brought on by her refusal to play by that society's rules: her position on the fringes of society requires independence and self-reliance: "there remained no possibility of dependence on others; to myself alone could I look. I know not that I was of a self-reliant or active nature; but self-reliance and exertion were forced upon me by circumstances" (Brontë 47). Victorian women were expected always to depend on someone—if there were no friends or family, then the state might find use for such women in work-houses. But Lucy shuns dependence of any kind, and although she says that this decision was forced on her by circumstance, it was also her choice. So, Lucy's choice to live independently in a devalued role is also a source of her loneliness. As Showalter points out, Brontë refuses "to blame women's madness on external wrongs alone. Granted the rights to mobility, work, and autonomy that Victorian feminists . . . were beginning

to demand, Lucy still finds herself racked ‘by a cruel sense of desolation’” (71). Regardless of the origin of Lucy’s solitary confinement, there is the solitude itself; Lucy may intend this solitude to induce self-control and, thereby, sanity, but in fact it creates a mental conflict that greatly affects Lucy. Failing either to produce sanity or insanity, Lucy’s solitude succeeds in creating a space for her intermediacy.

Tracing the development of nineteenth-century medical views of madness clarifies the influence of such medical thought on *Villette*’s representation of Lucy Snowe’s melancholy. Not only is medical terminology present (“nervous system” and “hypochondria,” for example), but there is also some treatment of controversial issues of the day, such as the priest-like behavior of physicians and the effects of solitary confinement. Most importantly, however, by voicing the problem of self-control *Villette* undermines the medical views that promoted its importance, which Gilbert and Gubar identify as the epicenter of Lucy Snowe’s conflict: “‘Reason’ and ‘imagination’ are the terms [Lucy] uses to describe the conflict between her conscious self-repression and the libidinal desires she fears and hopes will possess her. . . . the fragmentation within . . . will eventually lead to her complete mental breakdown” (411-2). Lucy’s “secret and sworn allegiance” (Brontë 328) to imagination may impel her toward madness, but her obedience to reason and attempts to enforce self-control are signs of sanity; therefore, her mental state can be characterized as intermediate. Moreover, Lucy’s solitude, which is both imposed and chosen, creates a space for her in-between state. Hence, Lucy’s melancholy, characterized by the conflict of contradictory demands and by solitude, is a symptom of her in-betweenness.

As Chapter One explores the theoretical aspects of psychic in-betweenness and Chapter Two situates the discussion of intermediacy in a historic context, the following chapter will

provide a close reading of *Villette* in order to depict the grave consequences of intermediacy for women.

Chapter Three **“Still Shadow-World”: The Representation of Intermediacy in *Villette***

This chapter examines *Villette*'s representation of intermediacy, relating it to the patriarchal devaluation of woman and its symptomatic expression in feminine melancholy. In addition, *Villette*'s representation of Lucy Snowe's in-betweenness is discussed in terms of Hélène Cixous' analysis of women's function within patriarchal master narratives. This chapter confirms that *Villette* ultimately illustrates the serious psychological repercussions of patriarchal culture on women.

In *Villette*, Brontë uses “reason” to refer to the practice of culture and “imagination” to refer to the experience of nature. Gilbert and Gubar explain the roles that each of these play: “‘Reason’ and ‘imagination’ are the terms she [Lucy] uses to describe the conflict between her conscious self-repression and the libidinal desires she fears and hopes will possess her, but significantly she maintains a sense of herself as separate from both forces and she therefore feels victimized by both” (411). Lucy maintains herself as separate from both reason and imagination because she believes she belongs fully to neither—one might say she is intermediate. Lucy envisions herself as the ground on which these two forces do battle: “In the conflict within the house of Lucy's self, her antagonistic representatives testify to the fragmentation within that will eventually lead to her complete mental breakdown” (Gilbert and Gubar 412). This struggle between “antagonistic representatives” is the consequence of contradictory patriarchal demands that trap Lucy in the region between them and result in her melancholy.

Villette paints a portrait of a woman trapped between two worlds and explores the psychological implications of that sort of imprisonment. Throughout the novel, Lucy Snowe reminds readers of her non-position in either world: “I . . . opened my own casement . . . and leaning out, looked forth upon the city beyond the garden, and listened to band-music from the

park or the palace-square, thinking meantime my own thoughts, living my own life in my own still shadow-world” (Brontë 164). Here, Lucy is trapped between alternating worlds: she leans out of a window (culture) to see the city (culture), which lies beyond the garden (nature submitted to culture) and listens to music (culture) coming from a park (nature submitted to culture) or a palace-square (culture)—but while she reaches through these alternating layers, she remains, as ever, in her own “still shadow-world.” This expression describes the domain of her melancholy, which she distinguishes from the worlds she crosses between (nature and culture).

Lucy’s intermediacy is likewise explored during a crucial point of the novel—the long vacation—when Lucy, finding herself entirely alone, walks in search of companionship:

At first I lacked courage to venture very far from the Rue Fossette, but by degrees I sought the city-gates, and passed them, and then went wandering away far along chaussées, through fields, beyond cemeteries, Catholic and Protestant, beyond farmsteads, to lanes and little woods, and I know not where. A goad thrust me on, a fever forbade me to rest; a want of companionship maintained in my soul the cravings of a most deadly famine. I often walked all day, through the burning noon and the arid afternoon, and the dusk evening, and came back with moonrise. (Brontë 221)

Her search for companionship does not take her to the town, to shops, to churches of any faith; Lucy searches for companionship in the least likely of places—that is, if we assume that she searches for *human* companionship. This passage describes Lucy’s progressive abandonment of culture in favor of nature, but Lucy acknowledges the difficulty of seeking companionship there: “I too felt those autumn suns and saw those harvest moons, and I almost wished to be covered in with earth and turf, deep out of their influence; for I could not live on their light, nor make them

comrades, nor yield them affection” (Brontë 221).³⁸ This is an illustration of the simultaneous pull of culture and nature: first rejecting culture, Lucy searches for companionship in nature, but then admits that the relationship she yearns for cannot be found in the light of the moon.

Not long after Lucy admits to nature’s inability to provide true companionship, she falls ill and again seeks solace first in nature:

It rained still, and blew; but with more clemency, I thought, than it had poured and raged all day. Twilight was falling, and I deemed its influence pitiful. . . . It seemed to me that at this hour there was affection and sorrow in Heaven above for all pain suffered on earth beneath . . . I was sure this hope would shine clearer if I got out from under this house-roof, which was crushing as the slab of a tomb, and went outside the city to a certain quiet hill, a long way distant in the fields. Covered in a cloak . . . forth I set. The bells of a church arrested me in passing; they seemed to call me in to the *salut*, and I went in.

(Brontë 224-5)³⁹

To Lucy, the wind and rain suggest clemency and pity, which urges her to hope for affection; significantly, she is certain that her hopes will grow stronger if she leaves the house (which symbolizes culture) and makes her way to “a certain quiet hill.” She seems intent on this mission until she is “arrested” by the bells of a cathedral. “Arrested”⁴⁰ implies that she is distracted from

³⁸ This quotation seems to suggest a wish to die, to end her association with worlds she cannot be fully a part of. Compare this to Lucy’s wish to leave the Brettons as a criminal wishes for his execution to be over: “I long to get the good-bye over, and to be settled in the Rue Fossette again. . . . I longed to leave them as the criminal on the scaffold longs for the axe to descend: that is, I wished the pang over” (Brontë 324).

³⁹ In contrast to the previous quotation (Brontë 221) in which Lucy wished that death would free her from the natural world, here Lucy feels that culture is a tomb in itself. Though Lucy searches for companionship in nature and society, her search is ultimately fruitless because Lucy belongs to neither world.

⁴⁰ In the quotation under discussion, there is some suggestion of guilt as Lucy seeks “clemency and pity” and, moreover, confesses to a Catholic priest in the following paragraphs. So, the use of the term “arrested” is rather intriguing. However, as suggested by the following portion of Lucy’s confession, any guilt Lucy feels is more likely the result of her melancholy and not of any wrongdoing on her part: “‘Was it a sin, a crime?’ he inquired, somewhat startled. I reassured him on this point, and, as well as I could, I showed him the mere outline of my experience”

her purpose, stopped, and then forcibly pulled from nature into culture. Indeed, it is precisely at this point of the novel that Lucy comes under the watchful eye not only of Père Silas, a priest, but also of Dr. John, a physician—both of whom are iconic representatives of patriarchal culture.

The tension caused by patriarchal culture is most clearly demonstrated during Lucy's visit to the art gallery, where she examines two paintings: *Cleopatra* and *La Vie d'une femme*. The *Cleopatra*, an enormous painting, is given a place of honor in the gallery: cordoned-off for protection and provided with ideal lighting, admirers can sit on a cushioned bench to appreciate the Egyptian queen. As Lucy describes it, the painting

represented a woman, considerably larger, I thought, than the life. I calculated that this lady, put into a scale of magnitude suitable for the reception of a commodity of bulk, would infallibly turn from fourteen to sixteen stone. She was, indeed, extremely well fed: very much butcher's meat—to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids—must she have consumed to attain that breadth and height, that wealth of muscle, that affluence of flesh. She lay half-reclined on a couch: why, it would be difficult to say; broad daylight blazed round her; she appeared in hearty health, strong enough to do the work of two plain cooks; she could not plead a weak spine; she ought to have been standing, or at least sitting bolt upright. She had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa. She ought likewise to have worn decent garments; a gown covering her properly, which was not the case: out of abundance of material—seven-and-twenty yards, I should say, of drapery—she managed to make inefficient raiment. Then, for the wretched untidiness surrounding her, there could be no excuse. Pots and pans—perhaps I ought to say vases and goblets—were rolled here and there on the foreground; a perfect rubbish of flowers was mixed

(Brontë 226). Therefore, I interpret the use of the word “arrested” in the sense of an object that is stopped in its course, and I focus on the forces that have this arresting power.

amongst them, and an absurd and disorderly mass of curtain upholstery smothered the couch and cumbered the floor. (Brontë 284-5)⁴¹

What was, perhaps, intended to be a scene of sensuality and luxury, becomes, in Lucy's eyes, a scene of corpulence, laziness, and slovenliness.⁴² But she is not permitted to continue her analysis of the *Cleopatra*; Monsieur Paul happens upon her and puts an end to it as, it appears, Miss Snowe ought not see such images: "Astounding insular audacity! . . . How dare you, a young person, sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a garçon, and look at *that* picture?" (Brontë 287). Monsieur Paul immediately removes Lucy from her position in front of *Cleopatra* and deposits her in a corner where she can better admire a more suitable painting: *La Vie d'une femme*. This series of four small paintings illustrate the phases of a woman's life: the young woman, the married woman, the young mother, and the widow:

They were painted in a rather remarkable style—flat, dead, pale and formal.⁴³ The first represented a "Jeune Fille," coming out of a church-door, a missal in her hand, her dress very prim, her eyes cast down, her mouth pursed up—the image of a most villainous little precocious she-hypocrite. The second, a "Mariée" with a long white veil, kneeling at a prie-dieu in her chamber, holding her hands plastered together, finger to finger, and showing the whites of her eyes in a most exasperating manner. The third, a "Jeune Mère," hanging disconsolate over a clayey and puffy baby with a face like an unwholesome full moon. The fourth, a "Veuve," being a black woman, holding the hand of a black little

⁴¹ It is interesting to note Lucy's references to Cleopatra as a commodity in this highly sexualized representation of a woman: "suitable for the reception of a commodity of bulk" and she was "strong enough to do the work of two plain cooks." In addition, Lucy's evaluation is suggestive of a prize cow: "fourteen to sixteen stone," "well fed," "very much butcher's meat," "wealth of muscle," and an "affluence of flesh."

⁴² Lucy's prissy, satirical reaction to this representation of excess in every detail is reminiscent of her descriptions of Ginevra; it has a tinge of the jealousy and the moral snobbery patriarchy ascribes to females.

⁴³ This description echoes Lucy's own self-description: "Left alone, I was passive; repulsed, I withdrew; forgotten—my lips would not utter, nor my eyes dart a reminder" (Brontë 593-4).

girl, and the twain studiously surveying an elegant French monument. . . . All these four “Anges” were grim and gray as burglars, and cold and vapid as ghosts. What women to live with! Insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless non-entities! As bad in their way as the indolent gipsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers. (Brontë 287-8)

Both paintings are false representations of womanhood and so they inspire disgust in Lucy.

Neither the languid odalisque nor the ghostly hypocrite corresponds to the realities of womanhood; they are both representations of patriarchal expectations of women—examples of the virgin/whore dichotomy— that are, moreover, displayed in a gallery, an institution of patriarchal culture. But both representations of womanhood are embodied by characters in the novel: Ginevra Fanshawe plays the role of a Cleopatra, while Justine Marie wears the garb of a non-entity. Ginevra is described in much the same language as the *Cleopatra*⁴⁴—both are round, well-fed, lazy beauties—and Justine Marie has lived her life as the images of the *La Vie d’une femme* dictate.⁴⁵ Lucy, however, fits neither mold nor expectation; she is literally and figuratively caught between the two representations of womanhood, denying herself one and resisting the other.

In “Sorties,” Hélène Cixous dissects the representations of womanhood in patriarchy’s master narratives that echo the *Cleopatra* and *La Vie d’une femme*. Cixous presents a classic fairy-tale scenario, the Sleeping Beauty scenario, to show patriarchal society’s almost exclusive

⁴⁴ Brontë ends the “Cleopatra” chapter with Dr. John’s estimation of the Egyptian queen: “‘Pooh!’ said he, ‘My mother is a better-looking woman. I heard some French fops . . . designating her as ‘le type du voluptueux;’ if so, I can only say, ‘le voluptueux’ is little to my liking. Compare that mulatto with Ginevra!’” (293). Dr. John’s preference for a white woman as flawed as Ginevra over Cleopatra, even though this “mulatto” is a queen, is worth noting. As Cleopatra is neither black nor white she, too, is intermediate. Perhaps Lucy has more in common with Cleopatra than she is willing to admit for Dr. John disdains Cleopatra’s intermediate beauty in the same way that he is unable to appreciate Lucy’s shadowy person.

⁴⁵ Lucy describes the portrait of Justine Marie, thus: “I had taken it for a Madonna; revealed by clearer light, it proved to be a woman’s portrait in a nun’s dress. The face, though not beautiful, was pleasing; pale, young, and shaded with the dejection of grief or ill health. I say again it was not beautiful; it was not even intellectual; its very amiability was the amiability of a weak frame, inactive passions, acquiescent habits” (Brontë 566).

focus on the exploits of men.⁴⁶ Cixous' analysis of this patriarchal master narrative can be used to examine *Villette*'s own representation of the intermediate spaces women occupy in patriarchal culture:

Beauties slept in their woods, waiting for princes to come and wake them up. In their beds, in their glass coffins, in their childhood forests like dead women. Beautiful, but passive; hence desirable: all mystery emanates from them. . . .

She sleeps, she is intact, eternal, absolutely powerless. He has no doubt that she has been waiting for him forever.

The secret of her beauty, kept for him: she has the perfection of something finished. Or not begun. However, she is breathing. Just enough life—and not too much. Then he will kiss her. So that when she opens her eyes she will see only *him*; him in place of everything, all-him.

—This dream is so satisfying! Whose is it? What desire gets something out of it?

He leans over her . . . Cut. The tale is finished. Curtain. Once awake (him or her) it would be an entirely different story. Then there would be two people, perhaps. You never know with women. And the voluptuous simplicity of the preliminaries would no longer take place. (Cixous 66)

In this scenario, the woman is not just passive, she is inert. The action of the plot and the woman's existence are entirely dependent on the man and his kiss. Her role is to motivate the prince, but not by any effort on her part; it is enough motivation that she exists. The woman of this master narrative is intermediate; she is the object anticipated, the goal, even the prize, but she is not an actor in the tale. Her purpose, such as it is, is to give the prince's story, the prince's

⁴⁶ I say "almost" because women usually play key roles in these narratives that are simultaneously, if contradictorily, insignificant.

valor and accomplishments, a happy ending. It is true that her role is crucial to the story, as without her beauty the prince has no reason for bravery. But the prince does not care who lies waiting for his kiss; it could be any She, so long as she is beautiful. Her contribution to the plot does not require her particular presence; her person is irrelevant, insignificant; all that signifies here is the prince's desire to save her and the satisfaction of that desire. Her insignificance to the story line is reinforced by her inertia. The woman sleeps—a state between wakefulness and death, of which we are reminded by her glass coffin. Because sleep is an intermediate state, she lacks agency, but not the possibility for agency: “she is breathing. Just enough life—and not too much” (Cixous 66). She has enough life to awake with his kiss and see *him*, but not so much life that she might be distracted from the “all-him.” The masculine narrative is narcissistic: she has been placed in this plot only to give him a reason and then to adore him—not to have a will, not to be active.⁴⁷

In *Villette*, Lucy's melancholy is a kind of sleeping and waiting. Like the beauty in the woods whose inconsequentiality is made clear by her sleeping, Lucy's melancholy is symptomatic of her relative insignificance. The description of Lucy as a “slumbering bark” is reminiscent of this idea: “I will permit the reader to picture me...as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass—the steersman stretched on the little deck, his face up to heaven, his eyes closed: buried, if you will, in a long prayer. A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest?” (Brontë 46). The sleeping beauty may be in a coffin, neither dead nor alive; she may be in her bed

⁴⁷ Cixous' language is similar to Lucy's when she expresses her wish to please M. Paul:

“Do I displease your eyes *much*?” I took courage to urge: the point had its vital import for me.

He stopped, and gave me a short, strong answer—an answer which silenced, subdued, yet profoundly satisfied. Ever after that, I knew what I was for *him*; and what I might be for the rest of the world, I ceased painfully to care. Was it weak to lay so much stress on an opinion about appearance? I fear it might be—I fear it was; but in that case I must avow no light share of weakness. I must own a great fear of displeasing—a strong wish moderately to please Monsieur Paul.” (Brontë 699)

Moreover, Lucy's “strong” yet “moderate” wish to please reinforces patriarchy's imposed contradiction.

(culture) or in her childhood forest (nature)—she belongs in no particular place because where she is and who she is do not matter to the story. The prince only needs to know that she exists. And, what is more, Lucy is frequently torn between culture and nature, seeking solace in one and then the other; and finally being disappointed by both. So, Lucy’s melancholic breakdown sends her in search of a “certain quiet hill,” but deposits her into the hands of priests and physicians; her failure to reach her destination can be understood as a mark of her insignificance to the master narrative of which she is, nonetheless, a part. Instead of a valiant prince, Lucy has Monsieur Paul, her “Christian Hero” (Brontë 577);⁴⁸ instead of sleeping she is melancholic, and instead of waiting in a glass coffin she waits in the Fauborg Clotilde for M. Paul’s return from America. Thus, Lucy is unwittingly playing a part that she does not believe herself capable of: the role of sleeping beauty.

Lucy’s story does not end with a happily-ever-after, but, as Cixous explains, neither does Sleeping Beauty’s. The story of the prince and the sleeping woman ends with the kiss: “Harmony, desire, exploit, search—all these movements are preconditions—of woman’s arrival. Preconditions, more precisely, of her *arising*. She is lying down, he stands up. She arises—end of the dream” (Cixous 66). We are told that they live happily ever after, but we are not shown the ensuing happiness. In fact, Cixous argues that with the woman’s arising, happiness is essentially impossible because “what follows is sociocultural: he makes her lots of babies, she spends her youth in labor; from bed to bed, until the age at which the thing isn’t ‘woman’ for him anymore” (66). In order for Lucy’s story to end in the fairy-tale fashion with the insinuation of continued happiness, it would have to end in the Fauborg Clotilde with Monsieur Paul’s

⁴⁸ “I felt a longing to trace in . . . [Monsieur Paul’s face] the imprint of that primitive devotedness, the signs of that half-princely, half-saintly chivalry which the priest’s narrative imputed to his nature. He had become my Christian Hero: under that character I wanted to view him” (Brontë 577). Both Lucy’s desire to view M. Paul as a Christian hero and her description of his heroic qualities as “imprints” suggests that she recognizes this figure as a construction.

declaration of love—but it continues. As Lucy’s story continues, the happiness is constricted, if not ended, by Monsieur Paul’s death⁴⁹ and finally reinforces the melancholy lesson of loss Lucy has incorporated.

Cixous’ description of love, from what she believes is the male perspective, speaks to Lucy’s romantic situation:

And once again upon a time, it is the same story repeating woman’s destiny in love across the centuries with the cruel hoax of its plot. And each story, each myth says to her: “There is no place for your desire in our affairs of State.” Love is threshold business. For us men, who are made to succeed, to climb the social ladder, temptation that encourages us, drives us, and feeds our ambitions is good. But carrying it out is dangerous. Desire must not disappear. You women represent the eternal threat, the anticulture⁵⁰ for us. We don’t stay in your houses; we are not going to remain in your beds. We wander. Entice us, get us worked up—that is what we want from you. Don’t make us stretch out, soft and feminine, without a care for time or money. Your kind of love is death for us. A threshold affair: it’s all in the suspense, in what will soon be,

⁴⁹ If we assume that Monsieur Paul has died at sea, it follows that Lucy would be among the “thousand weepers, praying in agony on waiting shores, [who] listened for that voice; but it was not uttered—not uttered till, when the hush came, *some could not feel it—till, when the sun returned, his light was night to some!*” (Brontë 715, my emphasis). If Lucy is, in fact among these mourners, then her happiness has certainly ended. However, if she is not among these unfortunate souls or if her former life has inured her to loss so that she is beyond the dark numbness, then her happiness may continue. In any case, it is certain that losing Monsieur Paul must constrict her happiness, if not permanently, then at least for a time.

Incidentally, it may be interesting to compare the ending of *Jane Eyre* to the ending of *Villette*. Jane asserts that her union with Edward Rochester resulted in “perfect concord” (Brontë *Jane Eyre* 530), while *Villette* ends with the implication of death and the somewhat indulgent enjoinder to “leave sunny imaginations hope. . . . Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life” (Brontë *Villette* 715). It seems Charlotte Brontë either could not accept a middle ground or did not think the middle ground worth writing about.

⁵⁰ According to the ideas I have put forth in Chapter One, nature, which is associated with women, is the ultimate ‘anticulture.’

always differed. On the other side is the fall: enslavement for the one and for the other, domestication, confinement in family and social function. (67)

Desire and its repression is a central issue in *Villette*; as I have discussed in Chapter Two, Lucy does not believe that she is permitted desires and works strenuously to quell even their suggestion because Victorian patriarchal culture has taught her that her duty must subsume her desiring self. Indeed, as Cixous reminds us, there is no place for women's desire; only man's desire is required for the creation of culture. But it is not so simple for men: they must always desire, never attain, for if they achieve their desires, if they are satisfied, if they are complacent and cease to desire further, then they will be like women who (are believed to) have no desire—that is why women are the “eternal threat, the anticulture.”

All the wandering man requires of woman is that she continue to entice him (Cixous 67), which is paralleled in Monsieur Paul's departure for the Americas. He leaves Lucy in the little house in the Fauborg Clotilde, secure, provided for—all she must do is wait for his return; then they will be happy. Monsieur Paul has put his beauty in her glass coffin and can now set out on his adventure, having secured the continuation of his desire without fulfillment. What is more, he arranges the house and school for Lucy so that he can write to her freely: “there is another objection to your present residence [at Madame Beck's school]. I should wish to write to you sometimes: it would not be well to have any uncertainty about the safe transmission of letters” (Brontë 700). So, this bit of independence for Lucy comes from his desire, not hers (though it happens, conveniently, to be her dream). Monsieur Paul's gift is, to the last detail, what Lucy wanted for herself.⁵¹ But rather than achieving this, it is *given* to her and it is not given for her

⁵¹ “I . . . pondered . . . how I should make some advance in life, take another step towards an independent position. . . . ‘Living costs little,’ said I to myself, ‘in this economical town of Villette. . . .’ House-rent, in a prudently chosen situation, need not be high. When I shall have saved one thousand francs, I will take a tenement with one large room, and two or three smaller ones, furnish the first with a few benches and desks, a black tableau, an estrade for

benefit (not directly, though it will also benefit her); it is mostly a gift Monsieur Paul gives himself:

“I determined to give myself the richest treat that I *have* known or *shall* know. I like this. I have reckoned on this hour day and night lately. I would not come near you, because I would not forestall it. Reserve is neither my virtue nor my vice. If I had put myself into your power, and you had begun with your questions of look and lip—Where have you been, Monsieur Paul? What have you been doing? What is your mystery?—my solitary first and last secret would presently have unraveled itself in your lap. Now,” he pursued, “you shall live here and have a school; you shall employ yourself while I am away; you shall think of me sometimes; you shall mind your health and happiness for my sake.”

(Brontë 703-4)

According to Cixous, love is a threshold that once crossed leads to a kind of slavery for both man and woman, but man would argue that his slavery is worse because once he has ceased to desire, he has been feminized. Monsieur Paul expresses this idea when explaining the distance he kept from Lucy; he thought that through her questioning, his endeavor would have “unraveled itself” in her lap.⁵² The implication is that Lucy’s sexuality (as suggested by the use of the word “lap”) would have killed his desire to carry out his plans. As Cixous puts it, the kind of love that unravels desire is death to man.

Continuing with the theme of thresholds, *Villette*’s ending must be considered.

Considering Cixous’ claim that either the absence or fulfillment of desire is the most disastrous

myself; upon it a chair and table, with a sponge and some white chalks; begin with taking day pupils, and so make my way upwards” (Brontë 521-2).

⁵² This allusion to Lucy’s lap is reminiscent of Hamlet teasing Ophelia: “Lady, shall I lie in your lap?” (*Hamlet* 3.2.110). Responding to Ophelia’s surprise, Hamlet asks whether she took the remark as a sexual advance to which Ophelia replies “I think nothing, my lord” (*Hamlet* 3.2.115). Hamlet then retorts that “nothing” is a “fair thought to lie between maids’ legs” (*Hamlet* 3.2.116), mischievously suggesting that not thinking is attractive in a woman.

fate that a man may face, the resolution of a romantic desire may have dire consequences for man. Monsieur Paul is safe from such destruction with Justine Marie, as her death ensures that she can only be desired, never attained; but Lucy poses a greater threat to Monsieur Paul for, despite a few obstacles, she is attainable. By the end of the novel, the reader is encouraged to believe that Monsieur Paul's and Lucy's relationship will be fulfilled, but instead he is drowned. Regarding this ending, which is unsatisfactory to many readers, Charlotte Brontë wrote in an 1853 letter to George Smith:

With regard to that momentous point—Monsieur Paul's fate—. . . Drowning and Matrimony are the fearful alternatives. The Merciful . . . will of course choose the former and milder doom—drown him to put him out of pain. The cruel-hearted will on the contrary pitilessly impale him on the second horn of the dilemma—marrying him without ruth or compunction to that—person—that—that—individual—“Lucy Snowe.” (Brontë 751)

Brontë clearly identifies the only possibilities for Monsieur Paul⁵³: death with his desire intact or the death of his desires through “enslavement . . . , domestication, [and] confinement in family and social function” (Cixous 67). Charlotte Brontë's belief that death is a kinder fate for Monsieur Paul than marriage to Lucy can be seen as an extension of an unconscious disdain for Victorian society and/or the sort of woman it produces.

⁵³ Monsieur Paul's first love is also a threshold affair. His poverty denied him Justine Marie's hand, but after she dies of heartache in the convent she entered to save herself for him (glass coffin), he cares for her family. M. Paul's generosity is highly appreciated by those who benefit from it, as Père Silas explains: “[H]e has given himself to God and to his angel-bride. . . . [Monsieur Paul] was and *is* the lover, true, constant and eternal, of that saint in Heaven—Justine Marie” (Brontë 569-70). Monsieur Paul's relationship to Justine Marie (made impossible by financial difficulty, her entrance into a convent, and her death) is characterized entirely by anticipation. M. Paul first anticipates the day he will have enough money to wed Justine Marie, then he anticipates the day in which he might die so that he can see her in heaven. Similarly, there are obstacles to his union with Lucy that may increase his anticipation to have her: religion and Madame Walravens', Père Silas', and Madame Beck's financial interest in his chastity.

The threshold nature of love centers on man's fate, not woman's. Woman is not the anticipation, the desire that comes before, because "there is no place for [women's] . . . desire in our affairs of State" (Cixous 67). Nor is woman in the dénouement; though she may be perceived as either a fellow slave or the slave driver, the slavery of fulfillment focuses on man—we cannot pity her loss of desire for she never should have had it. In the threshold construction (Desire/Destruction), woman is the line, the threshold; while she is the object of desire and the tool of destruction, man is the subject that desires and the subject that is destroyed. Woman, as object and not a subject in love, must take up residence at the thresholds of life, in the intermediate shadows humanity:

By dint of reading this story-that-ends-well, she learns the paths that take her to the "loss" that is her fate. Turn around and he's gone! A kiss, and he goes. His desire, fragile and kept alive by lack, is maintained by absence: man pursues. As if he couldn't have what he has. Where is she, where is woman in all the spaces he surveys, in all the scenes he stages within the literary enclosure?

We know the answers and there are plenty: she is in the shadow. In the shadow he throws on her; the shadow she is. (Cixous 67)

Part of Lucy's resignation is the knowledge that her fate is one of loss; beginning with the obliteration of her family, Miss Marchmont's death, losing Dr. John to Paulina, and finally Monsieur Paul's⁵⁴ death, Lucy continually expects loss: "I suppose, Lucy Snowe, the orb of your

⁵⁴ The similarities between the names Paul and Paulina are discussed by Georgia S. Dunbar in "Proper Names in *Villette*": "M. Paul and Paulina are constantly described as little, and their physical smallness is made a feature of their attractiveness. They are the only characters so described in the novel, and therefore it seems likely that the choice of their similar names was no accident. The root of both is the Latin *paulus*, meaning small" (79-80).

life is not to be so rounded; for you the crescent-phase must suffice” (Brontë 522).⁵⁵ Lucy’s relationship with Monsieur Paul fits Cixous’ model as he leaves for the Americas once he has, in a sense, awoken Lucy in the Fauborg Clotilde. Furthermore, his desire for her is kept alive by correspondence—by her absence. But following her awakening, Lucy does not sustain herself; rather, she is sustained by Monsieur Paul’s letters: “Do not think that this genial flame sustained itself, or lived wholly on a bequeathed hope or a parting promise. A generous provider supplied bounteous fuel” (Brontë 713). Lucy is still not fully a subject; she continues to exist in terms of Monsieur Paul, in a shadow-world whose events are insignificant enough that three years can be flitted over in the course of four pages. Echoing Dr. John’s memorable description of Lucy as “a being inoffensive as a shadow” (Brontë 454), Cixous tells us where Lucy can be found: “In the shadow he throws on her; the shadow she is” (Cixous 67). Even though Monsieur Paul does not see Lucy as shadowy but as a wild animal and as an ambitious⁵⁶ woman, he does, however, believe that she *belongs* in quiet, dark, unambitious corners. For instance, Lucy’s reluctance to take part in the next public examination in French inspires the following tirade from Monsieur Paul: “‘The obstinacy of my whole sex,’ it seems, was concentrated in me; I had an ‘orgueil de

⁵⁵ The “crescent-phase” Lucy refers to can be considered another threshold or intermediate region as it is literally the moon’s intermediate phase between full and new. See Ardener’s diagram in Chapter One for an illustration of this region.

⁵⁶ In the following passage, Monsieur Paul sees Lucy as an “obtrusive ray”: “[T]here starts up a little man . . . roundly charging you with being too airy and cheery—too volatile and versatile—too flowery and coloury. This harsh little man—this pitiless censor—gathers up all your colour, your small fringe of a wreath, your scrap of ribbon, your silly bit of lace, and calls you to account for the lot. . . . You are well habituated to be passed by as a shadow in Life’s sunshine: it is a new thing to see one testily lifting his hand to screen his eyes, because you tease him with an obtrusive ray” (Brontë 482-3).

Here, Monsieur Paul says to Lucy, “You remind me . . . of a young she wild creature, new caught, untamed, viewing with a mixture of fire and fear the first entrance of the breaker-in” (Brontë 332, sic). Interestingly, this is the first time Monsieur Paul offers a description of Lucy. Monsieur Paul is the breaker-in as in this moment he has just interrupted Lucy’s peace in the allée défendu. It may be significant that he interrupts Lucy in her sacred, forbidden space; the transgression can be taken as a suggestion of sexual penetration or rape.

Finally, regarding Monsieur Paul’s thoughts on the intelligence of women, Lucy says, “A ‘woman of intellect,’ it appeared, was a sort of ‘lusus naturæ,’ a luckless accident, a thing for which there was neither place nor use in creation, wanted neither as wife nor worker. Beauty anticipated her in the first office. He believed in his soul that lovely, placid, and passive feminine mediocrity was the only pillow on which manly thought and sense could find rest for its aching temples; and as to work, male mind alone could work to any good practical result” (Brontë 513).

diable.' I feared to fail, forsooth! What did it matter whether I failed or not? Who was I that I should not fail like my betters? It would do me good to fail. He wanted to see me worsted (I knew he did)" (Brontë 517). Lucy's unwillingness to put herself in a potentially humiliating situation hints at pride and ambition, qualities Monsieur Paul seems to believe are antithetical to femininity: "He believed in his soul that lovely, placid, and passive feminine mediocrity was the only pillow on which manly thought and sense could find rest for its aching temples" (Brontë 513). In other words, Monsieur Paul believes Lucy belongs in the shadows and finds the thought of any other kind of feminine existence disagreeable. So it is that Lucy's melancholy shadow-world in which she has existed and *should* exist, according to Monsieur Paul, corresponds to the thresholds Cixous identifies as women's place in patriarchal narratives.

The psychological stresses of these threshold realms, these intermediate spaces, brought about by patriarchy's paradoxical demands on women reveal themselves in Lucy's melancholy. Lucy's drugged midnight quest for the moon exemplifies the fragmentation of mind brought about by her intermediacy. By dosing Lucy with a sedative, Madame Beck hopes to suppress her will; but the drug only suppresses Lucy's reason, her culturally prescribed self-restraint, while her imagination is loosed:

Imagination was roused from her rest, and she came forth impetuous and venturous....

"Look forth and view the night!" was her cry; and . . . with her own royal gesture, she showed me a moon supreme, in an element deep and splendid.

To my gasping senses she made the glimmering gloom, the narrow limits, the oppressive heat of the dormitory, intolerable. She lured me to leave this den and follow her forth into dew, coolness, and glory.

She brought upon me a strange vision of Vilette at midnight. Especially she showed the park, the summer-park, with its long alleys all silent, lone and safe; among these lay a huge stone basin—that basin I knew, and beside which I had often stood—deep, set in the tree-shadows, brimming with cool water, clear, with a green, leafy, rushy bed. (Brontë 651)

Lucy is encouraged to leave culture behind and to follow Imagination into an idyllic, natural scene. But when Lucy follows her imagination into the night, she finds that the delineation between culture and nature has been confused:

Vilette is one blaze, one broad illumination; . . . moonlight and heaven are banished: the town by her own flambeaux, beholds her own splendour—gay dresses, grand equipages, fine horses and gallant riders throng the bright streets. . . . In the midst of this glare the park must be shadowy and calm—*there*, at least, are neither torches, lamps, nor crowd? . . . In a land of enchantment, a garden most gorgeous, a plain sprinkled with coloured meteors, a forest with sparks of purple and ruby and golden fire gemming the foliage; a region, not of trees and shadow, but of strangest architectural wealth—of altar and of temple, of pyramid, obelisk, and sphinx; incredible to say, the wonders and the symbols of Egypt teemed throughout the park of Vilette. (Brontë 654-5)⁵⁷

Where Lucy expects nature, she finds culture as though it cannot be escaped. And not simply a few examples of culture—the natural environment has been altogether altered and draped with the bright and garish symbols of patriarchal culture (particularly the obelisk). Moreover, Lucy

⁵⁷ Another instance of the confusing of culture and nature occurs in the park when Lucy hears a band playing: “The song, the sweet music, rose afar, but rushing swiftly on fast-strengthening pinions—there swept through these shades so full a storm of harmonies that, had no tree been near against which to lean, I think I must have dropped. Voices were there, it seemed to me, unnumbered; instruments varied and countless—bugle, horn, and trumpet I knew. The effect was as a sea breaking into song with all its waves.

The swaying tide swept this way, and then it fell back, and I followed its retreat.” (Brontë 657)

never finds the moon's reflection—instead she discovers a reflection of her own fear of rejection and pain. In the park, Lucy happens upon Madame Beck, Madame Walravens, and Père Silas, but they are not alone; there too is Monsieur Paul, whom Lucy has been told is already aboard a ship bound for the Americas. Lucy's discovery is not simply that she has been misled by the three "self-seekers" (Brontë 668), but that what she calls Truth is really Falsehood. As Lucy interprets the scene through her culturally conditioned self-repression and depressive denial of hope (both of which result from women's participation in male culture), the line between Truth and Falsehood is confused, which leads to her melancholy.

The park scene illustrates another aspect of the culture/nature binary: reason/imagination, which Cixous calls "Logos/Pathos" (63). Reason is associated with culture because it is "human," and the language and imagery Lucy uses to describe it is severe. Imagination, being inhuman and, therefore, natural is described in much more inviting language. In the following passage, Lucy's contrasting of Reason and Imagination illustrates the binary at play:

I groaned under her bitter sternness. . . . This hag, this Reason would *not* let me look up, or smile, or hope: she could not rest unless I were altogether crushed, cowed, broken-in,⁵⁸ and broken-down. According to her, I was born only to work for a piece of bread, to await the pains of death, and steadily through all life to despond. Reason might be right; yet no wonder we are glad at times to defy her, to rush from under her rod and give a truant hour to Imagination—*her* soft, bright foe, *our* sweet Help, our divine Hope. . . . Reason is vindictive as a devil: for me, she was always envenomed as a step-mother. If I have obeyed her it has chiefly been with the obedience of fear, not of love. Long ago I should have died of her ill-usage . . . ; but for that kinder Power who holds my secret and

⁵⁸ On page 69, Monsieur Paul is the "breaker-in"; in this quotation, however, it is Reason who abuses Lucy. Even though Reason is gendered female ("hag"), she represents masculine elements of culture; as such we can draw a parallel between Lucy's abusers.

sworn allegiance. . . . sternly has [Reason] . . . vowed her stores held nothing more for me—harshly denied my right to ask better things. . . . Then, looking up, have I seen in the sky. . . . [a] spirit, softer and better than Human Reason, has descended with quiet flight to the waste—bringing all round her a sphere of air borrowed of eternal summer; bringing perfume of flowers which cannot fade—fragrance of trees whose fruit is life. . . . tenderly has she assuaged the insufferable tears which weep away life itself—kindly given rest to deadly weariness—generously lent hope and impulse to paralyzed despair. (Brontë 327-9)

Lucy explicitly qualifies the source of her desperation by naming her tormentor: *human reason*. The negativity of Lucy’s description of Reason contrasts with the overwhelming positivity of her description of Imagination. In her description of Reason, Lucy uses words that can be associated with negative patriarchal views of women, negative male characteristics, and negative aspects of culture. Reason is personified as a “hag” and an “envenomed . . . step-mother”—both of which are female archetypes that reinforce negative patriarchal characteristics assigned to old, childless, single women, which Lucy must fear she will become. Take, for example, the following list of characteristics assigned to Reason, but which can also be associated with female weakness: “bitter,” “crushed,” “cowed,” “broken-in,” “broken-down,” “waste,” “despond,” “fear,” “insufferable tears,” “deadly weariness,” and “paralyzed despair.” Violent and unsympathetic characteristics—“vindictive,” “stern,” “hard,” “defy,” “rod,” “ill-usage,” and “death,”—suggest a link in Lucy’s mind between Reason and masculinity, while reference to “human,” “work,” “bread,” “stores,” and “better things” point to an association with culture as they are its products and accessories. Conversely, the language used to describe Imagination is associated with positive female characteristics: “soft,” “bright,” “sweet Help,” “divine Hope,” “kinder Power,”

“tenderly,” “assuaged,” and “generously.” The natural world is also associated with Imagination in the words “sky,” “quiet flight,” “sphere of air,” “eternal summer,” “perfume of flowers,” “fragrance of trees,” and “fruit is life.” Evidently, then, Lucy associates Imagination with femaleness and nature; but this association depends upon patriarchal definitions of positive femininity in the same way that the description of Reason depends on negative patriarchal definitions of femininity, masculinity, and culture. So, although Lucy genders Reason and Imagination as opposites, the differentiation is made through patriarchal definitions of masculinity and femininity and, therefore, both her tormentors are ultimately products of masculine culture.

Regardless of their gender, both Reason and Imagination are intimately involved with Lucy’s mental fragmentation. While Lucy’s relationship to Reason is combative and adversarial, she is drawn to Imagination, with whom she has a “secret and sworn allegiance.”⁵⁹ But the relationship is not so simple; Lucy may dislike Reason, but she obeys it; and although she has sworn allegiance to Imagination, she frequently rejects it as a path to pain. Consider, for instance, Reason’s injunction against taking pleasure in Graham’s letters:

Reason, [came] . . . stealthily up to me . . . laying on my shoulder a withered hand, and frostily touching my ear with the chill blue lips of eld.

“If,” muttered she, “if he *should* write, what then? Do you meditate pleasure in replying? Ah, fool! I warn you! Brief be your answer. Hope no delight of heart—no indulgence of intellect: grant no expansion to feeling—give holiday to no single faculty: dally with no friendly exchange: foster no genial intercommunion.”

(Brontë 326-7)

⁵⁹ The secretive nature of Lucy allegiance is suggestive of the occult—as though an allegiance to Imagination is taboo. This would further align Imagination with nature and both of these with women, as they are all considered dark, mysterious, and magical (de Beauvoir 68).

Reason here insists upon brutal repression of all feeling and hope, which inspires the tirade in which Lucy calls Reason a “hag.” But, despite her initial revulsion, Lucy yields and, more than simply following Reason’s orders, she agrees:

To speak truth, I compromised matters. . . . I wrote to these letters two answers—one for my own relief, the other for Graham’s perusal.

To begin with: Feeling and I turned Reason out of doors, drew against her bar and bolt, then we sat down, spread our paper . . . and, with deep enjoyment, poured out our sincere heart. When we had done—when two sheets were covered with the language of a strongly-adherent affection, a rooted and active gratitude . . . then, just at that moment, the doors of my heart would shake, bolt and bar would yield, Reason would leap in, vigorous and revengeful, snatch the full sheets, read, sneer, erase, tear up, re-write, fold, seal, direct, and send a terse, curt missive of a page. She did right. (Brontë 363-4)

Lucy gives Imagination a “truant hour,” but then willingly submits to Reason’s “punishing rod.”

In her description of Reason and Imagination, Lucy claims that she “should have died of . . .

[Reason’s] ill-usage . . . ; but for that kinder Power who holds my secret and sworn allegiance”

(Brontë 328); yet, throughout the novel, it seems that Reason sustains Lucy, though it be in an artificial manner, hidden away from the rest of humanity, while Imagination brings her pain.

Imagination gives Lucy hope when faced with Reason’s austerity, but even though hope assuages her loneliness, when hope is crushed it is more painful to Lucy than her original

desolation. Receiving Dr. John’s letters and attentions lifts Lucy’s spirits beyond anything to

which she is accustomed; their end brings her pain. Once Lucy realizes that Graham’s attentions

have turned elsewhere and that she will no longer be the recipient of his letters, her hope dies and must be buried; the correspondence is interred in a hermetically sealed jar under Methuselah, the

old pear tree, in the *allée défendu*.⁶⁰ Lucy explains her sad ritual thus: “The Hope I am bemoaning suffered and made me suffer much: it did not die till it was full time: following an agony so lingering, death ought to be welcome” (Brontë 421). Lucy’s imagination, which allows her to hope for Graham’s true love, brings her pain that she cannot *reasonably* express and, so, must bury.

This burial, however, is a sign of resignation to reason because Lucy never allows herself to fully embrace a hope for Dr. John’s affections, or any one else’s for that matter. For instance, Lucy feels certain that the pleasure of her friendship with the Brettons will come to an agonizing end and, therefore, attempts to preempt the pain:

“I long to get the good-bye over, and to be settled in the Rue Fossette again. I must go this morning: I must go directly; my trunk is packed and corded.” . . . I could have cried, so irritated and eager was I to be gone. I longed to leave them as the criminal on the scaffold longs for the axe to descend: that is, I wished the pang over. (Brontë 324)

Because Lucy has so often suffered loss, she fears the prospect of it; consequently, Lucy uses reason at least to make the pain quick. But there is one person for whom Lucy allows herself to hope: Monsieur Paul.

⁶⁰ This tree is associated with the legend of the nun that haunts Lucy:
at the foot of . . . Methuselah . . . you saw, in scraping away the mossy earth between the half-bared roots, a glimpse of slab, smooth, hard, and black. The legend went, unconfirmed and unaccredited, but still propagated, that this was the portal of a vault, imprisoning deep beneath that ground, . . . the bones of a girl whom a monkish conclave of the drear Middle Ages had here buried alive for some sin against her vow. (Brontë 147-8)

With this legend in mind, Lucy explains the burial of her hope and grief: “Now Methuselah, though so very old, was of sound timber still; only there was a hole, or rather a deep hollow, near his root. . . . and there I meditated hiding my treasure. But I was not only going to hide a treasure; I meant also to bury a grief. That grief over which I had lately been weeping, as I wrapped it in its winding-sheet, must be interred” (Brontë 424). Dr. John’s letters represent a hope for love that Lucy’s repression does not permit her. Therefore, she must bury the letters as punishment for the transgression of hoping. The nun, a symbol of repression who violated her vows and was punished, parallels Lucy’s feelings.

The hope Lucy has for Monsieur Paul, on the other hand, is quite different from her hope for Dr. John: it is a possibility to which she feels entitled:

I think I never felt jealousy till now. This was not like enduring the endearments of Dr. John and Paulina, against which while I sealed my eyes and my ears, while I withdrew thence my thoughts, my sense of harmony still acknowledges in it a charm. This was an outrage. The love born of beauty was not mine; I had nothing in common with it: I could not dare to meddle with it, but another love, venturing diffidently into life after long acquaintance, furnace-tried by pain, stamped by constancy, consolidated by affection's pure and durable alloy, submitted by intellect to intellect's own tests, and finally wrought up, by his own process, to his own unflawed completeness, this Love that laughed at Passion, his fast frenzies and his hot and hurried extinction, in *this* Love I had a vested interest; and whatever tended either to its culture or its destruction, I could not view impassibly. (Brontë 677-8)

Having allowed herself to believe, to hope for Monsieur Paul's affection brings Lucy more than the disappointment she augured in Dr. John's case—this hope brings jealousy and embarrassment as well. That is why her hope for Monsieur Paul is more violently put to death; her hope for him does not die in its sleep to be buried beneath an ancient pear tree; no, this hope must be crucified, it must be a bloody and violent death because she believes in it so profoundly:

I gathered it [Truth] to me with a sort of rage of haste, and folded it round me, as the soldier struck on the field folds his colours about his breast. I invoked Conviction to nail upon me the certainty, abhorred while embraced, to fix with the strongest spikes her

strongest strokes could drive; and when the iron had entered well my soul, I stood up, as I thought renovated. (Brontë 676-7) ⁶¹

Although Lucy crucifies her hope, it is resurrected the following day when she begins to question the accuracy of the park scene. The resurrection of her hope allows her to demand her just deserts from Reason in the guise of Madame Beck, who attempts to ban Lucy from seeing Monsieur Paul: “Pierced deeper than I could endure, made now to feel what defied suppression, I cried—‘My heart will break!’” (Brontë 695). These words echo Lucy’s earlier comment to Polly, in which she declares that “Life has worse than . . . [sadness]. Deeper than melancholy, lies heart-break” (Brontë 617). It appears, then, that Lucy’s hope is not dead at all; it has survived the crucifixion and, for all its pain, it has brought Lucy nearer to Monsieur Paul. If Lucy resigns herself to live in Reason’s cold shadow, she, of course, will not suffer the crucifixion of her hopes, but at the price of hopelessness and loneliness.

Still Lucy’s clearest explanation of her relationship with Reason and Imagination occurs while she considers her future:

I suppose, Lucy Snowe, the orb of your life is not to be so rounded; for you the crescent-phase must suffice. Very good. I see a huge mass of my fellow-creatures in no better circumstances. . . . I find no reason why I should be of the few favoured. I believe in some blending of hope and sunshine sweetening the worst lots. I believe that this life is not all; neither the beginning nor the end. *I believe while I tremble; I trust while I weep.*

(Brontë 523, my emphasis)

Internally, perhaps, Lucy may believe in and trust Imagination, but outwardly—visibly—she trembles and weeps; again, caught between two opposing forces Lucy is torn and at certain times

⁶¹ The masochism in this quotation is almost sexual in its intensity and imagery; not only in the abhorred embrace of truth, but also in the penetration of the spikes, although, interestingly, Truth is gendered female.

seems to be unable to differentiate between them. While wandering the park in a drug-induced search for the moon, Lucy sees Monsieur Paul with his young ward; in her jealousy, she immediately assumes that Monsieur Paul is promised to her and that his attentions toward herself were mere flattery and falsehood. In the storm of her emotion, Lucy resolves to *accept* this eventuality; she pledges a new and fiery allegiance to Truth saying,

“Truth, you are a good mistress to your faithful servants! While a Lie pressed me, how I suffered! Even when the Falsehood was still sweet, still flattering to the fancy, and warm to the feelings, it wasted me with hourly torment. The persuasion that affection was won could not be divorced from the dread that, by another turn of the wheel, it might be lost. Truth stripped away Falsehood, and Flattery, and Expectancy, and here I stand—free!”
(Brontë 676-7)

Even so, Lucy is wrong; what she thinks is falsehood is truth and vice versa; Monsieur Paul is not promised to his ward and he does have feelings for Lucy. Forgetting that it was Imagination who lured her into the park, Lucy believes that she is led to this place to bear witness to a great truth. At this point in the novel, the line between reason and imagination has been so confused that Lucy takes a real scene, translates it into an imaginative scene, and dubs the product Truth. So much so that when she returns to the dormitory and sees the nun, she takes an unusual course of action:

Tempered by late incidents, my nerves disdained hysteria. Warm from illuminations, and music, and thronging thousands, thoroughly lashed up by a new scourge, I defied spectra. In a moment, without exclamation, I had rushed on the haunted couch; nothing leaped out, or sprung, or stirred; all the movement was mine, so was all the life, the reality, the substance, the force; as my instinct felt. I tore her up—incubus! I held her on high—

goblin! I shook her loose—the mystery! And down she fell—down all round me—down
in shreds and fragments—and I trode upon her. (Brontë 681)

All along, what Lucy thought was a spirit was a young man in nun's clothes; yet in this scene it is neither spirit, nor lover, but only an inanimate object—it is merely a long, black stole and white veil on a couch, but Lucy attacks the nun with all the ferocity of one who has long been haunted. Lucy states that she is acting out of a renewed faith in truth and a rejection of fancy, but her violence against the nun's garments do not have the tint of reason. On the contrary, the frenzied tearing, holding on high, shaking, shredding, and treading betoken the influence of imagination.

A life of reason is an artificial life in which Lucy never actively participates; she is an onlooker, an “inoffensive shadow.” Imagination causes suffering, turbulence, uncertainty, pain, and disappointment; but it also actively involves Lucy, allows her to feel connections and to love. As such, Lucy is faced with choosing between the absence of pain through obedience to reason, and the experience of emotion, both positive and negative, through surrender to imagination. For Lucy, there is no clear choice; when she chooses one, she regrets not having chosen the other, so she is always at odds with her decisions.

Lucy's loss of self in the gray space between both forces is revealed in her melancholy because, as Ardener's diagram shows in Chapter One, the female “wild zone” is outside the symbolic system; therefore, Lucy is unable to symbolize her confusion and emotion through cultural products. “Societies,” Clément asserts, “do not succeed in offering everyone the same way of fitting into the symbolic order; those who are . . . between symbolic systems, in the interstices, offside, are the ones who are afflicted with a dangerous symbolic mobility. . . . because those are the people afflicted with what we call madness” (7). Indeed, according to the

biological determinism accepted during the Victorian period by medical and lay persons alike, woman is her body and is incapable of being more. Therefore, Lucy expresses the contradiction of womanhood in her body through melancholy: with fever, nervousness, hallucination, and despair because woman cannot symbolize her pain, she can only wear it on her body. But this is an inefficient means of communication: female melancholy is outside the symbolic order; therefore, “culture cannot take it into account and make it the object of a transmission” (Clément 9). The inefficiency of female melancholy to communicate the “wild zone” reinforces intermediacy: neither able to communicate within the cultural symbolic order nor through the natural body, Lucy is intermediate.

Lucy suffers from melancholy, a symptom of intermediacy, which is the psychological space between patriarchally constructed binaries. Like Sleeping Beauty, slumbering in her coffin, Lucy, in her melancholy, represents all women who are suspended between culture’s demands and nature’s urges, between reason and desire. Through Lucy Snowe, then, *Villette* depicts the grave consequences of patriarchal culture for women.

Conclusion

Through Lucy's observations of Vashti's performance, an image of the female artist—woman engaged in cultural production—emerges to mirror Lucy's own artistic endeavor: the symbolic creation of her self through autobiography. When Dr. John unexpectedly asks Lucy to accompany him to the theater, she is initially hesitant. But upon mentioning the name of a great actress, Lucy quickly accepts and keenly anticipates the performance: "I longed to see a being of whose powers I had heard reports which made me conceive peculiar anticipation. . . . She was a study of such nature as had not encountered my eyes yet: a great and new planet she was: but in what state? I waited her rising" (Brontë 368). Once the performance begins, Lucy immediately penetrates the woman on stage and sees instead "a royal Vashti" (Brontë 369) whom she understands perfectly as a fellow woman in torment. But as the death scene approaches and the only sound in the theater is

her throes, her gaspings, breathing yet of mutiny, panting still defiance: when, as it seemed, an inordinate will . . . resisted to the latest the rape of every faculty, *would* see, *would* hear, *would* breathe, *would* live, up to, within, well nigh *beyond* the moment . . . [of] death. . . . Just then a stir, pregnant with omen, rustled behind the scenes. . . . "Fire!" rang through the gallery. (Brontë 373-4)

Vashti's story on the stage does not end with her own death, but with a surrounding chaos, much as Lucy's story does not conclude with her own fate but with the chaos of shipwreck and with the death and prosperity of others.

Vashti has been seen as a representation of the female artist, struggling for a space in the world of patriarchal cultural production,⁶² who parallels Charlotte Brontë's own experience.⁶³

⁶² "Vashti's resistance to 'the rape of every faculty' represents the plight of the female artist who tries to subvert the lessons of female submission. . . . By transcending the distinctions between private and public, between person and

Indeed, when Dr. John is asked for his thoughts on Vashti, Lucy tells us that he “judged her as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgment” (Brontë 373). Gilbert and Gubar argue that by

Implying that the female artist is as confined by male conventions as her characters are imprisoned in the institutions of a patriarchal society, Brontë considers the inadequacy of male culture in her search for a female language; her rejection of male-devised arts contributes to her extraordinary depiction of the potential dangers of the imagination for women. (403)

The representation of the female artist then is useful for closing my discussion of female intermediacy in *Villette* since the narrative is Lucy’s autobiographical attempt as narrator to symbolize the experience of Lucy the character despite, or beyond, the limitations of patriarchal culture. Therefore, contrasting Lucy’s opinion of Vashti to Dr. John’s can reveal the role of intermediacy in women’s cultural creativity.

Although Lucy’s first impression of Vashti is that she is “only a woman,” she eventually recognizes something in the actress that deeply impresses Lucy: “I found upon . . . [Vashti] something neither of woman nor of man: in each of her eyes sat a devil” (Brontë 369). Lucy seems to penetrate Vashti’s exterior, which we are told is, like Lucy, considered rather “plain” (Brontë 368), to reveal the driving force behind her powerful performance: these devils “shook her with their passions. . . . They tuned her voice to the note of torment. . . . [and] writhed her regal face to a demoniac mask” (Brontë 369). Altogether, the description of Vashti’s conflict

artist, between artist and art, Vashti calls into question, therefore, the closed forms of male culture” (Gilbert and Gubar 423-24).

⁶³ On December 29, 1836, Charlotte Brontë sent some of her poems to Robert Southey, the Poet Laureate, who replied some three months later saying:

Madam,

. . . Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, and when you are you will be less eager for celebrity. (qtd. in Gordon 65)

See also William M. Thackeray’s response to *Villette* on page 2.

parallels Lucy's own inner conflict which emotionally shakes, torments, and makes her writhe until she assumes the straight-faced mask of restraint. In addition, Lucy identifies the source of Vashti's conflict and, unsurprisingly, it appears to be a patriarchal dichotomy—woman as holy/wicked: “It was a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation. It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral” (Brontë 369). The source of Lucy's in-betweenness, like Vashti's, is a series of patriarchal dichotomies: culture/nature, sanity/insanity, reason/imagination. Vashti's demons parallel Lucy's own demons, and the violence with which they assault her parallels Lucy's melancholy. Thus, Vashti mirrors Lucy's conflict that is due to patriarchal dichotomies.

Patriarchy's master narratives rely on dichotomies for their logical structure, but because dichotomies create in-betweenness for women, “our ways of understanding are ‘complicitous with our ways of oppressing’” (Tyler 103). As Chapter One shows, the contradiction and paradox inherent to the patriarchal view of the nature/culture dichotomy creates the intermediate position in which women are doubly confined because they have been denied access to language and symbolization. But even when women gain access to symbolization, as Vashti does, patriarchy devalues it in the same way that Dr. John's opinion of Vashti as a woman and not an artist devalues her performance. Thus, as Chapter Two demonstrates, women have been forced to symbolize this devaluation through their bodies. Just as the outward sign of Vashti's conflict is her writhing, shaking, violence on the stage, Lucy expresses her intermediacy through the psychological and physical symptoms of melancholy—with fever, nervousness, hallucination, insomnia, and despair; because she cannot symbolically express her pain, she can only wear it on her body. This melancholy shadow-world that Lucy inhabits, which is outside the patriarchal symbolic system, corresponds to the thresholds Cixous identifies in Chapter Three as women's place in patriarchal narratives. Like Lucy's expression of conflict, Vashti's appears to be outside,

or perhaps beyond, the patriarchal symbolic system, which may account for Dr. John's inability (or unwillingness) to recognize her artistry. Therefore, although binary systems of logic may be practical ways of understanding the world, the oppressive nature of patriarchal dichotomies that create female intermediacy do considerable harm to the female psyche, as seen in the character of Lucy Snowe.

Intermediacy, however, may not necessarily be counterproductive to symbolic expression. Even though women have been devalued and marginalized within the patriarchal symbolic order, inner conflict may provide a space for the rejection of the shadow-worlds that women are assigned in the master narratives. As Eleanor Salotto writes,

woman can position herself through narrative as not accepting the placement which she has been assigned. She acts the part, but her narrative meaning remains elsewhere. And the parts start to fragment, revealing an inanimate object. Lucy collapses a unified representation of herself. . . . the uncanny for woman's plots then revolves around woman crossing the threshold of the construction of feminine identity which has no fixed meaning. (72)

Throughout *Villette*, Lucy reminds us of the emptiness of patriarchal representations of women. When confronted with the power of Vashti's performance, Lucy asks, "Where was the artist of the Cleopatra? Let him come and sit down and study this different vision" (Brontë 370). Indeed, this seems to be the question *Villette* asks of its readers: both Ginevra and Polly could easily be the protagonist of their own novels as they both comply, each in her own way, with patriarchal expectations of femininity, but Lucy is non-compliant. In fact, we see her juxtaposed to these women and to patriarchal representations of womanhood as in the art gallery between the

Cleopatra (Ginevra) and *La vie d'une femme* (Polly). But Lucy moves between these opposites, she resists their implications and asks us to look to her for a different vision of womanhood.

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