

松 山 大 学 論 集  
第 30 卷 第 5 - 1 号 抜 刷  
2 0 1 8 年 12 月 発 行

# The Despair Related to a Woman's Independence

## – A Study of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* – Part 1

Hideo ARAI

# The Despair Related to a Woman's Independence

– A Study of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* – Part 1

Hideo Arai

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine how Charlotte Brontë (1816-55), in her last completed novel, *Villette* (1853), describes the possibility of a woman's independence in Victorian society.

*Villette* is the story of Lucy Snowe, a young woman orphaned early in life. She opens her narrative by remembering a visit to her godmother, Mrs. Bretton, and the attachment she had to her son, John Graham Bretton, along with another child who came to stay, Paulina Mary Home. Lucy then loses touch with the Brettons and after eight difficult years, finds a post as a paid companion to an elderly invalid, Miss Marchmont. When Miss Marchmont dies, Lucy crosses the English Channel in search of a new life. On board *The Vivid*, she meets a spoilt young lady, Ginevra Fanshawe, on her way to a pensionnat in a town called Villette, in the kingdom of Labassecour. Lacking any other plan, Lucy makes her way to the same pensionnat. She arrives unannounced, is scrutinised by the formidable headmistress, Madame Beck, and her cousin, a despotic little man and a teacher of literature, named Paul Emanuel, and is taken in to work as a nursery governess to the headmistress's children before becoming an English teacher.

Lucy works hard but is always lonely. She becomes attached to the school's English physician, Dr. John. She is disappointed, however, to realise that he is

infatuated with the pretty, flirtatious but shallow Ginevra Fanshawe.

On being left alone except for the company of the ‘cretin’ at the pensionnat during the long summer vacation, Lucy suffers a nervous breakdown. Lucy wanders out into the streets of Villette in a kind of delirium. Though she is a Protestant, she confesses to a Catholic priest, Père Silas, after which she faints. She is rescued by Dr. John and Mrs. Bretton, who are now living in Villette, and they resume their friendship. She continues to work at the school while depending on Dr. John’s letters as her spiritual guide. He, however, is in love with the superficial Ginevra. On one occasion, she encounters, and is frightened by, the ghost of a nun when she is deeply distressed after mislaying one of his letters. (In fact, the ‘ghost’ is none other than Alfred de Hamal in disguise.) Dr. John reassures her that the nun is the product of a fevered brain. Several weeks later, they go to the theatre to see a famous actress, Vashti. Dr. John runs into Paulina again at the theatre by chance when a fire breaks out mid-performance. His hopeless infatuation is eventually resolved by her renewing ties with her father. By the end of the novel, Dr. John has fallen in love with Paulina and married her, and Ginevra has eloped with Alfred.

Meanwhile, Lucy is increasingly attracted to Paul. She commits herself to becoming his ‘friend’ and makes him a beautiful watch-guard. Through several small encounters over many months, they cultivate a mutual affection. Finding the couple’s bond unpleasant for their relationship, Madame Beck sends Lucy on an errand to the witchlike Madame Walravens, who knows the tragic story of Paul’s love for a young girl called Justine Marie, who died in a nunnery. This manoeuvre is intended by Madame Beck, Père Silas and Madame Walravens to separate the two of them for both religious and family reasons. Hoping to split them up, they dispatch Paul to the West Indies to manage an estate owned by Madame Walravens.

Lucy falls into the depths of despair, thinking Paul has left her without

explanation. Paul, however, resists Madame Beck's machinations, and he delays his departure in order to see Lucy before he goes abroad. He has arranged a home and a position at a small school for her in Faubourg Clotilde. His intention is to marry her on his return from the West Indies. The ending of the novel, however, is ambiguous. It is left to the reader to imagine one of two alternatives: either Paul returns to marry Lucy, or he is drowned at sea on his way home from the West Indies, leaving her to face life alone.

*Villette* received high praise from representative feminist critics in the 1970s, such as Kate Millett, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.<sup>1)</sup> Furthermore, Robyn Warhol and Patricia E. Johnson nowadays approvingly interpret the ambiguous ending as a strategy to get 'feminist powers'.<sup>2)</sup> Literary scholars have made numerous attempts to interpret *Villette* as a feminist novel that embodies women's independence. It is true that the figures stand out conspicuously in this novel, as when Lucy earnestly wishes to break away from patriarchal society and seek social and economic independence as a woman. However, the figures also stand out in this novel in the image of an ordinary warm family that she wishes to raise. Thus, she reflects mixed feelings. She does not have an unequivocal commitment to her opinions and wavers in her commitment to one perspective or the other. However, in my alternative interpretation of the novel, it appears unlikely that Brontë wrote this novel with promoting 'feminism' as her top priority.

Lucy Snowe is originally seen as a person of few words in *Villette*, which is written in first person unlike the more voluble protagonists in *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre*. For example, at the beginning of *Villette*, even though Lucy feels lonely and deserted living with a relative away from her parents, she never tells readers about these circumstances until the ending of the novel. She does not clearly explain why she goes through her lonely life even though she attempts to express this using a metaphor related to the weather and a shipwreck. Furthermore,

she gives no definitive explanation regarding when and where she is writing this autobiography and how she is living now. As described above, the narrative motif ‘self-repression’ is repeated throughout this novel.

In this paper, I show how the conflict between self-repression and self-expression is repeated in this novel as part of the narrative as well as reflected in the biographical background of Brontë herself and in the norms of Victorian society although *Villette* is generally valued as a feminist novel.

## 2. The Harsh Circumstances Surrounding Charlotte Brontë

In the early nineteenth century, England joined the ranks of the world’s leading industrial powers through the Industrial Revolution, which had started in the late eighteenth century. It brought about drastic development in commerce and industry, while producing new problems such as the concentration of the population into urban areas, unemployment issues and the labour movement. It shifted the labour environment from inside to outside the home, thereby reordering the sociosexual roles of the middle class, with men working outside the home and women inside in the late 1850s. In this way, it restricted the province of a woman to the ‘fireside’, required her to be ‘the Angel in the House’<sup>3)</sup> and defined marriage as the only way a woman could be recognised in society. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) defines this type of woman in the following way :

I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House . . . She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily . . . in short, she was so

constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. (285)

In the early nineteenth century, the womanly ideal was for a woman to be a 'perfect wife', pursuing 'femininity' and devoting herself to housekeeping and childcare. Women, who were only allowed to exist inside the narrow confines of the house, found their freedom controlled to an extreme degree. Young maiden ladies, for example, were restricted in their expression, appearance and activities and were taught not to have their own opinions. The development of sensual feelings was disciplined through instruction in sexual morality.

In the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century, activities in which women took up their pens and engaged in literary activities in public were socially prohibited as behaviours related to sexual deviation. Elaine Showalter remarks that 'nineteenth-century women writers did not believe that literary talents took precedence over the normal obligations of womanhood' (*Literature* 61). In fact, Victorian women were imprisoned in 'the sphere of home' and within 'the traditional idealized vision of femininity'. When Brontë sent a letter to Robert Southey (1774-1843) with the intention of having her poems published, he replied, '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 will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and recreation' (Gaskell 123). He emphasised and admonished a woman's ideal situation as 'the Angel in the House'. A clerical family, as was the Brontë family, which was subject to evangelical belief, showed a marked tendency to make a connection between a woman's imagination and the fallacy. Brontë thus could not help but experience self-consciousness regarding her creative activities, because she came into the world as the daughter of a cleric in the Anglican Church, Patrick Brontë (1777-1861).<sup>4)</sup> Her situation is apparent in a letter which she wrote

to Southey: 'Following my father's advice . . . I have endeavoured not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always succeed, for sometimes when I'm teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself' (Gaskell 125).

Nevertheless, what led women writers such as Charlotte Brontë to undertake creative activities under the harsh circumstances for women at that time? Apart from marriage, the only acceptable path that Victorian middle-class women could take was to be a 'governess' even though it was a burdensome and distressful job.<sup>5)</sup> Charlotte and her sister Anne actually experienced this. She confesses her irritation at this work to her friend Ellen Nussey:

Such a vehement impatience of restraint and steady work; such a strong wish for wings – wings such as wealth can furnish; such an urgent thirst to see, to know, to learn; something internal seemed to expand bodily for a minute. I was tantalised by the consciousness of faculties unexercised, – then all collapsed, and I despaired. (Gaskell 164)

Many women authors engaged in writing as a way of breaking out of such a distressing situation. As Showalter points out, 'There is no doubt that from the beginning writing offered the best chances of remuneration' (*Literature* 48). Women authors used various strategies to pursue their literary careers in a patriarchal society. One of the best ways of addressing the prejudice against them was to use a unisex pen name. Charlotte Brontë also used a pen name, Currer Bell, and she explained the reason for doing so in 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell' (1850):

We had very early cherished the dream of one day becoming authors. This dream, never relinquished even when distance divided and absorbing tasks occupied us, now suddenly acquired strength and consistency: it took the character of a resolve. We agreed to arrange a small selection of our poems, and, if possible, get them printed. Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because – without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called ‘feminine’ – we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise. (xliv)

The use of a pen name was a strategy that played an important role in helping women authors avoid the ‘double standard’ of criticism on the part of critics and in preventing them from making a distinction between them and men. Brontë felt extremely sensitive about this. She sent him a letter concerning the clamorous protest against the review of *Shirley* that G. H. Lewes contributed to ‘Edinburgh’:

Because after I had said earnestly that I wished critics would judge me as an author, not as a woman, you so roughly – I even thought so cruelly – handled the question of sex . . . and perhaps you will not now be able to understand why I was so grieved at what you will probably deem such a trifle; but grieved I was, and indignant too. (Gaskell 334)

Judging from these remarks, it is obvious that she had doubts about the

appropriateness of an ideal woman prescribed by social norms in the Victorian era.

Not only this historical background but also the environment surrounding Brontë played an important role in the repression that she suffered. She remarked that she felt impotent in enduring the environment in Haworth, the province in northern England where she grew up :

I can hardly tell you how time gets on at Haworth. There is no event whatever to mark its progress. One day resembles another ; and all have heavy, lifeless physiognomies. Sunday, baking-day, and Saturday, are the only ones that have any distinctive mark. Meantime, life wears away. I shall soon be thirty ; and I have done nothing yet. Sometimes I get melancholy at the prospect before and behind me. Yet it is wrong and foolish to repine. Undoubtedly, my duty directs me to stay at home for the present. There was a time when Haworth was a very pleasant place to me ; it is not so now. I feel as if we were all buried here. I long to travel ; to work ; to live a life of action. (Gaskell 220)

Haworth was enveloped in a wintry wilderness, which suggested unbearable loneliness and monotony and led her to have the heart-wrenching impression she conveys in the words above. The Brontë children, including Charlotte, lived in the parsonage, where their father served as a vicar. They spent most of the day in the first-floor nursery and looked down from their window on graves where a large number of deceased were sleeping. At the time, 41.6 per cent of the Haworth population died before the age of six, and the average lifespan was twenty-five years because the area had harsh weather and lacked adequate water supply and sewage systems. The children continually heard funereal bells and prayers ; thus, they grew up feeling threatened with their own death. Charlotte particularly felt

frightened by the spectre of death.<sup>6)</sup> Such an environment made her feel repressed and conjured images of 'death' in her family. Her mother, Maria Brontë, died of physical languor in 1821, just after she gave birth to Anne. Though Charlotte's two elder sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, entered a boarding school, they experienced poor health owing to the unhealthy environment in this school and so died tragic deaths, one after the other. Patrick Brontë, having lost his two daughters as well as his wife, became crankier than ever. He retreated into his shell and remained in his study. In the long run, he refused to sit in the family circle and chat happily. Charlotte served as a mother to her siblings, giving first priority to their happiness rather than hers, and devoted herself to the family. The only form of amusement for her was to wander in the wilderness holding the hands of her siblings because the educational philosophy of their father led him to prohibit them from playing with the local children, playing with toys or reading children's books. As seen here, Charlotte was forced to live at the expense of her own identity in an isolated world. In addition, 'death' stuck like glue to the Brontës. When she was writing her third book, *Shirley*, Branwell, Emily and Anne died from illness in quick succession.<sup>7)</sup> Under the shadow of these tragedies, *Villette* was written under totally different circumstances from *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*. As Charlotte had nobody to turn to with her concerns, she took up her pen while enduring some mental instability. Even though Haworth had already brought her oppressive loneliness, Charlotte was increasingly apt to feel spiritual repression because she came to live alone with her father.

### 3. The Canvas of a Narrative

As mentioned above, Brontë's last completed novel, *Villette*, was written in first person, as was *Jane Eyre* (1847).<sup>8)</sup> This marked a major shift from her third novel, *Shirley* (1849), which was written in third person under the influence of

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63) and Jane Austen (1775-1817). David Cecil defines the main characteristics of Brontë's novels as follows :

Every page of Charlotte Brontë's novels burns and breathes with vitality. Out of her improbabilities and her absurdities, she constructed an original vision of life ; from the scattered, distorted fragments of experience which managed to penetrate her huge self-absorption, she created a world . . . . Indeed, concentrated as she is on her immediate reactions, she has no sense of past or future, of the huge continuous process of time that conditions human existence, modifying impressions, indifferently ordering events in significance and perspective. (125)

Brontë reported her experiences to W. S. Williams : 'It would be difficult to explain to you how little actual experience I have had of life, how few persons I have known, and how very few have known me' (Gaskell 318). Because she lived in a very confined world, she depicted in her writing a world that reminds us of what she saw around her on a daily basis, and so she can be recognised as a subjective writer. Therefore, insisting on expressing her inner feelings entailed the risk of throwing off the balanced structure of the book to write it in third person. She understood this and therefore used first-person narration in her last novel.

*Villette* was based on her experience of love with Constantine Héger, whom she met when she went to Brussels to study. The use of first-person narration in the novel allowed her to express this experience subjectively. Even though she wrote the novel *The Professor* (1846) on the same theme as soon as she broke up with Héger, the book was too realistic for her to publish, even after she had risen to fame as the author of *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*, because she had not yet recovered from a broken heart. Thus, after seven years had passed, she wrote *Villette*, which

was received literarily as her best work. Cecil remarks that 'she is our first subjective novelist, the ancestor of Proust and Mr. James Joyce and all the rest of the historians of the private consciousness' (111). Brontë reached maturity as a leading pioneer in the stream-of-consciousness technique. Her autobiography, which projected the feelings she had in Brussels, is not limited to these works. According to Cecil, all her works are written in the form of self-expression :

Fundamentally, her principal characters are all the same person ; and that is Charlotte Brontë. Her range is confined, not only to a direct expression of an individual's emotions and impressions, but to a direct expression of Charlotte Brontë's emotions and impressions. In this, her final limitation, we come indeed to the distinguishing fact of her character as a novelist. The world she creates is the world of her own inner life ; she is her own subject. (112)

What helped her overcome her heartbreak in Brussels during the seven-year interval between *The Professor* and *Villette* ? She had focused only on the experience of studying abroad in *The Professor*, while in *Villette*, she listened to her heart at the time she was writing that book. She wrote in this novel of the emotional pain which she felt from the death of her siblings and which led to her living alone. She revealed her thinking to her best friend, Ellen Nussey :

I might indeed repeat over and over again that my life is a pale blank and often a very weary burden – and that the Future sometimes appals me – but what end could be answered by such repetition except to weary you and enervate myself ? The evil that now and then wring a groan from my heart – lie in position – not that I am a *single* woman and likely to be *lonely*. But it cannot be helped and therefore *imperatively must be borne* – and borne too with as few

words about it as may be. (Wise and Symington IV. 6)

Brontë was aware of her dreadful and lonely fate without the man who had been the object of her affection. The lonely heroine of *Villette*, Lucy Snowe, has no relatives except a godmother, Mrs. Bretton, and her son, John Graham Bretton. *Villette* is thus a study in solitude. In contrast to her protagonist, Brontë herself spent happy days enjoying delightful social occasions and the fruits of her literary success as the author of *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*. She also became acquainted with Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-65) through these joyous experiences. Brontë stayed with her in Manchester and was most deeply impressed with her family. These experiences, which contrasted markedly with her real life, influenced Brontë's last completed novel. For example, in *Villette*, Gaskell's youngest daughter, Julia, appears as the prototype of Paulina.<sup>9)</sup> For several years after she published *Shirley*, the lack of balance in her life, which alternated between the closed parsonage and the resplendent city, caused her confusion in deciding where to live. Trying to deal with her inner imbalance through her literary work, she set her mind on writing *Villette*. It is, among all of Brontë's novels, a work that analysed her inner self and demanded a most thorough investigation of her identity.

The book became the focus of attacks by critics for the author's decision to change the hero from John to Paul in later scenes. Even Brontë's friends were quite critical of her. Harriet Martineau expressed discomfort with her: 'so incessant is the writer's tendency to describe the need of being loved, that the heroine, who tells her own story, leaves the reader under the uncomfortable impression of her having either entertained a double love, or allowed one to supersede another without notification of the transition' (Allott 173). Thackeray also remarked, 'I don't make my Good women ready to fall in love with two men at once' (Allott 198). The change of hero, however, does not provide good grounds

for denying the artistic value of this novel because Brontë was searching for her identity in it. She projected her personal colour onto it. For the reasons discussed above, *Villette* was better suited for first-person narrative.

As Brontë told George Smith in a letter to him,

You will see that *Villette* touches on no matter of public interest. I cannot write books handling the topics of the day ; it is of no use trying. Nor can I write a book for its moral. Nor can I take up a philanthropic scheme, though I honour philanthropy ; and voluntarily and sincerely veil my face before such a mighty subject as that handled in Mrs. Beecher Stowe's work, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. (Gaskell 412)

Clearly, she realised that it suited her nature to write a subjective and personal novel rather than a social problem novel such as *Shirley*.

Even though Brontë used a unisex pen name, it was public knowledge that *Jane Eyre's* author was a woman because she showed her face in literary circles. How did she write on the subject of 'the establishment of a sense of self and the self-exposure' in *Villette* given this unprecedented situation of her being a published female author ?

Unless I am mistaken, the emotion of the book will be found to be kept throughout in tolerable subjection. As to the name of the heroine, I can hardly express what subtlety of thought made me decide upon giving her a cold name ; but, at first, I called her 'Lucy Snowe' (spelt with an 'e') ; which Snowe I afterwards changed to 'Frost.' Subsequently, I rather regretted the change, and wished it 'Snowe' again. If not too late, I should like the alteration to be made now throughout the MS. A cold name she must have ; partly, perhaps,

on the ‘lucus a non lucendo’ principle – partly on that of the ‘fitness of things,’ for she has about her an external coldness. You say that she may be thought morbid and weak, unless the history of her life be more fully given. I consider that she is both morbid and weak at times. (Gaskell 415)

Brontë’s characterisation of Lucy Snowe is in marked contrast with that of Jane Eyre, a woman who is a passionate figure. The main feature of the protagonist Jane’s narration is her directness and honesty, while Lucy’s narration is indirect and vague. She first talks about others and then about herself in third person. Brontë drew Lucy as a negative observer and an outsider. Unlike the eloquent Jane, Lucy speaks for Victorian women who used their own words not to talk about themselves. At the same time, Brontë can also be regarded as a repressed woman, judging from her make-up as quite a heroine.

#### 4. Repression and Revelation of Feelings

*Villette* opens with a scene in which Lucy Snowe is living a happy life in her early childhood through her contact with the clean and ancient town of Bretton and the Brettons :

The house and its inmates specially suited me. The large peaceful rooms, the well-arranged furniture, the clear wide windows, the balcony outside, looking down on a fine antique street, where Sundays and holidays seemed always to abide – so quiet was its atmosphere, so clean its pavement – these things pleased me well. (61)

Mrs. Bretton, Lucy’s godmother, is presented as providing spiritual comfort : ‘Time always flowed smoothly for me at my godmother’s side ; . . . blandly, like the gliding of a full river through a plain’ (62). However, ‘home’, a place which is

comfortable for her, changes completely into a place that causes repression, as seen in the appearance of Polly, because Lucy loses her privilege: 'One child in a household of grown people' (61). In fact, the eyes of the family turn away from her, and they are instead devoted to Polly. The calm atmosphere of Bretton completely changes in the following description, which brings a 'storm' to mind: 'the rain lashed the panes, and the wind sounded angry and restless' (63). Furthermore, Lucy does not tell readers her name or background. She says only, 'I liked peace so well, and sought stimulus so little, that when the latter came I almost felt it a disturbance, and wished rather it had still held aloof' (62), insisting that she is a cool-headed observer and an outsider rather than a heroine. She emphasises her solitary existence.

In contrast, Polly is portrayed as a stereotypical Victorian woman: 'One would have thought the child had no mind or life of her own, but must necessarily live, move, and have her being in another' (83). She always requires someone to take care of her. She does not have a mind or a life of her own and feeds her way into others. Even though Polly reminds us of an ideal Victorian woman, Brontë does not always describe her as a woman who is filled with happiness. Even though Graham is taken care of, Polly is no more than a convenient woman who gives services to him, so she is expelled from his world when she is inconvenient and unnecessary for him.

'What are you thinking about, Polly?' 'Nothing particular; only I wish that door was clear glass—that I might see through it. The boys seem very cheerful, and I want to go to them: I want to be with Graham, and watch his friends.' 'What hinders you from going?' . . . She knocked—too faintly at first to be heard, but on a second essay the door unclosed; Graham's head appeared; he looked in high spirits but impatient. 'What do you want, you

little monkey?’ ‘To come to you.’ ‘Do you indeed? As if I would be troubled with you! Away to mama and Mistress Snowe, and tell them to put you to bed.’ The auburn head and bright flushed face, vanished; the door shut peremptorily. (83)

Here, her action, which is portrayed as that of a stereotypical Victorian woman, represents women's fears when they attempt to enter patriarchal society. In other words, it shows that they are always the 'other' in society. Lucy also experiences some hesitation, fear, pain and self-repression on entering the prevailing male-dominated society in later years. Judging from the above, it is clear that Polly is a part of Lucy's personality. In fact, Lucy tells Polly, 'Don't fret, and don't expect too much of him, or else he will feel you to be troublesome, and then it is all over' (91), and talks about the importance of self-repression. As Terry Eagleton points out, 'The capriciousness in her which attracts Graham Bretton suggests aspects of Lucy's own concealed emotional life; and in that sense Lucy's tight-lipped treatment of the girl signifies the erection of a blandly rational barrier against her own coldly unacknowledged impulses' (63).

Polly experiences unbearable suffering and sorrow when she has to leave her father and Graham. Yet when she goes away from her father, Polly represses her feelings and endures extreme hardship. The narrator Lucy Snowe describes the attitudes of Mrs. Bretton, Graham and herself as they watch Polly leave: 'Mrs. Bretton, being a mother, shed a tear or two. Graham, who was writing, lifted up his eyes and gazed at her. I, Lucy Snowe, was calm' (79). Lucy responds differently from the others and emphasises her own objectivity. This corresponds to the attitude that is also seen when she says about herself, 'I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination' (69). She denies 'feeling' and 'imagination' and goes on taking a stance as the onlooker. Her

principle is not to depend on anybody or to desire anything. Even though her attitude leads her not to talk about herself, she refuses to live through the existence of others, with her existence defined unilaterally by the eyes of others. After all, that means that she lives through others. In other words, Lucy also lives as a repressed woman in a patriarchal society. When this novel is read this way from the beginning, it is clear that the mechanism of the narrative of *Villette* depends on powerful self-repression, which creates contradiction, concealment and distortion. The uncontrollable urge on Lucy's part to give expression to her feelings always conflicts with the irresistible urge to repress them.

Lucy says nothing about the progress she made during the eight years after she left the Brettons, but she refers to it indirectly using the metaphor of a voyage. She encourages readers to see this image in their minds: 'Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft' (94), but in fact she shows through the metaphor that an incident that occurred during these eight years has caused her to suffer incredible hardship.

In that case, I must somehow have fallen over-board, or that there must have been wreck at last. I too well remember a time—a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltiness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished. (94)

She reveals these hard times metaphorically and neglects to mention what the actual incident was to the readers. Even though she alludes to great misfortune, she covers up what kind of misfortune it was. *Villette* takes the form of Lucy's retracing her past, so we can regard the eight years that passed, from the time she was fourteen to the time when she was twenty-two years of age, as hard times that she does not want to remember, and thus she represses her memory.

Lucy's relationship with Mrs. Bretton becomes estranged, so she makes the decision to live alone: '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, as they are upon thousands besides' (95). This is why she decides to work as a companion to the old crippled woman named Miss Marchmont, who is afflicted with rheumatism. Lucy is now confined in a small room, which becomes her entire world and is the only friend of the woman. She identifies Miss Marchmont with her mother and is satisfied with the untroubled and guaranteed living conditions: 'Tame and still by habit, disciplined by destiny, I demanded no walks in the fresh air' (95). This change of heart is noteworthy. She is attracted to 'femininity', which symbolises marriage and motherhood, and seeks happiness as a common woman rather than one who gains economic independence. When Lucy sees her childhood friend marry, become a mother and assume a woman's place in society, she appreciates her friend with admiring eyes: 'What a beautiful and kind-looking woman was the good-natured and comely, but unintellectual girl become! Wifehood and maternity had changed her thus' (104). In this scene, Lucy not only expresses her longing for the feminine life but also represses her own determination and makes a compromise with the society surrounding her.

Lucy decides to set off for London. She tells readers that this action is not motivated by a specific intention but rather is due to the influence of the Aurora

Borealis.

This solemn stranger [the Aurora Borealis] influenced me otherwise than through my fears. Some new power it seemed to bring. I drew in energy with the keen, low breeze that blew on its path. A bold thought was sent to my mind ; my mind was made strong to receive it. 'Leave this wilderness', it was said to me, 'and go out hence.' 'Where ?' was the query. I had not very far to look ; gazing from this country parish in that flat, rich middle of England – I mentally saw within reach what I had never yet beheld with my bodily eyes ; I saw London. (104)

As a reader/literary critic, I cannot bring myself to accept her above remarks, however, because in fact the Aurora Borealis can generally be seen only in Canada, the Scandinavian Peninsula and Russia, not in England. Thus, in this scene, it is clear that she has a specific intention and that she falsifies the facts. Women were not allowed to act on their own initiative in Victorian society, so here Lucy represses her assertive actions on the grounds of viewing the Aurora Borealis and expresses herself as if she were a passive character. Judging from this act of self-repression, it is clear that she cannot break out of the framework of the Victorian social structure and that she remains firmly in a state of repression.

This device with which the heroine makes a crucial decision that leads to unconscious power can be seen in *Jane Eyre* as well as *Villette*. When Jane Eyre resists and neglects Mrs. Reed, she says purposely that her frenzy is unintended : "“What would Uncle Reed say to you, if he were alive ?” was my scarcely voluntary demand. I say scarcely voluntary, for it seemed as if my tongue pronounced words without my will consenting to their utterance : something spoke out of me over which I had no control' (36). In other scenes, the same device is used when she

thinks about her future :

A kind fairy, in my absence, had surely dropped the required suggestion on my pillow ; for as I lay down, it came quietly and naturally to my mind : – Those who want situations advertise ; you must advertise in the – shire Herald.’ ‘How ? I know nothing about advertising.’ Replies rose smooth and prompt now : – ‘You must enclose the advertisement and the money to pay for it under a cover directed to the editor of the Herald ; you must put it, the first opportunity you have, into the post at Lowton ; answers must be addressed to J. E., at the post-office there ; you can go and inquire in about a week after you send your letter, if any are come, and act accordingly. (101)

There are two characteristics of Jane that can be seen in her interior dialogue above. On the one hand, she presents herself as an inexperienced woman and as representing the prescribed womanly ideal in the Victorian era. On the other hand, she shows herself as an independent woman who takes positive action. Here, the figure of Jane is emphasised as matching the prescribed feminine ideal, and the latter figure of the independent woman is only expressed in her subconscious, which is repressed. Her return to Rochester is similarly engineered.

I heard a voice somewhere cry – ‘Jane ! Jane ! Jane !’ – nothing more. ‘O God ! What is it ?’ I gasped. I might have said, ‘Where is it ?’ for it did not seem in the room – nor in the house – nor in the garden ; it did not come out of the air – nor from under the earth – nor from overhead. I had heard it – where, or whence, for ever impossible to know ! And it was the voice of a human being – a known, loved, well-remembered voice – that of Edward Fairfax Rochester ; and it spoke in pain and woe, wildly, eerily, urgently. ‘I

am coming !' I cried. 'Wait for me ! Oh, I will come !' I flew to the door and looked into the passage : it was dark. I ran out into the garden. (466)

A similar 'inner voice' that guides the heroine is used broadly in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. It may have been employed by Brontë to avoid the criticism that Jane and Lucy appear to disregard Victorian norms and to promote women's participation in society. It also gives voice to the repressed figure of Brontë, which she cannot help presenting in this way, as well as to the repressed narrator. Certainly, the early experience of Jane is similar to that of Lucy's in many respects. Neither of them basks in her family, and they both experience a mother's affection towards her children, which is offered without limit. They, however, are radically different : Jane reveals her feelings furiously from the beginning of the novel and learns subsequently about the repression of her natural emotions through experience that comes afterwards, but Lucy, in contrast, defines herself as a quiet personality and covers up all self-revelation.

The narrator relates that Lucy Snowe starts on a journey of self-discovery after she has lost her companion, Miss Marchmont. Having lost everything, she begins to express her inner ambition, which she has kept in check within her mind : 'Who but a coward would pass his whole life in hamlets, and for ever abandon his faculties to the eating rust of obscurity ?' (108). In this scene, she betrays her intentions, about which the narrator has not spoken up to this point. What motivates her to sail for Labassecour is her ambition and the desperate courage to think that she has 'nothing to lose' (110). In this way, she takes a step forward from being an onlooker of life towards being an aggressive participant. This change in her is symbolized in the name of the ship, *The Vivid*, on which she embarks to cross to the Continent. The name has a meaning that contrasts sharply with the cold as symbolised by Lucy's last name, 'Snowe'. It reflects her desire to

grow more alive and her determination to take a step towards aggressively taking part in life.

This aggressive attitude of Lucy's, however, is repressed again. The actions she takes to enter society on her own are suppressed thoroughly because a woman is always the 'other' and is disregarded and is allowed no independent role in society. Typical symbols of this attitude are *The Vivid* and the lamp in Labassecour's harbour. Lucy feels as if the boat is associated with some 'solitary soul' and the Styx: 'Down the sable flood we glided; I thought of the Styx, and of Charon rowing some solitary soul to the Land of Shades. Amidst the strange scene, with a chilly wind blowing in my face, and midnight-clouds dropping rain above my head' (111). In addition, she feels as if the lamp exposes her to 'unnumbered threatening eyes' (70): 'the lights of the foreign sea-port town, glimmering round the foreign harbour, met me like unnumbered threatening eyes' (118). As much as she is an outsider in English society, Mrs. Bretton and Miss Marchmont assure her of her identity as a gentlewoman. In contrast, in Villette, the capital of Labassecour, nobody assures her of this because she turns out to be an absolute stranger, losing both her belongings and her language. Even though she is a privileged outsider in her own country, she now completely changes into an absolute outsider.

As soon as Lucy tries to express herself, she cannot say anything about her inner feelings and confines them within her mind again. Even though she has social ambitions to become an independent woman, she tries to compromise with real society as well as to contain her ambition: 'provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter' (140). Judging from the above, it is clear that her lifestyle is extremely negative.

In her journey of self-discovery, the conflict between resigning herself to a

limited fate, which she cannot help but accept passively, and the ambition to have an active life in which she can make the best use of her ability, accounts for the major part of this novel.

Madame Beck, the headmistress of a school, for whom Lucy begins to work, plays an important role in Lucy's development. This older woman is the capable and calm proprietress of the school, and Lucy, by degrees, comes to realise her own latent social ambition in a confrontation with her. Nina Auerbach remarks that Madame Beck serves as the catalyst for Lucy to carve an independent way: 'It is she who snatches Lucy out of the "nursery obscurity" of a woman's sphere and makes her look in the face of power' (110). Actually, Lucy also expresses great appreciation for Madame Beck: 'Madame was a very great and a very capable woman' (137), while at the same time she utters criticism about her: 'Wise, firm, faithless; secret, crafty, passionless; watchful and inscrutable; acute and insensate' (137). Thus, Lucy takes an ambiguous attitude towards Madame Beck, which shows her own inner contradictions.

Not only Auerbach but also A. S. Byatt and Eagleton suggest that Madame Beck plays an important role in Lucy's development. When Madame Beck asks Lucy to be an English teacher in place of Mr. Wilson, Lucy changes her negative attitude altogether and displays her strong ambition.

I suddenly felt all the dishonour of my diffidence—all the pusillanimity of my slackness to aspire. 'Will you', she said, 'go backward or forward?' indicating with her hand, first, the small door of communication with the dwelling-house, and then the great double portals of the classes or school-rooms. 'En avant', I said. (141)

In this scene, Lucy explores her own determination to move forward, which she has

concealed calmly ever since childhood, and takes steps towards womanly independence. It is true that Lucy seems to move in this direction by expressing her intentions superficially, when she states her decision as follows: 'I felt I was getting on' (145); however, in this scene, these steps take the form of an act compelled by Madame Beck. Upon considering Lucy from the perspective of a passive narrator, we see that she has a psychological dependence and that she does not emancipate herself from the repression in her patriarchal society. In other words, Lucy makes a compromise with society even though she does express herself.

Madame Beck effectively rules the students and the staff of her school using rational generosity and repressive restraint at the same time. She is established firmly within patriarchal society and functions as a normative model of a successful woman. It is most important for Madame Beck to get achieve advantages for herself on her own. She maintains order in her pensionnat using 'surveillance, espionage' (135) and orders other women, including Lucy, not to deviate from their proper place in society. Lucy's realisation of her own latent feelings is due to the emotional repression that Madame Beck forces on her.

In Bretton, Lucy does not demand stimulation and tries to get in touch with her feelings, but in Labassecour, she expresses her inner emotions as if she is devoted to them, such as raging tempests: 'the tempest took hold of me with tyranny: I was roughly roused and obliged to live' (176). Though she has contained her feelings unconsciously, she must repress them on her own initiative at this moment. She uses an episode from Judges as a symbol of repression: 'I did, figuratively, after the manner of Jael to Sisera, driving a nail through their temples. Unlike Sisera, they did not die: they were but transiently stunned, and at intervals would turn on the nail with a rebellious wrench; then did the temples bleed, and the brain thrill to its core' (176). From this passage, we can see her current condition, in

which she is now suffering from conflict created by her inner feelings, as compared with her childhood, when she did not repress herself unconsciously.

Another important figure who influences Lucy is Ginevra Fanshawe, who is an English student at Madame Beck's pensionnat and Lucy's partner during the voyage. Ginevra is a symbol of the typical womanly ideal in the Victorian era and presents a notable contrast to Madame Beck. Even though Ginevra is a frivolous, vain and selfish girl, a close relationship exists between her and Lucy. Lucy admires Ginevra's external feminine beauty: 'Notwithstanding these foibles, and various others needless to mention – but by no means of a refined or elevating character – how pretty she was!' (149). Ginevra plays the role of a coquette, who nevertheless notices a real aspect of the patriarchal social system. She thinks that marriage is the way to advancement and carries out a strategy to attain an advantageous marriage by displaying her attractiveness. However, she does not have the property necessary for independent living. Her situation indicates a hard reality for women living in a patriarchal social system. In fact, Ginevra uses the status of her husband and rises in social rank, so she feels her life is adequately happy: 'Remember, I am a countess now. Papa, mamma, and the girls at home, will be delighted to hear that. "My daughter, the Countess! My sister, the Countess!" Bravo! Sounds rather better than Mrs. John Bretton, hein?' (575). Although Ginevra seems to represent a contrast to Lucy, she is actually an alter ego for expressing Lucy's repressed feelings. There is a symbolic scene where Ginevra and Lucy are reflected in a mirror together.<sup>10</sup> Gilbert and Gubar define 'mirror' as follows: 'a mirror... is also a sort of chamber, a mysterious enclosure in which images of the self are trapped like divers parchments' (340). As this definition suggests, we can regard Ginevra as being a part of Lucy in this scene. Paul Emanuel also points out that Lucy is a coquette: 'Petite chatte, doucerette, coquette!' (404). Not only Ginevra but also Lucy displays benevolence towards

Alfred de Hamal: 'As I like sweets, and jams, and comfits, and conservatory flowers' (217). Even though Lucy has a longing to be a common woman like Ginevra, who falls freely in love, she compares herself to 'poor outcast Cain' and hides her feelings.

When Fifine, the second daughter of Madame Beck, breaks a bone falling down the stairs, Dr. John comes and sees her at the pensionnat. Lucy then notices that he is the young English gentleman who had arranged her baggage on the night when she arrived at Villette :

Are collection which had been struggling to form in my memory, since the first moment I heard his voice, started up perfected. This was the very gentleman to whom I had spoken at the bureau ; who had helped me in the matter of the trunk ; who had been my guide through the dark, wet park. Listening, as he passed down the long vestibule out into the street, I recognized his very tread : it was the same firm and equal stride I had followed under the dripping trees. (161)

She, however, reveals this memory to him. In addition, she realises that he is Graham Bretton, a friend from her childhood : 'an idea new, sudden, and startling, riveted my attention with an overmastering strength and power of attraction' (163). Yet she does not relate her discovery to him, nor does she even reveal it to the readers, but rather keeps pretending that she does not notice who he is. Lucy says, regarding the reason for this, that 'in quarters where we can never be rightly known, we take pleasure, I think, in being consummately ignored' (164). Lucy wishes to be an outsider as well as to express her real nature. In this scene, she shows a compromising attitude towards the narrative rhetoric.

## Notes

- 1) Kate Millett deems this 'a book too subversive to be popular' (140), and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar state that '*Villette* is in many ways Charlotte Brontë's most overtly and despairingly feminist novel' (339).
- 2) Most critics regard this ambiguous ending as a feminist strategy. Robyn R. Warhol remarks, 'that power—arguably a feminist, as opposed to "masculinist", form of power—arises from her keeping the ending open, unresolved, double' (870). Furthermore Patricia E. Johnson states that 'Lucy gives her reader the continuing freedom to maintain her choices, thereby offering them participant in her heresy' (629).
- 3) The 'Angel in the House' is essential for expressing the Victorian ideal woman. This phrase was born from the successional long verse 'The Angel in the House' (1854, 56, 60, 62), in which Coventry Patmore (1823-1896) sings of the sanctity of love and marriage. In this poem, Patmore emphasises sexual difference and apotheosises women.
- 4) Seiko Aoyama. *The Brontës*. Tokyo : Shimizu-Syoin, 1944. 30.
- 5) Shizuko Kawamoto. *Governess : The Excess Women in Victorian Era*. Tokyo : Chuuo-u-Kouronsya, 1994. 48.
- 6) Seiko Aoyama. *The Brontës*. Tokyo : Shimizu-Syoin, 1944. 20.
- 7) Charlotte Brontë survived her five siblings : Maria Brontë died on 6 May 1825, Maria Brontë on 15 June 1825, Branwell Brontë on 24 September 1848, Emily Jane Brontë on 19 December 1848, and Ann Brontë on 28 May 1849.
- 8) Charlotte Brontë wrote two fragments after she published her last completed novel, *Villette* : *Wille Ellin* and *Emma*.
- 9) Winifred Gérin. *The Brontës*. Tokyo : Eicho-sya, 1978. 24.
- 10) Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*. Chapter 14.

## Bibliography

- Allen, Walter. *The English novel : a short critical history*. Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1991.
- Allott, Miriam. *The Brontës : the critical heritage*. London : Routledge, 1995.
- 青山誠子『ブロンテ姉妹—女性作家たちの十九世紀—』朝日選書, 1995。
- Arnold, Matthew. 'From Letter to Mrs. Forster, 14 April 1853.' *Letters of Matthew Arnold 1848-1888*, collected by George W. E. Russell. London : Macmillan, 1896.
- Auerbuch, Nina. *Communities of women : an idea in fiction*. Cambridge : Harvard UP, 1978.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Villette*. ed. Tony Tanner. Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1985.
- . 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell.' *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. ed. Pauline Nestor. London : Penguin Books. 2003.

- . *Jane Eyre*. ed. Michael Mason. London : Penguin, 1996.
- Byatt, A. S. and Sodr , Ign s. *Imaging Characters : Six Conversations about Women Writers*. New York : Randomhouse. 1995.
- Cecil, David. *Early Victorian Novelists : Essays in Revaluation*. London : Glasgow UP, 1863.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Myths of Power : A Marxist Study of the Bront *. London : Macmillan, 1975.
- Eliot, George. *George Eliot's life as related in her letters and journals* vol. 1, ed. J. W. Cross. New York : AMS Press, 1970.
- Gaskell, Elizabeth. *The life of Charlotte Bront *. New York : Oxford UP, 1966.
- G rin, Winifred. 'Villette' *The Bront s*. ed. Yuriko Yamawaki. Tokyo : Eich -sya, 1978.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic : The Women Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven : Yale UP, 2000.
- Hunt, Linda. 'Villette : The Inward and the Outward Life.' *Victorians Institute Journal* 11, 1982 -3.
- Joint Committee on the New Translation of the Bible. *The New English Bible : the Old Testament*. London : Oxford UP, 1970.
- 川本静子『ガヴァネス ヴィクトリア時代の〈余った女〉たち』中公新書, 1994。
- Lodge, David. *The Art of Fiction : Illustrated from Classic and Modern Texts*. London : Penguin Books, 1994.
- Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics : The Classic Analysis of the Interplay between Men, Women, and Culture*. Urbana : Illinois UP, 2000.
- Mores, Ellen. *Literary women*. New York : Oxford UP, 1985.
- Moglen, Helene. *Charlotte Bront  : The Self Conceived*. New York : Wisconsin UP, 1976.
- 中岡洋『ブロンテ姉妹の留学時代』開文社出版, 1990。
- Rabinowitz, Nancy Sorkin. "Faithful Narrator" or "Partial Eulogist" : First-Person Narration in Bront 's *Villette*.' *The journal of narrative technique*, v. 15, no. 3. Michigan : Eastern Michigan UP, 1985.
- Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own : British Women Novelists from Charlotte Bront  to Doris Lessing*. New York : Princeton UP, 1997.
- . *The Female Malady : Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*. New York : Pantheon Books, 1985.
- Sutherland, John. *Is Heathcliffe a murderer ? : Great puzzles in nineteenth-century literature*. Oxford : Oxford UP, 1996.
- Warhol, Robyn R. 'Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*.' *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, v. 36. Houston : Rice UP, 1996. 857-75.
- Wise, Thomas J. and Symington, J. Alexander. *The Bront s : Their Lives, Friendship Correspondence, in four volumes*. Oxford : Shakespeare Head Press, 1980.

Woolf, Virginia. *Collected Essays by Virginia Woolf* vol. 2, London : The Hogarth Press, 1966.

This paper is the result of the 2016 Special Research Grant from Matsuyama University.