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The Despair Related to a Woman's Independence

– A Study of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* – Part 2

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5. Solitary Confinement

When school ends and the long summer vacation begins, Madame Beck leaves on the first day of the holidays to join her children at the seaside while Paul Emanuel sets forth on a pilgrimage to Rome. Lucy, however, stays at the pensionnat with a servant and Marie Broc, a mentally handicapped pupil (called a 'cretin' in the novel), because she does not have a house to return to. The school is left quite empty, so her heart almost dies within her. Miserable longing strains its chords. She must take care of Marie Broc, who cannot speak: 'Her weak faculties approved of inertia: her brain, her eyes, her ears, her heart slept content; they could not wake to work, so lethargy was their Paradise' (228). Marie's situation overlaps with Lucy's. Lucy also lives as an outsider, repressing her inner feelings and making a compromise with society:

The hapless creature had been at times a heavy charge; I could not take her out beyond the garden, and I could not leave her a minute alone; for her poor mind, like her body, was warped: its propensity was to evil. A vague bent to mischief and aimless malevolence, made constant vigilance indispensable. As she very rarely spoke, and would sit for hours together moping and mowing and distorting her features with indescribable grimaces, it was more like being

prisoned with some strange tameless animal, than associating with a human being. (229)

Marie Broc is a symbol of the inner feelings that Lucy has hidden. Marie plays the role of the alter ego for the feelings that Lucy has failed to express in an attempt to repress. Another point of significance in this scene is that Lucy describes her solitary environment as ‘it was more like being prisoned’ (229).

Showalter observes that Brontë pursues ‘solitary confinement’¹⁾ in *Villette*: ‘In her last novel, *Villette*, Brontë made use of current ideas about insanity to explore the psychological contradictions in nineteenth-century women’s lives. The metaphor she chose for this novel was “solitary confinement”’ (*Female Malady* 69). ‘Solitary confinement’, as defined by Showalter, is symbolised by ‘home’, the space where Lucy stays in *Villette*. The ‘home’ in which she resides is Mrs. Bretton’s in Bretton, and Miss Marchmont’s and Madame Beck’s homes in Labassecour, where she feels intensely isolated and must hide her inner feelings, which come from the bottom of her heart. Lucy, however, is always surrounded by people and talks with them at Mrs. Bretton’s, Miss Marchmont’s and Madame Beck’s homes. Thus, this situation does not necessarily show ‘solitary confinement’, because she is not kept in a state of complete isolation. The feeling of loneliness at the pensionnat during this long summer vacation is different from that which she has experienced until now. Although Marie Broc lives with Lucy at the pensionnat, Lucy cannot talk with her, and furthermore, Marie leaves the pensionnat when her aunt takes her away. In this scene, Lucy is left alone at the pensionnat and is filled with feelings of loneliness. This situation is nothing less than ‘solitary confinement’. The loneliness that she feels even as she is living with others is different from the feeling of losing others. It is possible for her to define this sense of loneliness clearly and to have a place to reside by living with other

people. But if she literally loses others, it is impossible for her to define that and to get them back. In this scene she becomes completely solitary and loses her living space. Lucy wanders around the city as if she is going to find the place where she lives : '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' (230). This scene is not one that reflects the comfortable type of loneliness, which she has always experienced, but rather of loneliness filled with anxiety and grief. Ellen Moers insists that the episode 'the woman wanders over the city' is a symbol that Brontë uses to express the anxiety of an independent woman. In her wanderings, Lucy recalls her school acquaintances and envies Ginevra because she thinks that she is the happiest woman out of all her schoolmates : 'Ginevra seemed to me the happiest. She was on the route of beautiful scenery ; these September suns shone for her on fertile plains, where harvest and vintage matured under their mellow beam. These gold and crystal moons rose on her vision over blue horizons waved in mountain lines' (230). Ginevra does not feel lonely because Dr. John gives 'the Love' to her, and she represents quite a contrast to Lucy. In this scene, Ginevra plays the part of the heroine for Lucy and symbolises Lucy's wish for 'the Love'. Lucy only expresses her inner feelings to Ginevra and otherwise represses them. Her habit of repressing herself, in a state of complete isolation, leads to physical as well as mental disease.

About this time the Indian summer closed and the equinoctial storms began ; and for nine dark and wet days, of which the hours rushed on all turbulent, deaf dishevelled – bewildered with sounding hurricane – I lay in a strange fever of the nerves and blood. Sleep went quite away. I used to rise in the night, look round for her, beseech her earnestly to return. A rattle of the window, a

cry of the blast only replied – Sleep never came ! (231)

Not only does Lucy experience insomnia but she is also tormented by nightmares.

By the clock of St. Jean Baptiste, that dream remained scarce fifteen minutes – a brief space, but sufficing to wring my whole frame with unknown anguish ; to confer a nameless experience that had the hue, the mien, the terror, the very tone of a visitation from eternity. Between twelve and one that night a cup was forced to my lips, black, strong, strange, drawn from no well, but filled up seething from bottomless and boundless sea. Suffering, brewed in temporal or calculable measure, and mixed for mortal lips, tastes not as this suffering tasted. Having drank and woke, I thought all was over. (231)

A sensation of fear in this depressive state changes Lucy's environment into a virtual image through her delusions. The pensionnat in Villette represents a place of 'solitary confinement' for Lucy: 'The solitude and the stillness of the long dormitory could not be borne any longer ; the ghastly white beds were turning into spectres – the coronal of each became a death's head, huge and sun-bleached – dead dreams of an elder world and mightier race lay frozen in their wide gaping eyeholes' (232). The insomnia, nightmares and fancy that she experiences are caused by her excessive isolation.

It is true that Lucy's loneliness may be attributed to her circumstances of being without her parents and her relatives. Her solitariness is the price that she pays as a woman who decides to be independent and to break with social convention in Victorian times. Nevertheless, Lucy is crushed under her loneliness in this scene and is laid up with illness, which suggests that she is defeated by social conventions on her way to achieving independence as a woman. I suggest that her sickness in

this scene reflects a negative attitude towards the woman who tries to be independent. Lucy, however, is left with no option but to earn a living on her own, so she cannot continue being sick and escaping from reality. She must of necessity confront reality. She takes a big step towards breaking free of her feelings of mental and social repression, and seeking words of advice and comfort, she enters a Catholic Church. Although she is a Protestant dissenter, she confesses to a priest in the confessional. She renews her awareness of 'otherness' and of a solitary existence in Villette and confesses to him, 'Mon père, je suis Protestante' (233). This confession is a self-revelation, a way to express her repressed desires. She does not try to state her feelings until she plunges into uncontrollable circumstances. Furthermore, she attributes the loneliness that is tormenting her to 'fate', to the predominant influence of others, and she compromises with society : 'With what dread force the conviction would grasp me that Fate was my permanent foe, never to be conciliated' (229). Her words suggest that she attempts to escape from a reality which she cannot face and which makes her live within the framework prescribed by society without leaving behind the repression.

Showalter explains that female adolescence is a kind of 'miniature insanity', and furthermore, she insists in the following passage that doctors and female authors in the Victorian era thought women experienced mental deficiency in the first bloom of youth : 'while doctors blamed menstrual problems or sexual abnormality, women writers suggested that it was the lack of meaningful work, hope, or companionship that led to depression or breakdown' (*Female Malady* 41). The basis for Lucy's disease accords with that suggested by women authors. Brontë also experienced terrible loneliness while studying abroad in Brussels and also had bouts of insomnia, nightmares and fancy, just like Lucy :

They are very false in their relations with each other, but they rarely quarrel,

and friendship is a folly they are unacquainted with. The black Swan, M. Heger, is the only sole veritable exception to this rule (for Madame, always cool and always reasoning, is not quite an exception). But I rarely speak to Monsieur now, for not being a pupil I have little or nothing to do with him It is a curious metaphysical fact that always in the evening when I am in the great dormitory alone, having no other company than a number of beds with white curtains, I always recur as fanatically as ever to the old ideas, the old faces, and the old scenes in the world below. (Wise and Symington I. 296)

Brontë herself felt confident that she was repulsive to Madame Héger and deeply held the suspicion that Monsieur Héger became cooler and cooler towards her under the influence of his wife, so Brontë led a life of solitude in a foreign country. When school ended and the long summer vacation began, Monsieur and Madame Héger went off on their journeys. Brontë stayed alone, just as Lucy Snowe does. There might have been days when Brontë, too, felt solitary and terrible, as if she were going out of her mind. Then, she sought a place where she could rest her mind and entered St. Gudula Cathedral, one of the most famous Catholic Churches in Brussels, to confess. It was sheer madness to do such a thing because she was the daughter of an Anglican clergyman: ‘I took a fancy to change myself into a Catholic and go and make a real confession to see what it was like. Knowing me as you do, you will think this odd, but when people are by themselves they have singular fancies’ (Wise and Symington I. 303). Brontë experienced first-hand the cause of some women’s mental breakdown, concerning which Showalter points out ‘the lack of meaningful work, hope, or companionship’ (Wise and Symington I. 215), and therefore, in *Villette*, she describes a magical world to express women’s psychology as Lucy experiences it.

6. The Multiple Functions of the Symbols

In *Villette*, Lucy Snowe does not clearly reveal her inner feelings but instead hides them completely. They are reiterated throughout the length of the novel. Symbolic expressions used in *Villette*, such as 'the Play', *Cleopatra* and *La vie d'une femme*, 'Vashti' and the 'nun's apparition', connote the concealment that Lucy uses. They do not function to make specific mention of her inner feelings but rather to express them indirectly. It is true that we can regard symbolic expression as a compromise on the part of Brontë in a patriarchal society where the woman who brought her desires and goals to the fore was not loved and accepted, but we can understand some of her intentions. Although her intention is stated in a concealed way, Lucy speaks volumes about it paradoxically and powerfully communicates her inner thoughts. This enigmatic logic, in which she reveals her ideas eloquently even as she holds her tongue, is the remarkable logic of the eventual narrative that Brontë was able to create in a patriarchal society when women writers had to give voice to their feelings within a confined space.

Lucy gives vent to her inner feelings indirectly in the scene of 'the Play'. Students are to perform the play under the guidance of Paul Emanuel at a party to celebrate the birthday of Madame Beck. On the day of the fete, he asks Lucy to act as a substitute in a role because Louise Vanderklkov, who has a vital part, is not present for being in bad condition. Lucy expresses the intention to emphatically reject the suggestion that arises in her heart: 'A thousand objections rushed into my mind. The foreign language, the limited time, the public display . . . Inclination recoiled, Ability faltered, Self-respect (that 'vile quality') trembled. "Non, non, non!" said all these' (203). Although Paul's request goes against her intention of not appearing onstage herself, Lucy cannot reject him, however, and ends up agreeing to come onstage. In this scene, she appears as a typical female figure who

covers up her feelings.

Byatt notes the important role that the ‘stage’ plays in novels and proposes the following theory: ‘You mentioned the word “stage”. We were saying . . . that theatrical presentations in many of these novels give us a kind of image of possible power or self-expression or possible emotion space, which are not offered to the characters in their daily lives’ (52). If we totally agree with the views expressed by Byatt, we can regard the scene in which Lucy participates in the play as a pivotal role that moves her from an attitude of self-repression to one of self-revelation. However, a woman insisting on expressing her intentions and feelings openly is demonstrating a socially prohibited behaviour within a patriarchal social system. Thus, Lucy emphasises that her appearance in the play is unavoidable, and furthermore, she agrees to take the role as if she does not realise what she has done: ‘my lips dropped the word “oui”’ (203). It is true that the ‘stage’ is a place to express herself, as Byatt insists, but here Lucy communicates her inner feelings in a passive way, making a compromise with society. Judging from the passive behavior described above, we cannot assert that she completely reveals herself here.

Although Lucy is to take the part of the ‘fop’ who courts the ‘coquette’, which Ginevra plays, she adamantly refuses to wear men’s clothes :

To be dressed like a man did not please, and would not suit me. I had consented to take a man’s name and part ; as to his dress—*halte là !* No, I would keep my own dress, come what might. M. Paul might storm, might rage : I would keep my own dress. I said so, with a voice as resolute in intent, as it was low, and perhaps unsteady, in utterance. (208)

She clearly reveals her intention in this scene although she has given in to the urge to repress herself and has tried to say nothing until now. She digs in her heels and

appears onstage as an androgynous figure :

Retaining my woman's garb without the slightest retrenchment, I merely assumed, in addition, a little vest, a collar, and cravat, and a *paletôt* of small dimensions ; the whole being the costume of a brother of one of the pupils. Having loosened my hair out of its braid, made up the long back hair close, and brushed the front hair to one side, I took my hat and gloves in my hand and came out. (209)

Her appearance as this character in the play, which links her intention with exercise, is a perceptible change and can be seen as her letting go of the urge to repress and to develop a way of revealing herself. Why is it necessary for her to adamantly refuse to wear men's clothes ? Because the play is staged at the girls' pensionnat, it would not be at all humorous for a female to play a male part wearing men's clothes as it is a common property including audiences. When she appears on stage as an androgynous figure, she should have worn men's trousers if she thought the role was a male part. Lucy, who is not close to any particular group of people, is not allowed to live as the stereotypical 'Angel in the house'. She must, rather, live as a woman who can support herself economically and socially in a patriarchal society. Her androgynous position is a symbol of her compromising attitude, which suggests a woman who cannot relinquish the desire for the feminine life even though she must live in a patriarchal society.

In this scene describing the play, although it seems as if Lucy expresses her feelings openly, she actually displays her compromising attitude towards society through the androgynous identity she assumes. Ignês Sodré points out Lucy's androgyny, saying, 'it seemed much more clear that keeping her skirt is a powerful affirmation of her personality and of her womanhood' (53). I agree that Lucy takes

an androgynous position in order to insist on her ‘femininity’.

Let us now turn our attention to the symbolic expression of two paintings, *Cleopatra* and *La vie d'une femme*. These pictures, which Lucy looks at in an art gallery, show two kinds of female stereotypes in the Victorian era. In *Cleopatra*, a woman is presented as a sensual figure lying on a sofa. *La vie d'une femme* is composed of four pictures, ‘Jeune Fille’, ‘Marié’, ‘Jeune Mère’ and ‘Veuve’. When Lucy views *Cleopatra* at the gallery, she describes it in a sarcastic tone, as if she makes its odiousness stick :

This picture, I say, seemed to consider itself the queen of the collection. It represented a woman, considerably larger, I thought, than the life She lay half-reclined on a couch : why, it would be difficult to say ; broad daylight blazed round her 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 On referring to the catalogue, I found that this notable production bore the name ‘Cleopatra’. (275)

Her line of sight clarifies the opinions of the male characters regarding this painting. Paul Emanuel appears excited and infuriated that she views the sensual picture by herself: ‘Matter ! How dare you, a young person, sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a *garçon*, and look at *that* picture ?’ (277). Colonel de Hamal, in contrast, falls in love with it : ‘I observed him for about ten minutes, and perceived that he was exceedingly taken with this dusk and portly Venus of the Nile’ (281). John Graham appreciates it with cold eyes and compares its beauty with that of Ginevra : ‘My mother is a better-looking woman. I heard some French fops ; yonder, 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 !’ (282). Even though Lucy is critical of *Cleopatra*, John and Graham affirm and praise it. However, Paul insists that young women should not view this painting, and he takes her before a series of most dreary ‘cadres’ in a particularly dull corner to look at *La vie d’une femme*. This painting contrasts sharply with *Cleopatra* because all sensuality is eliminated from it, and it presents a symbol of Victorian womanhood, ‘the Angel in the House’. Though it is drawn as a contrast to *Cleopatra*, Lucy criticises it furiously : ‘All these four “Angels” were grim and grey as burglars, and cold and vapid as ghosts. What women to live with ! Insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless nonentities ! As bad in their way as the indolent gypsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers’ (278). The two paintings were both created from a male perspective. The sensual nature of *Cleopatra* portrays a woman’s physical body, which is a sex object for men, while the ascetic nature of *La vie d’une femme* depicts, as ‘the Angel in the House’, a woman’s body that is made available to men. Although Lucy is always presented in the novel as an observer who does not reveal her inner feelings at all, she rejects woman’s submissiveness, which is only made from the point of view of men, and within herself, she wishes to be an independent woman who drops out of patriarchal society as well as has the freedom to evaluate paintings. The three male characters, Paul, John and Hamal, who affirm that ‘men force their ideas on women’, are a symbol of the patriarchy.

Lucy goes on 1 December to see a play in which a great actress appears onstage with John.²⁾ Although the actress has a weak constitution, she possesses great reserves of consuming passion. Even when she experiences extreme mental agony, she makes no effort to give in to it and become indignant about it ; rather, she fights through it and resists it strongly. She makes a conquest of conventional ‘feminine beauty’ to overcome it, looking at illness and death with the eyes of a traitor :

I found upon her something neither of woman nor of man : in each of her eyes sat a devil. These evil forces bore her through the tragedy, kept up her feeble strength – for she was but a frail creature ; and as the action rose and the stir deepened, how wildly they shook her with their passions of the pit ! They wrote HELL on her straight, haughty brow. They tuned her voice to the note of torment. They writhed her regal face to a demoniac mask. Hate, and Murder, and Madness incarnate she stood Suffering had struck that stage empress ; and she stood before her audience neither yielding to, nor enduring, nor in finite measure, resenting it : she stood locked in struggle, rigid in resistance Before calamity she is a tigress ; she rends her woes, shivers them in convulsed abhorrence. Pain, for her, has no result in good ; tears water no harvest of wisdom : on sickness, on death itself, she looks with the eye of a rebel. Wicked, perhaps, she is, but also she is strong ; and her strength has conquered Beauty, has overcome Grace. (339)

The actress, who puts on a splendid performance in front of the audience, has a power and a grace that refuses to be governed by men. She exists as an alter ego to reveal Lucy's inner desire to be an independent woman who breaks away from patriarchal society. Thus, we can regard the actress as being representative of self-revelation. Lucy, however, narrates this stage production in terms of Queen Vashti's story, which appears in the Book of Esther, and reveals no details about the play, such as the actress's real name and concrete program contents. Although the figurative expression that indicates her inner feelings has been often used in *Villette*, it is noteworthy that this scene has the double structure of the play and the Book of Esther, which is different from other scenes. According to the first chapter of the Book of Esther, King Ahasuerus wishes to display the beauty of his wife, Queen Vashti, and bids her to attend a drunken celebration. She, however, sticks

to her principles and refuses his order, so she meets with his anger and is deported because feudal lords are also concerned about the impact that such behaviour might have on their wives.³⁾

Queen Vashti represents both the challenge posed by a feminist, who tries to destroy the standards of patriarchal society, and Lucy's inner feelings, that is, her desire to engage in self-revelation as is the case with the performance of the great actress. The result, which leads Queen Vashti to stray outside the norms of patriarchal society, is banishment. In other words, deviation from the sociosexual role in a patriarchy means banishment. Lucy, too, faces repression due to such social conditions. She tries to express that she feels she has fallen victim to an intense conflict between self-repression and self-revelation through the double structure of the play and the Book of Esther.

Even though Lucy tries to take control of her identity, she breaks down the balance of self-repression and self-revelation because the performance of the actress moves her emotions in an excruciating way. She projects onto Vashti her passionate energy, which she has repressed and stored in the back of her mind, and explodes with it. She incarnates her explosive power in the form of a theatre fire. Just as Bertha Rochester sets fire to Thornfield in *Jane Eyre*, so too does this fire in *Villette* show the risk of her passion and the collapse of her identity. In addition, this fire burns out her passion and brings her back to being a repressed woman. As evidence of this in the next chapter entitled 'Vashti', Lucy loses contact with Dr. John over seven weeks, thus becoming an inactive woman and waiting hopelessly to hear from him.

If Vashti is one aspect of her identity, another one is a nun's apparition, which Lucy sees over and over again. A rumour is going around in the community that a nun who was buried alive at a young age walks as an apparition in the boarding school. When Lucy tries to read a letter from John, for whom she has longed, she

actually comes into contact with the nun's apparition in a white veil and a black robe. Therefore, we can regard this spectre as a symbol of sexual lust and romantic feelings for John, which Lucy has repressed, and as her alter ego. She, however, is frightened by the nun and tries to escape from this fear: 'I cried out; I sickened. Had the shape approached me I might have swooned. It receded: I made for the door. How I descended all the stairs I know not' (325). The description of this apparition suggests that her fleeing from it is an act of self-repression and that the nun's appearance reflects Lucy's own internal emotions and the conflict between the desire to communicate her attachment to John openly and to repress it. The conflict between self-revelation and self-repression is described in two letters that Lucy addresses to John. One is written by 'feeling' and the other by 'reason':

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, dipped in the ink an eager pen, and, with deep enjoyment, poured out our sincere heart...the doors of my heart would shake, bolt and bar would yield, Reason would leap in vigorous and revengeful, snatch the bull sheets, read, sneer, erase, tear up rewrite, fold, seal, direct, and send a terse, curt missive of a page. She did right. (334)

Lucy buries five letters from John under a pear tree in the allée défendue to distance herself from her passion for him and to hide them from the surreptitious glances of Madame Beck and Paul Emanuel. Her actions can be taken as the repression of sexual lust and romantic feelings for John. As soon as she tries to leave there to finish burying them, she is reunited with the nun's apparition, which is revealed in the moonlight. This scene also suggests Lucy's conflict between self-

repression and self-revelation. Her attitude towards the ghost, however, is different from earlier. She does not try to escape from her fear but instead approaches the apparition.

I stood about three yards from a tall, sable robed, snowy-veiled woman. Five minutes passed. I neither fled nor shrieked. She was there still . . . I felt, if not brave, yet a little desperate ; and desperation will often suffice to fill the post and do the work of courage. I advanced one step. I stretched out my hand, for I meant to touch her. (381)

This scene conveys to us the impression that self-revelation gains an advantage over self-repression. The spectre, however, gets away from Lucy adversely : 'She seemed to recede. I drew nearer : her recession, still silent, became swift. A mass of shrubs, full-leaved ever greens, laurel and dense yew, intervened between me and what I followed having passed that obstacle, I looked and saw nothing' (381). The apparition functions to convey the overpowering sense of loss and the oppressive loneliness that she experiences because Lucy has already lost her love interest, John, at this moment : 'This time there was no Dr. John to whom to have recourse : there was no one to whom I dared whisper the words, 'I have again seen the nun' (382).

As mentioned above, Lucy symbolically relates, through the use of symbolic expressions such as 'the Play', *Cleopatra* and *La vie d'une femme*, 'Vashti' and the 'nun's apparition', her autistic suffering due to the conflict within her.

7. The Significance of the Ambiguous Ending

Brontë presents Paul Emanuel, who was modelled after Monsieur Héger, as the person who occupies an important place in her mental growth and her character

formation. His name, Paul, recalls the image of Saint Paul as well as shows the name itself, because not only do they have in common the spelling of their name and their appearance but also they share the experience of a shipwreck and the ambiguity of death of later life. Furthermore, the name Paul suggests an image of St. Paul's Cathedral. Thus 'Paul' as a symbol plays an important role in *Villette*.

After Miss Marchmont dies, Lucy leaves for London by herself because she has no one to turn to and therefore cannot help but undertake an independent life. Lucy, however, feels serious anxiety about what her life may hold in the future: 'What was I doing here alone in great London? What should I do on the morrow? What prospects had I in life? What friends had I on earth? Whence did I come? Whither should I go? What should I do?' (107). Although she feels completely helpless about the future, as seen above, the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, which she sees from the window of a hotel, gives her a charge, and she decides to leave her native land and cross the sea to mark the first step towards a new life:

The next day was the first of March, and when I awoke, rose and opened my curtain, I saw the risen sun struggling through fog. Above my head, above the house-tops, co-elevate almost with the clouds, I saw a solemn, orbéd mass, dark-blue and dim – THE DOME. While I looked, my inner self moved: my spirit shook its always-fettered wings half loose; I had a sudden feeling as if I, who never yet truly lived, were at last about to taste life: in that morning my soul grew as fast as Jonah's gourd. (108)

The day on which Lucy is greatly encouraged by St. Paul's Cathedral is the morning of 1 March. This happens to be Paul Emanuel's birthday. Thus, it is clear that Paul is closely related to St. Paul's Cathedral and that Brontë, by providing the description of St. Paul's Cathedral, implies that Paul has a great

influence on Lucy.

How is Paul characterised ? Lucy explains that he has an unspectacular figure, 'A dark little man he certainly was ; pungent and austere. Even to me he seemed a harsh apparition, with his close-shorn, black head, his broad, sallow brow, his thin cheek, his wide and quivering nostril, his thorough glance and hurried bearing. Irritable he was' (197), and that he has a selfish character and condescending habits. He can take a lenient attitude when he lies centrally in the place as the strong. However, once his status is regarded as equal with that of a woman, he cannot put up with the place and have an accepting relationship, and he enters a state in which he cannot repress his feeling. His conservative character is presented as a symbol of patriarchal authority, and he is seen as a man who inhibits other people. Although Lucy has yielded to repression and taken a negative attitude until now, she becomes able to tell him her opinion forthrightly. In *Villette*, this change is apparent in the scene describing Paul's birthday party.

Besides Madame Beck, only Paul is allowed to have a birthday party at the pensionnat. The students already have flowers for him because he let them know earlier that there is no need to give him an expensive present unlike in the case of Madame Beck. Lucy, however, prepares a homemade clock-band as a present in lieu of flowers because she likes flowers that bloom in the field and the garden, which amuses her heart. When Paul appears before the class, his students form a line with the bouquet and put it in front of him. Even though he expects a birthday present from Lucy, he cannot get one from her, his pride is hurt and he expresses anger over not to put up with his annoyance. As if he is still attached, he repeats a phrase for the students three times : 'Est-ce là tout ?' (426). Although Paul is normally a difficult and authoritative man, these words show his pessimism. He has a domineering personality, which makes him unable to leave without saying a word until he has a sense of triumph, which occurs in association with completely

getting his own way. This is why he hurls reproaches at Lucy mercilessly. She protests furiously against his accusation: ‘Vive l’Angleterre, l’Histoire et les Héros ! À bas la France, la Fiction et les Faquins !’ (429). She does not reveal her emotions but keeps a cool head no matter what happens as the name ‘Snowe’ suggests. Just as the ringing of St. Paul’s bell, to which she listened in London, made her take an important step towards a new self, now Paul plays a role in leading her towards self-expression and the displaying of her emotions and opinions without yielding to repression. In other words, he has a part in making her take a step forward.

While Paul’s paternal rights are only too conspicuous, his bilateral character is also described using the word, ‘androgynous’.⁴⁾ It is true that Paul displays strong paternal rights as a man in a patriarchal society, such as when he preaches to Lucy about the need for rigorous surveillance, but he also shows maternal behaviour as when he puts a shawl around her shoulders to keep her warm when she takes to her bed with a desk. Judging from his actions as described here, we can regard him as a man who has both a paternal and a maternal nature, that is, who is ‘androgynous’. We can add that Lucy also has an ‘androgynous’ nature. She demonstrates this in the scene of ‘the Play’, in which she performs under Paul’s direction at the party to celebrate the birthday of Madame Beck. As noted, even though she plays a male part, she adamantly refuses to completely disguise herself as a man and appears on stage in male clothes from the waist up and female clothes from the waist down. Thus Paul and Lucy can understand each other because both of them have a similar ‘androgynous’ nature.

There is also another similarity between Paul and Lucy. Both of them lead a repressed life. He spends about three quarters of his income to support Madame Walravens and Père Silas, who destroyed the relationship between Paul and his girlfriend, Justine Marie, in his younger days. He is now content to lead an austere

life, and furthermore, he sets out on a trip to the West Indies to have control over the site that Madame Walravens owns. Madame Walravens, Madame Beck and Père Silas think that they can exploit him for their own gain, and they dispatch him to the West Indies. They take mean advantage of his religious, self-sacrificing spirit and repress him economically and psychologically. As described above, Paul and Lucy can build a trusting relationship and express their repressed feelings naturally in their own language because they are similar to each other.

Such changes mean a departure from 'femininity'. It was presumably impermissible for a Victorian woman to reject male opinions and clearly communicate her own views. Lucy, however, states her opinions in a positive way. It is clear that her attitude contains criticism against 'femininity' constructed conventionally from a male perspective. Such criticism is repeated throughout *Villette*. Lucy, however, also shows a 'feminine' attitude, which she had rejected until now, in the chapter titled 'Faubourg Clotilde', where she gains Paul's love. She worships him as her hero and takes great pleasure in caring for him like Polly : 'I took a delight inexpressible in tending M. Paul' (588). Even though Lucy has refused to be stuck with male chauvinistic views, she expresses the opposite opinion : 'to offer homage was both a joy and a duty' (587). She gains his love, so she comes to care about her appearance, just like other female characters for whom she has previously shown contempt throughout the novel :

'Ah ! I am not pleasant to look at - ?' I could not help saying this ; the words came unbidden : I never remember the time when I had not a haunting dread of what might be the degree of my outward deficiency ; this dread pressed me at the moment with special force . . . '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 M. Paul. (583)

Furthermore, as if she were denying her intention to become an independent woman from scratch, she says definitively to him, ‘I will be your faithful steward’ (587). In this scene, Lucy clarifies her common desire to build a warm and loving family, while at the same time, she states her wish for women’s social and economic independence. In this chapter, Brontë provides a happy ending to the novel and characterises Lucy as an amenable heroine of a traditional novel.

Brontë, however, does not associate Lucy with Paul eternally. He is a masculinist as she points out: ‘he had points of resemblance to Napoleon Bonaparte’ (436). Thus, the marriage between Lucy and Paul is undesirable because she has ever agreed with the aberration from ‘femininity’ and rejects traditional Victorian womankind’s role of ‘the Angel in the House’. Judging from the above, it holds major significance that Brontë does not bring this novel to a close with a happy ending and that she adds a final chapter. Gilbert and Gubar also note the importance of this :

The ambiguous ending of *Villette* reflects Lucy’s ambivalence, her love for Paul and her recognition that it is only in his absence that she can exert herself fully to exercise her own powers. It also reflects Brontë’s determination to avoid the tyrannical fictions that have traditionally victimized women.’ (438)

Paul Emanuel is a tyrannical man who brings women under his control, so

Lucy cannot break away from 'the Angel in the House' role, that is, an ideal woman based on a man's perspective as long as she keeps company with him. Marriage, which brings social, economic and psychological stability, means a woman's complete subjection to her husband. Thus, it is necessary for Lucy to separate from Paul so that she can allow herself to be released in the true sense of the term. While she achieves great success in school administration for three years while he stays in the West Indies: 'M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life' (596), she nevertheless counts on his letters as her spiritual guide. This is why we cannot say that ultimately she leads a completely independent life without depending on a man. He supervises her using his letters. Therefore, it is necessary for Brontë to remove him definitively from the plot so that Lucy can completely break away from the prevailing patriarchal society and lead an independent life.

Lucy, however, makes no direct reference to their later fortunes :

Here pause : pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart ; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life. (592)

She never describes to readers what happens as a practical matter. This ending is the last act of concealment by Brontë in *Villette* and is similar to the scene in which she suggests the annihilation of her family and conceals it. Concealment, distortion and contradiction are techniques that Lucy employs for expressing the conflict between repression and revelation within her. She has clarified her inner feelings using this technique over and over again. This ambiguous ending also speaks of the

intense conflict between self-revelation and self-repression on the part of Brontë herself. Gaskell insists that Brontë was compelled to write an ambiguous ending because her father sought a happy ending to her story.⁵⁾ In spite of the appeal from her father, however, she does not bring the story to a conclusion with the traditional pattern of a happy marriage between Paul and Lucy. What is important to her is not the marriage but the characters' leading independent lives. Brontë, however, does not describe her as a successful woman who achieves independence, either.

Although Madame Beck represents an independent woman who does not rely on a man, Lucy describes her in a negative light. Indeed, she characterises her as a woman who is fully incorporated into the prevailing patriarchal society or as a woman who applies pressure when she describes the masculine nature of Madame Beck. The role that Madame Beck plays is what repressed many women and confined them within the roles prescribed for Victorian women, including Lucy. Thus, Lucy cannot become a second Madame Beck even though Madame Beck is a woman who leads an independent life. In other words, Madame Beck does not offer a good example to Lucy, so Lucy is not allowed to gain independence. She cannot help entering into the framework of patriarchal society despite her aim to be an independent woman. In this last scene, we can see the conflict with her endless consciousness.

8. Conclusion

As I have mentioned, Brontë puts Lucy Snowe into physical and psychological confinement within the enclosed environment of a foreign country and describes her as an isolated outsider in her last completed novel, *Villette*. Brontë characterises her as an amazingly reticent woman, as if she were a secondary character, even though she is actually the protagonist. The author, however, focuses on Lucy's desire to break away from patriarchal society and to achieve independence as a

woman throughout the novel as is clear from the many criticisms that give this novel status where Brontë writes it under the slogan of feminism. However, as discussed throughout this paper, even though she wants to gain social and economic independence, she buries this aim in the deep recesses of her mind and never expresses it. The scene where it seems to be communicated at first glance is actually described indirectly using symbolism and does not come directly from her mouth. We can regard this as concealment in the narrative.

Brontë repeatedly employs in *Villette* self-repression and self-revelation and shows a woman's desire for independence and the resulting compromises she must make. She describes symbolically her endless clouded consciousness, which is tormented with conflict. This allows her to depict a compromising situation and the forlorn condition of women who cannot discover a womanly image that is undefined by masculinist ideology unless they accept the unavoidable circumstances of real life and an ambiguous position.

Based on these considerations, I conclude that *Villette* is a 'book of despair' in terms of the possibility of women's independence and women's happiness.

Notes

- 1) Elaine Showalter discusses 'solitary confinement' as follows: 'During the 1840s, the punishment of solitary confinement had been widely publicized as an effective and "humane" form of penal discipline at model prisons in England and the United States, and as a useful technique for quieting patients in "moral" lunatic asylums. In the Eastern State Penitentiary near Philadelphia, and Pentonville in London, convicts sometimes spent their entire sentences alone, unable to speak to each other or to the outside world. Prison officials praised the method as a nonviolent, efficient form of control, one that had the additional benefit of breaking down the prisoner's psychological resistance to repentance by making him tremulous, emotional, and dependent . . . In 1853, Brontë had visited both Pentonville prison and Bethlem, and she had seen how frighteningly effective solitary confinement could be' (*Female Malady* 69).
- 2) The actress who plays the part of a traitorous queen, Vashti, is modelled on a French actress, Elisa Félix (1820-1858), named Rachel, whom Brontë actually saw in London in June 1851.

- 3) cf. The Book of Esther. *The Old Testament*. Joint Committee on the New Translation of the Bible. *The New English Bible: the Old Testament*. London: Oxford University Press: Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- 4) cf. Helene Moglen. *Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived*. New York: Wisconsin U. P., 1976. 215.
- 5) Mr. Brontë was anxious that her new tale should end well as he disliked novels that left a melancholy impression upon the mind, and he requested her to make her hero and heroine (like the heroes and heroines in fairy tales) 'marry, and live very happily ever after.' cf. Gaskell, 414.

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