OFFENSIVE SHADOWS:
VISION AND THE SPINSTER
IN
CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S VILLETTE

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

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VISION AND THE SPINSTER IN *VILLETTE*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2002) McMaster University
(English) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Offensive Shadows: Vision and the Spinster in Charlotte Brontë's Villette.

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NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 280

ABSTRACT

Graham Bretton's comment to Lucy Snowe, single heroine of Villette (1853), that she is "'a being inoffensive as a shadow'" serves as a fitting epigraph to Brontë's last novel (403). Having explored the experience of single life to varying degrees in her previous works, The Professor (pub. 1857), Jane Eyre (1847), and Shirley (1849), Brontë announces with the death of M. Paul that Villette tells the story of the spinster. Indeed, the first-person narrative of Brontë's heroine expounds the single woman's experience to an extent unknown in the literature of the time. In keeping with Brontë's representation of her own spinsterhood, Villette depicts a woman facing a hostile environment which leaves her feeling unsure of her own substantiality. For, as discussed in chapter one of this study, the marginal position of the middle-class spinster in the mid-nineteenth century meant that she was reduced to a shadow. At the same time, she was vilifed for the insubstantial body by which she was set aside, the very terms of her marginalization used to diminish her. Through theories of vision outlined in Michel Foucault's Discipline and Punish (1979) and Luce Irigaray's This Sex Which Is Not One (1985), I explore the untenable position of the single

woman in the mid-nineteenth century as represented in Villette. Although many studies acknowledge Lucy's difficulties with spinsterhood, none regards her spinsterhood as the determining factor in a narrative which explores such themes as identity and sexuality. Chapter two examines the social mechanism which produces Lucy's difference, while chapter three investigates Lucy's relationship to the treacherous world of flesh. In the end, the spinster in Villette emerges as above all else human, a sign that Brontë, as spokesperson for the shadow-band, has gone on the offensive.

Thank you to John Ferns, Michael Ross, and Joan Coldwell
for their enthusiasm, insight, and dedication
in supervising my thesis.

Thank you to my family.

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INTRODUCTION

"Why should she die?", Charlotte Brontë wrote to Elizabeth Gaskell about her plan to do away with her heroine at the end of the novel Ruth (1853). "Why are we to shut up the book weeping? ... And yet you must follow the impulse of your own inspiration. If that commands the slaying of the victim, no bystander has a right to put out his hand to stay the sacrificial knife..." ("To Elizabeth Gaskell" 26 April 1852, W&S 3: 332).[1] Written in response to Gaskell's forwarded outline of a work-in-progress, Brontë's comments might just as easily have been written about her own work-in-progress of that time. Engaged in writing Villette (1853) in the spring of 1852 (Barker 695), Brontë was to produce a novel which not only ended with the death, in this case, of the hero, but which also inspired both her father and her publisher to put out their hands to stay the sacrifice (Gérin 511, 520). Indeed, we would have a starker version of the hero's end today were it not for Brontë's wish to appease her father in some degree (Gaskell, Life 484; Barker 723). But what resonates most about her comments is the concern Brontë expresses for Gaskell's heroine. An unmarried mother with no claim to social standing or moral rectitude, Ruth Hilton might not appear a

likely candidate for Brontë's solicitude. Yet her "protest" over the heroine's fate indicates an interest in her survival which Gaskell herself does not evince ("To Elizabeth Gaskell" 26 April 1852). For the answer to Brontë's regard, however, we might turn to the resolution of her own plotline. For in eliminating Paul, she was to make it clear that she was telling the story of the spinster. Her interest in Ruth Hilton, then, may be an interest in seeing another single woman survive in print.

It would not be surprising of Brontë to want company in the literary climate of the times. The order of the day was that heroines would marry and prosper by the ends of their novels. Yet Gaskell's heroine, even were she to survive, would clearly offer minimal support to the other author, her "fallen" status removing her from the ranks of the conventional heroine. In effect, then, Brontë's Lucy Snowe was to stand alone among contemporary heroines.[2] As Patricia Thomson writes, even a decade later, when conventions surrounding the "novelists' ideal heroine" were in flux, "of one thing they were still certain: her ultimate fate must be marriage" (119).

One need only consult the works of other major novelists of the day to determine that Brontë alone embraced the single woman's experience. Neither Dickens, nor Thackeray, nor Gaskell herself, in her novels concerning

more conventional heroines, produced a novel contemporary to Villette which treats the fortunes of a heroine who remains unmarried. Indeed, even when considered at their most radical, such novels as David Copperfield (1849-50), Vanity Fair (1848), and, ultimately, Gaskell's Cranford (1851-3), all of which in one form or another challenge the autocracy of marriage, offer nothing more than a fleeting glimpse of life beyond the boundaries of convention.

Uncharacteristically, according to Michael Slater, author of Dickens and Women (1983), Dickens has created in Betsey Trotwood, David Copperfield's independent-minded aunt, a spinster-type who appears as something other than a stock figure (231-33, 272, 301). The tenderness she shows in caring for David and the sensitive Mr. Dick and the generosity she exhibits towards an abusive ex-husband (Copperfield 588) are two of the characteristics which set her apart from the conventional closed-hearted spinster. Moreover, Dickens' allusions to her destructive past union serve to emphasize Betsey's thriving independence, further opening up the space claimed in the novel for life beyond marriage. Nevertheless, Betsey's impact as a single figure is clearly lessened by the fact that she has been married, not to mention the fact that her humanization has been achieved in large part through the employment of another stereotype: that of nurturing mother. Thus, Dickens can be

regarded only as having accorded the spinster limited scope at best.

Thackeray's Vanity Fair, on the other hand, opens up an untried space for unmarried women by attacking marriage directly. Chronicling the fortunes of two "young ladies" who leave Miss Pinkerton's academy ready to find themselves husbands, the novel indicts a system which proffers marriage as the only means of survival for women (Vanity Fair 39). Becky Sharp, who begins as a mere over-zealous schemer, and Amelia Sedley, who appears all conventional passive charm, both end up being figured as devourers by Thackeray--Becky, a "fiendish marine canniba[l]" (738), and Amelia, "a tender little [vine-like] parasite"--(792), leading the reader to conclude that making marriage the business of women's lives forces them to prey on men. In addition, the novel features a sympathetic portrait of the "awful existence" of the unmarried daughter, in the person of Miss Osborne, inviting us to consider the deathly nature of the alternative as well (501). Yet, as Jenni Calder observes of Thackeray's heroines in general with respect to this system of economic determinism, "Thackeray writes basically about two types of women, those who submit...and those who rebel...," and "[b]oth types of women are destructive..." (35). In other words, in spite of presenting a clear picture of what is wrong with marriage, Thackeray forwards no viable

alternative for women who would do other than depend on men.

In contrast, Elizabeth Gaskell creates in the fictional world of Cranford an entirely alternative reality for single women. The story of a village dominated by aging spinsters and widows--or, as the narrator would have it, "in possession of the Amazons"--, Cranford affords a view of single life not approached by either Dickens or Thackeray (Cranford 1). Not only do the single ladies in Cranford occupy the centre of the tale (represented, no less, by a single narrator), but it is the men who are figured as Other here. One memorable exchange features a dissertation on "the sex" being greeted by "the chorus" with "a grave shake of the head, and a soft murmur of 'They are very incomprehensible, certainly!'" (96). Indeed, Nina Auerbach argues that we encounter in Cranford a society which overcomes the "epistemological and political" rule of men (113, 79-91). Still, despite its potential for radicalization, we cannot ignore the basically conservative nature of the work. Although its subject matter sets it apart from the other novels, Cranford offers a view of single life which relies to a great extent on stereotype. Not only have the single ladies in Cranford been furnished with many stereotypical attributes, but much of the humour which characterizes the work is based on these attributes. While Cranford discloses more about the day-to-day existence

of single women, then, it reveals little more about the inner world of the woman on her own.

On the other hand, such works as Elizabeth Sewell's The Experience of Life (1853) and Charlotte Yonge's The Daisy Chain (1856) do offer intimate accounts of the life of the single woman. Written by minor novelists of the time, these works feature single characters in central roles, whose stories are told to us by first- or omniscient third-person narrators without the "pervasively distanced, ironic tone" of Cranford, as Shirley Foster styles it (167).[3] In both cases, we follow the single heroine from childhood, assuring to us a view which transcends the easy categories of feminine adulthood. Moreover, each heroine grapples at some point with the fate which life has presented to her, providing us with an immediate rather than a mediated account of the transition to spinsterhood. Nevertheless, both novels revolve as much around the life of the heroine's family as they do around the life of the heroine herself, in sharp contrast to the story of Lucy Snowe. Further, neither provides us with the kind of extraordinary psychologically penetrating account of mid-nineteenth century spinsterhood with which we are provided, as we shall see, in Villette.

Of the two, Yonge's The Daisy Chain is the less challenging novel. Presenting only the opening years of Ethel May's adulthood, it provides little more than a

snapshot of her coming to terms with spinsterhood--although, as Susan Gorsky points out, Ethel May's determination "to live a useful life" sets her story apart from those of other single heroines (72). In addition, the older single women the novel does depict appear as recognizable types rather than differentiated human beings. Miss Winter, the Mays' governess, is remarkable only for her devotion to correctness, and the ladies of the "Committee" swell in the presence of any eligible man, much like the unengaged ladies of Cranford (Cranford 116). "[F]or him waved every spinster's ribbon," the narrator informs us of their attachment to the newly arrived Dr. Spencer (497). In essence, then, The Daisy Chain foregrounds what it does not portray about the single woman's condition. It features her adjustment to spinsterhood and the way in which she is perceived by her society without revealing what it is like to live as a single woman every day.

The Experience of Life, in contrast, presents a broader range of single experience. It features not only a single heroine whose story we follow from childhood to a contented old age, but also a collection of single women who belie the stereotypes of spinsterhood. In particular, Aunt Sarah extends the treatment of spinsterhood in the novel. Her warmth and strength of character are matched only by her influence over the entire Mortimer family, an influence

reflected in Sally's placing her as the final figure in her narrative. Indeed, Laura Fasick has argued recently that Aunt Sarah's home stands as a site in which we learn the proper relation between the single woman and society (78-89). Moreover (although Fasick does not take account of it in her study), Sally's own home operates as a sign of the rightful position of the single woman. Describing it in the closing pages of her narrative, Sally affirms of her self-financed cottage, "it has become very dear to me, for it is my home," and in doing so accrues more legitimacy to the single woman perhaps than in her entire previous narrative (343). Yet, despite its extensive treatment of single life --and its evocative name--, The Experience of Life does not present an unobstructed view of the single woman's experience. Apart from the occasions on which the merits of an unmmaried life are discussed, we do not discover much about the characters' feelings about being single. Indeed, the self-revelatory scenes in which Sally expresses her doubt about her place in the world disappear about midway through the novel, marked by a chapter which announces both through tone and content that such disclosures are no longer appropriate now that Sally has reached a mature age. As well, what sequences of self-revelation the novel does depict revolve around Sally's conflict with others more amiably placed rather than her complicated relationship with

herself. To obtain a richer view of the experience of spinsterhood, then, we must turn, in the end, to Villette.

Charlotte Brontë's portrait of single life lays bare the psychological conditions under which the single woman strove to carve out her existence. Exploring not only her struggle to establish an identity against a society which sought to inscribe her difference, but also to come to terms with the body through which she was to be defined, Villette paints the picture of a woman in trouble in body and soul. To appreciate the scope of the portrait, indeed, we can turn to two theorists who concern themselves with diagramming the relationship between social conditioning and the way in which we think about ourselves. In Discipline and Punish (1979), Michel Foucault explores the efficiency of a society which controls its citizens through observation alone, leading us to understand how Lucy's interaction with the forces surveilling her results in her disavowal of herself; while through Luce Irigaray's This Sex Which Is Not One (1985), we discover what might make Lucy eventually capitulate to a system which defines the single woman in terms of her unproductive body. Together, these theorists allow us to see the way in which social interference results in the single woman's diminishing of herself, providing us with a picture of spinsterhood more revealing than those which attend to her social constraints alone. Indeed, when

we consider that Villette attends also to the dire economic position of the single woman, we can see that it provides a more complete view of the single woman's existence than either of the other spinster-centred novels of its time.

To consider Lucy's story as an interpretable whole, of course, runs contrary to much recent criticism. Pauline Nestor, in her survey of modern critical responses to Villette, draws a distinction between critics who "read toward a kind of coherence" and those who "challenge...any sense of the organic wholeness of the text," engendering a division along roughly chronological lines (10). Indeed, language used to characterize this search after "hidden unitary meaning" often takes on a moralistic tone (Shuttleworth 221). We are warned not to be "tempted" into such a practice and cautioned against "our...desire for narrative completion," for instance (Shuttleworth 221; Walker 438). Yet the amenability of Villette to an approach which focusses on the single woman's experience, along with Brontë's apparent discomfort with her lot in life, appears to warrant such an examination.[4] Moreover, little research has been done into the centrality of spinsterhood to Lucy's complicated narrative. In addition, light shed on Lucy's sense of identity and relationship to her body through this approach will serve only to complement other research done in these areas.

There have been only two studies of the relationship between spinsterhood and Villette in recent times.[5] In Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual (1985), Shirley Foster examines the extent to which marriage is presented as a less desirable alternative to single life in the novel and in "'Herself Beheld': Marriage, Motherhood, and Oppression in Brontë's Villette and Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" (1997), Andrea O'Reilly Herrera compares the vision of spinsterhood endorsed in Villette to the vision of family life endorsed in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Both studies consider central aspects of the psychological experience of spinsterhood either without identifying their source or exploring their full implications.

Shirley Foster's study of Villette, although brief, devotes considerable space to describing Lucy's contradictory character. Allying the heroine's sense of a divided self to Brontë's exploration of the contradiction between the need for independence and the need for commitment, Foster presents the picture of a heroine caught up in a battle of opposing forces. However, in locating the source of her tension in the heroine's conflicting needs rather than in the controlling system besetting her, Foster overlooks society's desexualization of the single woman. As a result, she in effect argues for Lucy's ultimate

transcendence of her social conditions without being able to identify it as such (106). Moreover, she neglects Paul's role as facilitator in Lucy's return to fuller personhood because she can figure him as a potential bridegroom only. Indeed, her comparison between Villette and Sewell's The Experience of Life in a later chapter makes this binary approach to the novel even clearer. Arguing there that Sewell's novel "has perhaps more to say to the women of her generation," Foster dismisses Brontë's novel because it "cannot openly propose a womanly existence devoid of romantic emotion."[6] In other words, in spite of acknowledging the psychological depth of Brontë's characterization and asserting here that she offers a more "imaginative" treatment of spinsterhood, Foster ultimately faults Brontë for uncovering the single woman's need for love (133).

Perhaps because it appears at a time when many feminists no longer feel compelled to oppose an interest in personal relations to a woman's growth as an individual, O'Reilly Herrera's piece on Villette embraces the role Paul plays in Lucy's self-actualization. Asserting that Paul has "enriched" Lucy's life as a single woman, O'Reilly Herrera sees the lover as having participated in Lucy's struggle to come to terms with her passionate nature (66). Indeed, O'Reilly Herrera's discussion of passion with respect to a

single heroine itself sets her study apart from Foster's. Moreover, the critic makes reference several times to the single woman's social invisibility in her study, making her piece much more an exploration of the effects of her position on the single woman. However, in suggesting that Lucy's difficulties with passion arise from a philosophy enjoined on all Victorian women, O'Reilly Herrera avoids the link between passionlessness and singleness. Likewise, rather than following its effects through to their logical conclusion, she refers to the fact of the single woman's invisibility only. While O'Reilly Herrera locates Lucy more clearly within her socio-psychological context as a single woman, then, she nevertheless leaves large portions of the single condition uncharted.[7]

Not surprisingly, however, critics interested in Lucy's unusual identity itself produce more detailed accounts of how her distinct personality has come to be.[8] In fact, both Janet Gezari and Sally Shuttleworth have contributed studies in recent years exploring Lucy's idiosyncrasies using Foucault's Discipline and Punish.[9] In spite of their accounting for her oddness within a feminist context, however, they disregard the special role singleness plays in the heroine's identity, making an exploration of the relationship between spinsterhood and the narrative all the more timely.

Both Gezari and Shuttleworth treat Lucy's identity as an unfixable value, given that she constructs her narrative to withhold as well as disseminate information and that it represents her struggle to avoid normative description. This leaves room, however, for a study which attends to Lucy's efforts to remain undefined while exploring the social mechanism which defines the single woman in particular as abnormal.[10]

In Charlotte Brontë and Defensive Conduct (1992), Janet Gezari makes a case for Brontë's registration in physical terms of the attacks she sustains as an early Victorian woman and author, figuring Villette as the novel in which the act of writing itself is represented as putting the whole woman at risk. (Gezari has identified the publication of Shirley as the event which has unmasked Brontë as an author.) Accordingly, her employment of Foucault's theory of social control involves a focus on the determinative act of observation, as well as a sensitivity to the politically fraught relationship between reader and narrator. Sally Shuttleworth's Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology (1996), on the other hand, deploys the theory of Foucault to investigate the extent to which historically accurate social discourse has penetrated the psyche of the narrator. Representing the "battle" between Lucy and the forces of social control (236), Shuttleworth uncovers the psychic

landscape Lucy's regulated narrative has been designed to hide. While each study shares concerns with this one, however,--Gezari's in its attention to observation and Shuttleworth's in its exploration of Lucy's psyche--the stress on singleness here nevertheless serves to supplement the other studies. Gezari's assessement of Lucy as a heroine whose difference is based on the fact that she is "foreign, heretic, and unhealthy" can only benefit from a study that explores her singleness as a determining cause (146); and Shuttleworth's contention that to be a woman in the mid-nineteenth century was to be defined as abnormal gains focus from an exploration of the single woman's abnormality (as her brief discussion of young female sexuality shows) (232). Indeed, given their mutual interest in the body as a site which reflects social interference, both studies invite the kind of fuller exploration of female corporeality to which an investigation of the single woman's position inevitably leads.

The depreciation of the spinster by means of her offensive body constitutes an essential part of unmarried experience. Yet the critics employing Foucault provide little information about any woman's experience of her body, the emphasis in Foucault falling on the process of differentiation rather than its product. Irigarayan theory, on the other hand, provides us with a body-conscious

framework for the exploration of Lucy's psyche because it identifies the way in which women experience their bodies in male-dominated society. The few critics to employ Irigarayan theory in their analyses of Villette, however, focus not on the representation of the body in the novel but on its reinterpretation of spirituality.

Both Sue Chaplin and Kathryn Bond Stockton construct fully theorized Irigarayan readings of the novel. Accordingly, they attend to not only her analysis of female corporeality, but also her explication of the way in which male spirituality excludes the female body from the realm of discourse (see Chaplin 225-26, for instance). This in turn means that their readings of Villette record its impetus to show the inseparability of matter and spirit. Chaplin, on the one hand, argues for the reintegration of matter and spirit through the privileging of memory and imagination over reason in the novel and, especially, the sharing of memories among women. Stockton, on the other, contends that the movement in Villette is towards autoeroticism, her analysis of Lucy's discovery of pleasure through a Christ-like Paul illustrating the union of matter and spirit. (Stockton's argument is based on the idea that Christ images woman through his crucifixion "holes," an idea she has discussed earlier in her study [34].) These critics clearly break new ground in representing the relation between matter

and spirit, then; however, they shed little light on Lucy's relationship to a body that has been reduced to spirit alone.

One final group of critics does, however, attend more closely to the heroine's physical experience. From John Maynard, who describes Lucy's "sexual awakening" in Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality (1984) to Judith Mitchell, who charts the authorization of a female subject of desire in The Stone and the Scorpion (1994), these critics explore Lucy's erotic relationships, placing an emphasis on the erotic language with which Brontë infuses her heroine's narrative. However, because they are interested in her sexuality alone, they have little to say about Lucy's experience of corporeality in general. An exception is Linda Lee Gill, who does offer some discussion in her PhD dissertation (1992) of the way in which Lucy inhabits the world. However, Gill's discussion is limited by the psychoanalytic scope of her argument. Although much of the ground covered in the psychoanalytic critics' discussion anticipates ground covered in this study, then, the exploration of sexuality within its social context here clearly broadens the scope of their work.

To begin to understand this figure who is at one and the same time reduced to shadow and reviled for her insubstantiality by the early Victorians--who is, in effect,

an offensive shadow--, we must undertake a study of her social conditions and of the social position of the author who was to create this singular heroine.

Notes

[1] All letters are taken from Wise and Symington (W&S) unless otherwise noted.

[2] Susan Gorsky explains this divide between respectable unmarried women and fallen women more fully in "Old Maids and New Women: Alternatives to Marriage in Englishwomen's Novels, 1847-1915," (73).

[3] Other novels which unfold the story of the single woman include Geraldine Jewsbury's Constance Herbert (1855) and Julia Kavanagh's Rachel Gray (1856), both referred to in Shirley Foster's Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual. That Foster cites Brontë as one of the few authors who dared to institute an unconventional ending, however, indicates how few tales of single life there were (3-4). See also Susan Gorsky on the rarity of single woman novels in mid-nineteenth century fiction (69-71).

[4] In disparaging the search for hidden meaning, the critics quoted here have appealed to the authority of the text. But the text can be used equally well to justify a spinster-centred reading of the novel.

[5] Among studies which offer oblique treatments of this relationship are Nina Auerbach's in Communities of Women (1978), Gilbert and Gubar's in The Madwoman in the Attic (1979), and Kathleen Blake's in Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature (1983). Auerbach touches on Lucy's identity as a single woman only briefly as part of her study of the alternative female community represented in Villette, while Gilbert and Gubar feature Lucy's identity as a single woman as one of the many with which she must come to terms as a Victorian woman. In turn, Kathleen Blake offers a reading of Lucy's story which represents the heroine as a lovesick woman who adopts this persona in order to avoid future pain; however, she does not correlate Lucy's lovesickness with the desexualization visited on the spinster.

[6] The real power in Sewell's novel lies in its extended representation of life without a man, although Foster concentrates on the satisfaction of the heroine rather than her longevity (130-133).

[7] That O'Reilly Herrera republished the Villette portion of this essay with only minor alterations in a

collection titled The Foreign Woman in British Literature: Exotics, Aliens, and Outsiders (1999) indicates the extent to which she is interested in marginalization rather than spinsterhood itself.

[8] Although most critics address Brontë's social conditions in accounting for her unusual heroine, there have been a number of examinations in the past few years which have approached Lucy as a psychological case study alone, perhaps in response to the overwhelmingly social accounts of the novel. For instance, Diane Long Hoeveler locates Villette within a newly emerging tradition of "trauma" literature, asserting at the outset of her study that her focus on Brontë's personal tragedies will distinguish her work from criticism which locates Lucy's strangeness in Brontë's "feminism" (150). Likewise, Beverly Forsyth's article represents the heroine as a kind of female "Goth," a woman involved in the "deviant" behaviours that characterize "the darker nature of [modern] female Gothic," although it does offer some discussion of the feminist implications of Lucy's masochism (17).

[9] The applicability of Foucault's theories on individuality to Villette is reflected in the frequency with which the pairing occurs, from a brief mention in Tony Tanner's introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel (1979) (37) to a full-scale analysis of panopticism and narration in Jude Chudi Okpala's recent PhD dissertation (2000).

[10] Laura Ciolkowski makes a tentative connection between spinsterhood and Lucy's "eccentric narrative" (219) at the end of her article, but her interest all along has been in the way in which Brontë undercuts the conventional plotline rather than in the single woman per se.

CHAPTER 1

The Spinster

For the middle-class woman in the mid-nineteenth century, life began with marriage. On one side of the threshold was "a childlike and humiliating dependence on the parental home"; on the other, a considerable measure of independence, a space in which "[to create] a home and family of [her] own" (Perkin, Marriage 3). Crossing the threshold meant more freedom of movement: when she chose to venture forth from that home, she could do so alone; she had left behind the chaperon, who would follow the unmarried woman on any public outings, often past the age of thirty (Hughes 134). It meant more freedom of association: she could now begin to form her own social circle, making friends who were part of neither her family's nor her husband's set (Perkin, Marriage 3). Moreover, her choice could extend to include male friends without her forfeiting respectability (Perkin, Marriage 288), a mark of the licence she gained; for it was the lot of those on the other side to be shadowed in the company of any men but their relatives (Hughes 119). What marriage meant, in other words, was the chance to experience life as an adult, the only chance afforded the middle-class woman by a society towering in its

parsimony to her.

The division of middle-class life into separate spheres, with the married woman installed as "Queen" of the private and every man "King" of the public, ensured that the one opportunity open to women to participate in the business of society was the opportunity presented by marriage. And as the regal image from Ruskin's tribute to complementarity, "Of Queen's Gardens" (1865), suggests, the opportunity was held by conservatives to offer women a position of privilege. Ruskin, for instance, insists that there need be no "speaking of the 'superiority' of one sex to the other" since "[e]ach has what the other has not: each completes the other, and is completed by the other..." (135). His portrait of woman, however, "guard[ed]...["[b]y her office, and place,"] from" "peril," "trial," "failure," "offence," "error," "be[ing] wounded, or subdued," or "misled," makes it clear that, far from being a cause for complaint, woman's position is the better one (136).

Likewise Sarah Stickney Ellis, who addressed middle-class women directly in her "best-selling moral etiquette books" (Hollis 4) and who, like Ruskin, is called upon commonly today to provide colourful samples of the conservative view, admits of no complaint about the constrained position of women. Rather, she too points to woman's good fortune in being spared the difficult life of a

man. In a tidy paragraph near the beginning of her Daughters of England, Ellis disposes in her brisk, practical-minded fashion of any questions that might be raised about her initial advice to young readers in their capacity as women, that is, that "[a]s women...the first thing of importance is to be content to be inferior to men..." (3). A quick review of what such a position means, signifies Ellis, quiets any misgivings young women might have about their position, for having undertaken this review, she is free to turn from the contemplation of their appointed "sphere" (11) to a discussion of how best they might discharge "their peculiar duties" (12) as custodians of it.

Although "women, in their position in life, must be content to be inferior to men," then, posits Ellis, "their want of power...is abundantly made up to them by their...influence" (10), their "moral and religious" equality, and their exemption from the struggles of men (11). Her transition from the point about their equality in God's eyes to the segment making up the bulk of the paragraph and concerning the more reposeful position of women acts as a rhetorical device for the segment, leaving room for nothing but acquiescence from the daughters of England regarding their lot. After deposing to the first two benefits of their condition, less open to disparagement

because they represent genuine forms of power, Ellis introduces the refrain with which she safeguards her final point. "[N]or can it be a subject of regret to any right-minded woman," she affirms, "that...," and she goes on to congratulate women on their "exempt[ion] from" earning a living (11). The dubious merits of such an exemption are whisked away by "the middle-class housewife's mentor" (Crow 50), like so many cobwebs interrupting the order of the right-minded woman. "Can it be a subject of regret...?", she repeats twice in contrasting woman's "sphere of action" to man's (11). The question is clearly rhetorical, for, like Ruskin, she assembles a picture of the latter -- a place of "fierce conflict" where men "[are]...called upon...to calculate, to compete, to struggle," indeed, to ruin their "characters" (11)--which leaves no doubt about the luck of women in having escaped such a lot. For such figures, then, not only was the fitness of a division of labour beyond question, but also the balance of that division was tipped in favour of women. Moreover, any person who would question that division would impugn not only his or her right-mindedness, to use Mrs. Ellis' term, but also his or her regard for the well-being of women. Who wished to throw women into the "fierce conflict of worldly interests" could be counted, surely, as no friend (11).

There were, however, contrary to Mrs. Ellis' gesture of

homogeneity, those who found in the position of women a subject of much regret. In fact, in the preface to her primer on the Victorian women's movement, Women in Public: The Women's Movement 1850-1900, Patricia Hollis identifies women's restriction to the role of wife, or rather, where this left women who didn't marry, as one of the movement's "three main concerns" (vii). Of course, as the initial date in Hollis' title suggests, and as she establishes at the outset of her collection of relevant documents, feminism found its voice in Victorian England in the 1850s (vii); thus Mrs. Ellis, writing in the early forties, reckoned on her audience's ultimate acquiescence in a time before the public debate of such matters might be considered to have begun. Ruskin, on the other hand, weighed in with his poetic endorsement of the restricted position of women well into that debate. His piece exemplifies the kind of "glorification of marriage" in response to public scrutiny of the institution which Joan Perkin describes in her study Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England (7). But whether it appeared in the form of an assured survey of the appointed order or "a kind of desperate propaganda" in the face of the mounting opposition to that order (Perkin, Marriage 272)[1], the conservative view of woman's place remained the same: there was but one, and it sufficed.

One of the voices raised in opposition to that view was

that of Frances Power Cobbe, who as a "very well-known journalist" (Caine, Feminists 105) had the power to make her voice heard. While Mrs. Ellis preceded the debate, Cobbe was very much part of it. In fact, as Barbara Caine's inclusion of Cobbe as one of four for her study Victorian Feminists attests, Cobbe played a significant role in fostering the feminist movement in the nineteenth century, and without its insistence on a wider scope for women, there would have been no debate. On the limitations of women's present scope in view of the women who do not marry Cobbe is clear. She argues persuasively against "making marriage a case of 'Hobson's choice' for a woman" in an article in Fraser's Magazine in 1862 (596). Not only does such a limited scope result in women marrying for the wrong reasons, contends Cobbe, but also it leaves stranded any women who end up on the wrong side of the choice.

The view that placing women in such a position defied logic was advanced also by John Stuart Mill. As a man, with access to the machinery of reform, Mill was instrumental in setting in motion fundamental changes to that position. For instance, it was he who, in his words, "'had the honour of being the first to make the claim of women to the suffrage a parliamentary question'" in 1866 (qtd. in Robson and Robson xxviii). Yet he also took his part in the more general debate going on outside parliamentary gates. His The

Subjection of Women (1869), for example, presented the public with what Mill describes in his Autobiography as "'a written exposition of my opinions on that great question'" (qtd. in Robson and Robson xxix) and resulted in his being "established as the leader of the movement for the removal of all legal disabilities restricting women's lives," according to Ann Robson and John Robson in Sexual Equality: Writings by John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor Mill, and Helen Taylor (xxix). Thus Mill's interest in ameliorating women's position reached beyond the more obvious inequities, and his contribution to that cause involved both practical and ideological undertakings.

As Mill's description of it suggests, the scope of The Subjection of Women was comprehensive. Perkin reports, for instance, that the trend towards fewer children in middle-class families, occurring from the middle of the century onwards, was attributed by certain commentators in the 1870s to the influence of Mill's book (Marriage 282-83). But an argument about the equality of women which could be seen as having such sweeping consequences would have to engage the subject on a most fundamental level. Thus we find Mill, in a book concerned with nothing less than the complete emancipation of women, addressing in his first chapter what Cobbe must address in arguing for the freedom of unmarried women to support themselves: the tyranny of the expectation

that women will marry.

Like Cobbe, Mill characterizes this expectation as leading to only Hobson's choice for women when it comes to their futures. Mill takes pains to expose the unreasonableness of permitting women no option but marriage, by laying out the logic one would have to follow to reach such a position. The only "doctrine" which could account for what Mill compares to "impressment" is the following one: "'It is necessary to society that women should marry and produce children. They will not do so unless they are compelled. Therefore it is necessary to compel them'" (330). Although he elaborates on such thinking with comparisons to the arguments behind slavery and, as indicated, impressment, Mill's most striking indictment of it comes, perhaps, as he is about to dispense with the patently unreasonable logic and speak to the truth it elicits (for his point all along has been to expose the motivation of those who hold to the conventional position for women). Thus Mill concludes of those who would permit women only to marry that they are cognizant of the bad bargain marriage for women entails. "It is not a sign of one's thinking the boon one offers very attractive," Mill quips, "when one allows only Hobson's choice, 'that or none'" (330). Now Mill can go on to address the inequalities enshrined in the marriage contract, which he

does at length in his next chapter; but not before he has conveyed, in this one telling remark, the depth of meanness required to expect women to do only this.

But if women were confined in their ability to lead fully adult lives because they were prevented from exercising any freedom of choice, they were confined more radically by the way in which society employed their bodies against them. By defining the abilities of women by what their bodies were capable of, conservatives not only provided a rationale for restricting women's choices, but also consigned to oblivion their real potential. Further, they consolidated the position that nature had prescribed women's vocation, by promulgating, too, its corollary: that is, they held both that women's bodies destined them to be wives and mothers and that their bodies prevented them from applying themselves sufficiently to anything else.

In an article entitled "Victorian Women and Menstruation," appearing in Martha Vicinus' well-used collection Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age (1972), Elaine and English Showalter bring into focus the extent to which the female body and the fate of all women, for Victorians, were intertwined. What they present is the picture of a society in which this one bodily function is used to invalidate women as the equals of men. They offer evidence that "even relatively progressive [scientific]

investigators" constructed menstruation as a disability (40) and go on to discuss some of the appropriations of such science, remarking that "[t]he menstrual myth underlies much of the literature devoted to the woman question in Victorian journals [both American and British]..." (43).

A glance at the example provided by the Showalters of the menstrual myth in one of its "ardent[ly] antifemin[ist]" incarnations provides ample explanation for its utility to opponents of change (40). In this case, the facts about menstruation were being served up to the Anthropological Society of London in a talk by James MacGrigor Allan in 1869. The Showalters point out that the talk was given a "respectful reception" (40). In the authors' excerpt, Allan can be seen laying the groundwork for a multitude of barriers, one for every point at which a woman attempts to cross into the public sphere. He does so by pronouncing women "invalid[s]" because for a total of "one month in the year" the "periodical illness" to which they are subject "disqualif[ies] them for thought or action, and render[s] it extremely doubtful how far they can be considered responsible beings while the crisis lasts" (qtd. in Showalter 40). One can see without difficulty how impugning every woman's mental and physical stability might prevent any woman from being accorded the responsibilities of a man. But, perhaps in the event that such applications are not

immediately clear, the helpful Allan goes on to spell out how menstruation situates women with respect to men. "In intellectual labour," he intones, "man has surpassed, does now, and always will surpass woman, for the obvious reason that nature does not periodically interrupt his thought and application" (qtd. in Showalter 40). If there is any doubt in the minds of his audience as to the incapacity of women, it will not be James MacGrigor Allan's fault.

What becomes apparent when one considers the evidence presented by the Showalters is that what could not be accomplished by prescription, the Victorians would achieve through proscription. If the more congenial dictum that women were made to be, and thus should aspire to be, mothers were somehow to fail, this inexorable truth would be there to make safe the defence: women were fit for nothing else.[2]

Yet perhaps the most effective, and certainly the most insidious, expedient in the politics of restriction was the precipitating of women to limit themselves. Where the organization of middle-class life told women of marriage and motherhood: you may do only this; and the explication of their physiology, you can do only this; the construction of a feminine psychology told women, you want to do only this.

For an early writer like Mrs. Ellis, this peculiarly feminine disposition was a simple matter of fact. Indeed, it is to "her own nature" that Ellis blithely directs her

"youthful reader" in accounting in passing for the separate spheres (Daughters 6-7). A later writer like Ruskin, on the other hand, adverting to that nature when its existence was in question, would find himself first having to affirm it. Thus where Ellis offers only a few phrases in service of the classification, Ruskin painstakingly assembles it for the reader, setting it in contrast to a corresponding description of the masculine nature. When he goes on, then, to solicit the reader's participation in his estimate of "woman's true...power" (138), it is with this catalogue of the "separate characters" of each standing as evidence behind him.

But while Ruskin and Ellis may have proceeded from the staggered starting points at which changing times had set them, their conclusion about the nature of women was the same: women were made, as Frances Power Cobbe puts it in summarizing "[t]he theory about woman...called the Physical," to "form a link in the chain of generations, and fulfil the functions of wife to one man and mother to another" (qtd. in Hollis 23).

Cobbe, of course, is writing to protest this conflation of physiology and purpose. "To admit that Woman has affections, a moral nature, a religious sentiment, an immortal soul, and yet to treat her for a moment as a mere animal link in the chain of life, is monstrous...," she

writes (Hollis 23). But it is the insistence that women are made to be wives and mothers in spirit as well as in body that allows conservatives to uphold this link between physical capacity and vocation. When Ellis points out that "[women] are..., strictly speaking, relative creatures," it is to "their own constitution" that she assigns the primary responsibility (Women 155).[3] What women were taught, then, was that nature had made them, physically and psychologically, for one purpose and that outside the bounds of that purpose, they could never be whole.

The ramifications of constructing women as relative creatures are perhaps nowhere more starkly exposed as in the discussions of conservatives themselves. In romanticizing the role of helpmate, they consign to oblivion any regard women might properly pay to themselves. Thus, in styling women relative creatures, Ellis contends that in their capacity "as isolated beings," women "are only...filling what would otherwise be a blank space, but doing nothing more"(Women 155). Tellingly, it is in warning women away from the effort to become "striking and distinguished in themselves" that Ellis makes this contention (155). A similar admonition appears in Ruskin's delineation of "woman's true power." Women must employ their intelligence "not for self-development, but for self-renunciation," insists Ruskin, making it clear, along with Ellis, that care

of the self does not properly belong to women (138). What one discovers, then, in perusing conservative accounts of the nature of woman is that any woman who does not exist for others, exists for nothing. "[W]oman...has nothing, and is nothing, of herself," writes Ellis; "[her] experience, if unparticipated, is a total blank"(Daughters 126). One discovers, moreover, that any woman who takes heed of her own existence is worse than nothing. "A selfish woman," writes Ellis, "may not improperly be regarded as a monster..."(Women 73). Thus what lies beyond the gender borders of the Victorian world stands out in stark contrast in the writings of those who would defend those borders: it is a realm of nothingness and monsters, a wasteland where unnatural women are banished.

For middle-class women who did not marry, this land was the inheritance. Their situation with respect to those within the boundaries of Victorian society is spelled out, for example, in a contemporary essay by W.R. Greg. "[S]ingle women...," writes Greg, "not having the natural duties and labours of wives and mother, have to carve out artificial and painfully-sought occupations for themselves;...in place of completing, sweetening, and embellishing the existence of others, [they] are compelled to lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own" (47). Here, single women are set apart unequivocally

from the Victorian norm, Greg using the "artificial" and "incomplete" nature of their existences to differentiate them from women who tread the familiar territory of "natural" womanhood. Indeed, the exclusionary principle governing their lives is evident in the very title Greg gives his meditation on the situation of single women; he chooses as the phrase which will capture the tenor of his thoughts, "Why Are Women Redundant?". But being classed as "redundant" was not the fate of the Victorian single woman in its entirety. Tied as it was to the definition of marriage as natural, the classification carried with it the judgment that the single woman was not natural. In Greg's discussion, she emerges as "the evil and anomaly to be cured [his emphasis]" (54). Frances Power Cobbe draws attention to Greg's imagery of "disease" in her own discussion of the situation of single women, "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?" (595). Another supporter of validation for woman on her own, John Stuart Mill, also recognized the pathologizing of the unmarried woman, pointing out that she "is felt by both herself and others to be a kind of excrescence on the surface of society..." (qtd. in Jalland 259). Thus, not only was the single woman situated outside the domain of participatory society, she was viewed as an affliction on that society as well. In this context in which marriage and children were used to differentiate the normal woman from

the abnormal, Frances Power Cobbe's comment on "[t]he theory about woman called the Physical" takes on further significance. By affirming that it is this theory that is "monstrous," Cobbe strikes a blow against the doctrine, and the society, which determines single women to be the same.

The marginal position of the unmarried woman in middle-class society was embodied in some fascinating ways. W.R. Greg's "remedy" (59), for instance, for the anomaly which he identified in his nation's unmarried women was "the removal of 500,000 women from the mother-country, where they are redundant, to the colonies, where they are sorely needed" (89). Distinct from the project of such feminists as Maria Rye to secure employment for single women in the colonies, Greg's emigration plan aimed at their marriage.[4] Using simple statistics, he identified the need for women (read wives) in the outlying regions of the Empire, and concluded that since England had too many women, the redundant ones should go. Such reductive logic underlines the reductive nature of the conservative view of women; yet Greg, an "influential journalist" (Vicinus, Independent 3), makes his case without self-consciousness. In a similar vein, Punch offers as a straightforward news item, the following report on female emigration:

> 'Out of the female immigrants who recently arrived at Melbourne by the William Stewart, eight were married within 24 hours after their landing.'

(Rover 22)[5]

To those who viewed marriage as women's raison d'être, then, emigration appeared a delightful way to assist England's spinsters. However, not everyone saw it that way. Frances Power Cobbe, for instance, depicted it as another thing entirely. In "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?", in part a response to Greg's emigration scheme, Cobbe observes that unmarried women appear to stand accused of proliferating: she declares emigration their punishment and lack of respectability or income at home a deterrent for any "future evil doers." "No false charity to criminals!" proclaims Cobbe. "Transportation or starvation to all old maids!" (599). Thus, in a humorous way, Cobbe exposes the disciplinary standard to which women were subject at mid-century, revealing that to be a woman and unmarried was to be condemned to a life on the margins of society. That sending unmarried women to the Empire's literal margins was "a popular antifeminist solution" (Hammerton 57) to their unwanted presence serves as a concrete reminder of that fact.

Other signs of the Victorian impulse to banish unmarried women appeared in less literal, though equally telling, forms. Where many conservatives would assign to spinsters the same fate as to convicts, the time spent as a governess could lead to the fate of the madwoman. As Martha

Vicinus points out in Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920, "[t]he genteel poor woman had a choice of three underpaid and overcrowded occupations -- governess, companion, or seamstress" (3). Thus the unmarried woman who needed to support herself was quite likely to end up a governess. At the same time, governesses occupied a disproportionate number of spaces in mental hospitals. Harriet Martineau reported in her 1859 survey "Female Industry" that "on the female side of the lunatic asylums, the largest class...of the insane...[are] governesses" (qtd. in Yates 22).[6] But the single woman's position on the fringes of society showed up also in less dramatic ways. In social situations, for instance, her marital status held more significance than her family name. Thus, she had to wait while any married woman went in to dinner and would find her place farther from the head of the table when she arrived herself (Caine, Wives 86). In fact, the title "Miss." betokened such social disesteem that the successful journalist Harriet Martineau, having reached the dignified age of fifty-two, claimed the title "Mrs." although she remained unmarried (Yates 23).[7] This gesture towards full recognition by a woman whose writing already had made her visible points up the disregard experienced by the unmarried woman. Whether a public figure or a retiring daughter, her lot always was to be less. The significance

of such minimizing perhaps is best recognized, however, from the perspective of the archivist. Certainly, it is revealed at its most poignant. In her study Women, Marriage, and Politics, 1860-1914, Pat Jalland presents the findings of her research on the family papers of over fifty Victorian and Edwardian political families (1). When she turns to a discussion of the unmarried daughters, however, the number of families is reduced to twelve. "Family papers," explains Jalland, "were generally kept by the husband or sons of the married women, and most spinsters emerge only as occasional shadows in the background of their more fortunate married sisters' correspondence" (253). Not only were they marginalized in their own lifetimes, then, but, as Jalland points out, most middle- and upper-class single women went from the earth with nothing but the "passing references" in other people's letters to show that they had ever been there (253).

The impulse to rid themselves of unmarried women was quite understandable on the part of conservative Victorians. For those who wished to uphold the existing social order, unmarried women in any numbers did indeed "constitute," as Greg put it, "[a] problem to be solved...[his emphasis]" (54). On the one hand, not all middle-class families could afford to support their unmarried daughters: many were ruined in the volatile economy of the early Victorian years;

others simply had too many daughters to support; most were left without means because the father had died, at a time when neither pensions nor life insurance were common (Hughes 27-29). On the other hand, the young lady of the day, rather than being educated to be of use to herself, was being educated because "it improve[d] her usefulness to somebody else," as Harriet Martineau complained in an article entitled "What Women Are Educated For" (qtd. in Yates 98).

Martineau objected to the fact that even the most liberal men, working for the advancement of female education, were doing so with the idea that they were "fitting women to be 'mothers of heroes,' 'companions to men'"(qtd. in Yates 98). Yet this dubious end attached to a college education certainly amounted to a more favourable offering than the same end attached to the highly criticized ornamental education which was standard for middle-class girls of the period. Even the conservative Mrs. Ellis argued for an education more grounded in knowledge lest women end up with "silly husbands, and idiot sons" (Daughters 23). In attacking the aim of the "showy" education -- "to shine and attract" -- Dorothea Beale, founder of Cheltenham Ladies' College, incidentally exposes the difference between the standard education and a more thorough one (qtd. in Hollis 137). While a thorough

education might prepare women to be only good wives and mothers, the standard education prepared them only to secure husbands. Kathryn Hughes outlines the mercenary nature of female education in the early Victorian years in her book The Victorian Governess. "[T]he genteel girl of the 1830s and beyond," writes Hughes,

> was to acquire a set of accomplishments which included the ability to speak French and perhaps Italian, play the piano, dance and show a proficiency in fancy needlework. At the age of eighteen she was expected to take her place in her parents' social circle, using her carefully acquired sophistication as bait to land a husband from the pool of available young men. (17)

In a world in which "[m]arried life is woman's profession," as one piece in the conservative Saturday Review put it (qtd. in Hollis 11), an education which opens the door to marriage appears not only "suitable" (Hughes 17), but necessary.

For the woman who "failed in business" "by not getting a husband" (again the piece in the Saturday Review), this "training" obviously was inadequate (qtd. in Hollis 11). To add insult to injury, not only would she have been educated only to catch a husband, but also she would have been warned away from any more useful training in case it impeded her chances of marriage. To prove marriageable, the young genteel woman had to show that she expected to marry, and training of a more practical kind would not be consistent

with such an aim (Hughes 17, 38).[8] Moreover, too much education was deemed to render a woman, simply, unattractive. "The one thing men do not like is the man-woman," writes the author of an 1869 article entitled "Female Education" in the Quarterly Review, "and they will never believe the College, or University, woman is not of that type" (qtd. in Hollis 144). A cartoon of the period appearing in Punch captures the oppositional relationship set up by the Victorians between education and marriage. In it, a teacher, clearly meant to be unattractive, chides her young pupils about the neglect of their studies. The caption reads: "Teacher. 'I wonder what your mother would say if she knew how backward you are in geography?' Girl. 'Oh, my mother says she never learnt jogfry and she's married, and Aunt Sally says she never learnt jogfry and she's married; and you did and you ain't'" (pictured in Yates 86).[9] The girls have learned one lesson well: they know what is needed to pursue successful careers as women, and they know that their teacher, with all her learning, has not been a success. Given such a context, few women received the education necessary to pursue any profession other than marriage;[10] consequently, for the women who were not to marry yet who were forced by financial necessity to take up another profession, the prospects were grim.

Thus, the Victorians had on their hands a body of ill-

trained, unsupported single women of a class that propriety would not allow to be overlooked. At the same time, however, the class restrictions that kept them untrained also prevented them from taking up occupations for which much education would not be required. Beyond the occupations of governess, companion, or seamstress the requirements of gentility would not allow the middle-class lady to venture. Martha Vicinus explains that it was this middle-class value system that confined single women to such a meagre selection: before the appearance of a wealthy and genteel middle-class in the early nineteenth-century, unmarried women had figured prominently in the economic and social landscape and had done so for centuries (Independent 3). Fortunately, the training the middle-class girl did get would allow her to take up one of these few positions without additional education. She had been taught how to sew (Hughes 151) and brought up from birth to fulfil her role as a relative creature. As to the position for which some vocational training might have been deemed necessary, that of governess, the Victorians believed her to be naturally qualified also (Vicinus, Independent 24).[11] Further, any deficiencies she detected in her own education, for instance, the ability to play the piano or speak French fluently, she could attend to on her own (Hughes 38-42).[12] In addition, an effort was being made by feminists to

circumvent the requirements of gentility. A group of women known as "the ladies of Langham Place" (for the location of their "offices") worked to expand the selection of jobs available to middle-class women, most notably through the periodical they founded, the English Woman's Journal (1858) (Vicinus, Independent 24).[13] They encouraged gentlewomen to interrupt the connection between paid work and class and radically altered the inventory of what women were equipped naturally to do (Rendall 121-123). However, even by the early twentieth century, few women had ventured far beyond the range of opportunities available to their predecessors (Vicinus, Independent 25, 5). Certainly in the mid-nineteenth century, they remained crowding in the occupations which constituted their only real options (Vicinus, Independent 3).

On top of having produced a class of women for whose existence they had not provided, the Victorians at mid-century were faced with spinsters in numbers they had not seen before (Vicinus, Independent 27). Pat Jalland observes that "[t]he 1851 census caused considerable concern" because it affirmed the existence of 1,407,225 unmarried women between the ages of 20 and 40 in England and Wales (254). In addition, it showed that were every woman to resolve that she would do exactly what society asked of her, she could not: there were not enough men in England and Wales to match

the women. Women outnumbered men 104.2 to 100 reported the census (Jalland 255). These figures were a reflection primarily of higher child mortality rates for males; however, this inherent imbalance was exacerbated by the drain on the male population caused by emigration and foreign service (Jalland 255; Hollis 33). Moreover, women who might have expected to marry as they entered their twenties were confronted with the trend of middle- and upper-class men to delay marriage until they were financially secure (Jalland 255). Finally, the statistics worsened with each succeeding census (Jalland 255).

It was this situation which led Greg to identify his nation's unmarried women as a problem to be solved, and given the situation, perhaps the emigration scheme appeared kind-hearted to his conservative supporters. But what is interesting about what in fairness can be described as a problem is the dimensions it takes for the mid-Victorians. Martha Vicinus' analysis of the statistics, for instance, is instructive. She points out that although their absolute numbers were increasing, unmarried women were not proliferating in the way the contemporary response suggested: their percentage of the total female population remained the same over the second half of the nineteenth century (Independent 26-27). In spite of the debate over what to do with women who did not marry, seven out of eight

still did (26). Too, the number of women in the middle class who remained unmarried, that class of women who were inspiring all this attention, was small, relatively speaking. Vicinus calculates it to be 30,698 based on the figure for all unmarried women in the 1851 census (27). Further, she draws attention to the disparity between the number of these women who would need to work and the vastly larger number of unmarried working-class women, who outnumbered all middle-class spinsters to begin with by about six to one (26-27). Yet, even though their numbers were "very small"(27), poor genteel spinsters garnered much attention in the papers of the day, joining their relatively small parent group of middle-class single women as a puzzlingly significant social problem (26, 12).

One reason for the discrepancy between Vicinus' more modest figures and the alarming figures cited by Jalland (beyond the class distinction Vicinus incorporates) is the age group on which Vicinus focusses. While Jalland cites a range of figures, beginning with the largest one, for the twenty to forty age group, she includes no statistics for women over forty-five; Vicinus, on the other hand, reviews only the numbers for women over forty-five, postulating that women were unlikely to marry after that age (26). Taking Jalland's perspective, one accounts for the women who considered themselves spinsters though they eventually

married as well as the women who never married; taking Vicinus', one considers only the women who never married. On the other hand, Vicinus concedes that there would have been "many" women aware from a much earlier age that they would remain unmarried (27). But she includes these women, that is, those of them who needed to work, in her quantifying of poor genteel spinsters to working-class spinsters. Thus, as is invariably the case when statistics are employed, each writer fits the samples she provides to the point she is making, Jalland wishing to outline the problem and Vicinus wishing to amend it.[14]

In spite of their different approaches to the Victorians' treatment of the spinster, however, both writers comment on the kind of attention drawn by her at this point in history (Jalland 254; Vicinus 12). "[T]he Victorians wrote as if they had invented 'redundant women,'" observes Jalland, yet unmarried women in significant numbers had been a feature of society for centuries before (254). Why the Victorians behaved as if vast numbers of single women had appeared suddenly in their time and formed an obvious social ill is a question both authors invite their readers to entertain. Although neither is concerned with formulating theories to answer the question, Vicinus does offer a practical account of the belief that the unmarried woman was coming to occupy a larger and larger portion of the female

population. She points both to the increase in sheer numbers of middle-class spinsters and to her uncommon visibility (27). On the one hand, work made the spinster more visible: the presence in the public sphere of a body of middle-class working women could not go unnoticed (27), especially since these women were struggling in conditions not commensurate with their social status (23);[15] on the other, the very attention she was drawing in the press made it seem like her numbers were greater than they were (27). Yet perhaps the key to the larger question lies in the attention itself, too. That is, if there were a reason for the Victorians to "invent 'redundant women,'" as Jalland put it, the attention might be seen as an end in itself.

Beyond the schemes to send her overseas, to pack her off to the asylum, to ignore her at the dinner table, perhaps there was this: the wish to make the spinster vanish by training on her the public eye. If they could not eradicate her in body, perhaps they could eradicate her in soul. The logic of such a scheme is mapped out by Michel Foucault in Discipline and Punish. Exploring in the book at large the evolution of discipline as the modern method of state control, Foucault describes in the second and third chapters (part three), "The means of correct training" and "Panopticism," the correlation between observation and control. There, he provides ample evidence of the way in

which social scrutiny leads to the creation of the individual, a fully known and controlled unit of humanity. In effect, whatever one is prior to description is replaced by whatever the authorities deem one to be : the unspeakable essence vanishes. Moreover, Foucault draws "Panopticism" to a close (and with it part three, entitled "Discipline") with a discussion of the rudimentary nature of this process to "the human sciences," which materialized in the nineteenth century (226). In other words, not only does Discipline and Punish furnish the theory which would support this explanation of the conspicuous Victorian spinster, but also it locates the beginning of the theory's modern career in the Victorian age. Hence, we can say not only that this might be why the Victorians turned their attention to the spinster--to get rid of her--but also that it would be like them to do it.

While the nineteenth century saw the consolidation of this kind of control into the knowledge-producers we depend on today, the method itself according to Foucault is characteristic simply of the modern age. He explains how focussing attention on those who need to be controlled is the way in which disciplinary power operates:

> Disciplinary power...imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. ...Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be

> seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in subjection. (187)

The visibility of the subjugated is what sets this modern form of power apart from power as it was "[t]raditionally" exercised, wherein "[t]hose on whom it was exercised could remain in the shade..." (187).

In order to understand how relentless appearance can result in subjection of the magnitude of which Foucault writes, one must look to his discussion of the examination, of which the description above forms part. It is through his consideration of what he later calls "a concentrated or formalized form" of disciplinary technology that Foucault details the action of observation in the generation of control (227). Moreover, what becomes clear through this account is that the scope of control is consequent to the limitlessness of observation -- that is, that Foucault considers observation in its broadest sense.

Ultimately, to be made visible means to be made an object of description. Whether one encounters the disciplinary gaze materially or spiritually, what matters are the observations that attend it. In this way, one may be observed endlessly because wherever one is "capture[d] and fix[ed]," one is observed (189). The examination embodies this triad: the body may be examined; the mind may be examined; but always upon the attention follows the

observation. Thus, in introducing the examination, Foucault establishes a context in which visibility means subjection.

But this is not to say that the examination acts as a mere device to determine the meaning of observation in this discussion of disciplinary power; rather, it garners a place in the discussion because it is coincident with disciplinary power. In other words, as "a concentrated or formalized form" (227) of disciplinary technology, the examination partakes in discipline's investing of observation with the power to dispose the citizenry (170); it is inseparable from this modern functioning of observation. Through Foucault's discussion of the examination, then, we learn how observation generates a regulated population: how to watch and describe means to fashion an exploitable entity: the individual (170).

What is central to such description is the actuation of the norm. Foucault outlines its emergence in the eighteenth century as a new and pre-eminent kind of power, then identifies it (along with its antecedent, the gaze) as the engine of the examination. Exerting "a normalizing gaze" over its subjects, the examination locates the examined in the terrain of normal (184); moreover, it marks the wanderers from that terrain. As Foucault explains in diagramming normalization, part of the action involves "trac[ing] the limit that will define difference in relation

to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal..." (183). What is interesting here is that, while describing (and documenting) the location of subjects with respect to the norm and to each other results in a field of useful individuals (192), it is that external frontier which marks the point at which the most intense force is exerted. Those who appear farthest afield are those who are most individualized. "In a system of discipline," Foucault writes,

> the child is more individualized than the adult, the patient more than the healthy man, the madman and the delinquent more than the normal and the non-delinquent. In each case, it is towards the first of these pairs that all the individualizing mechanisms are turned in our civilization[.] (193)

Accordingly, one can conclude that where the attention of society is turned upon certain of its members and involves characterizing them as belonging to a space removed from the rest (that is, one where those members are highly individualized), there the system exerts its maximum control.

Foucault closes his account of this exercise of power with a call to recognize power as a creative rather than an oppressive force. That is, "it produces reality," rather than influencing it (194). If we consider the attention trained on the spinster in the nineteenth century from this point of view, we might affirm indeed that "the Victorians

invented 'redundant women'"; and not only that, but also that this creation was the product of their maximum effort to control. They made unmarried women the subject of social scrutiny and described them not only as redundant (a description itself which turns on a manufactured difference), but also as unnatural: the "excrescence," the "anomaly" who is the Victorian spinster. By creating such an individual, the Victorians transform their problem. They take what they have rendered a useless resource (by describing all women in terms of their physical capability) and make it one they can exploit (by designating the non-compliants a problem). In creating their own anatomy of the spinster, they place single women at their disposal.

This fabrication--the aberrant single woman--makes an object of every woman on her own. This is what is known of her; she can be nothing more. But the action of observation does not end here. For, ultimately, those who fall under the disciplinary gaze make objects of themselves; they "be[come]," explains Foucault, "the principle of [their] own subjection" (203). Thus, we can think of single women as, on the one hand, participating in their own disfigurement and, on the other, dismissing their essential selves; and we can think of the Victorians, who have set the examination of the single woman in motion and wish to make "the everyday individuality" of unmarried women disappear,[16] as relying on

the women themselves to do it (191).

To appreciate what might take place at the psychological level when the single woman enacts her own aberrance we need to recall what facilitates her ostracism in the first place: the exploitation of the female body. It is by defining women in terms of their bodies and their bodies in terms of their social utility that the Victorians effect the regulation of women. Rather than being described merely as an unmarried woman, then, the spinster is described as an unnatural woman; her body remains unused and she becomes, therefore, abnormal.

This conflation of body and soul characterizes the single woman's aberrance. As the following description illustrates, not only was the Victorians' incarnation of the single woman extremely individualized (that is, not only did it set her apart from the rest), but also it turned on her removal from the sexual economy. "It is a fact that can hardly have escaped the notice of anyone," writes Richard Carlile in 1838,

> that women who have never had sexual commerce begin to droop when about twenty-five years of age, that they become pale and languid, that general weakness and irritability, a sort of restless, nervous fidgettyness takes possession of them, and an absorbing process goes on, their forms degenerate, their features sink, and the peculiar character of the old maid becomes apparent. (qtd. in Jalland 256)

The lack of discrimination apparent in Carlile's rendering

of the spinster between physical and psychological traits reveals the extent to which her identity is generated from her woman's body. Moreover, the symptomatic nature of those traits makes clear her removal from the norm, that norm, in turn, based on this body being in circulation.[17] Finally, as Carlile himself indicates at the close of the passage, this is how the spinster can be known; it is through this description of her woman's body that every woman who has not married is to be identified. In other words, here is the individual into which every single woman is to disappear.

When one considers that, as Pat Jalland points out, this is the testimony of a "radical publisher" and sexual "progressive," one must be impressed with a sense of this creation's authority (256). It is small wonder that the women whom society relegated to "a sort of sub-animal class," to use Carlile's phrase, were affected by this designation (qtd. in Jalland 256). In her study of single women from mid-century, Martha Vicinus addresses, for example, the tendency among feminist and non-political single women alike to manufacture asexual versions of themselves (Independent 17-18). This idea that the individualizing of single women should result in their alienating themselves from their own desires reveals itself more fully in the light of an additional theoretical perspective, one engendered in Luce Irigaray's This Sex

Which Is Not One.

Emerging from a consideration of an early chapter of the same name and a later one, entitled "Women on the Market," is the notion that women are alienated from their own bodies in a society that reserves desire for men. Further, based on what Irigaray says about the virgin in the later chapter, we can visualize the lot of the spinster, in particular, within this framework. What becomes clear is that in such a society, in which women make contact with desire only as objects of it, the spinster is utterly disembodied; even this object relation to desire is denied her. Without substance, without desire, the spinster fades to a mere shadow in this account of the sexes.

What This Sex Which Is Not One provides us with, then, is a means by which to locate Foucault's concept of individualization in the arena of sexual politics. By offering accounts of the exploitation of the female body, it furnishes the details of how a particular individual, woman as object, is made. Moreover, because the details pertain to the relation of this objectified woman to a female subject, we obtain a bountiful view of the psychological experience of objectification; and, given the availability of a more convergent angle, of the single woman's experience of objectification, in particular. Hence, the introduction of Irigaray's work allows us not only to substantiate our

application of Foucault's, but also to extend its scope to the psychological realm.

Finally, as Vicinus' addressing the Victorian single woman and asexuality indicates, theory which provides an account of the banishing of single women's desire is singularly appropriate for gaining an understanding of the Victorian spinster. In fact, a construction which depends on the defining of women in terms of their bodies demands an approach which, similarly, is based on the body. In this sense, Irigaray's work partakes of the temper which guides and shapes Victorian society.

Moreover, that certain Victorians conceived of women not merely in terms of their exploitable bodies, but in those terms within an economic framework is clear from the writing of conservatives like W.R. Greg and the author of "Queen bees or working bees" (the Saturday Review piece). Indeed, where the author of "Queen bees" stipulates that the spinster "has failed in business," Greg spells out the economics of spinsterhood fully.

The unmarried woman, he proposes, has failed to marry because her "rival circle," "the demi-monde," offers the single man a better deal (77); his emigration plan will increase "the value" of women by creating a market demand for them, meaning that "men will not be able to obtain women's companionship and women's care so cheaply on illicit

terms" (89). For their part, single women must increase their appeal by appropriating the "charms" of their "cheap[er]" competition (77). In this way, bachelors might be induced "to purchase it in the recognized mode" (89).

The Saturday Review's spinster "fail[ing] in business" requires some deconstruction: this woman, whose product is herself, has failed to find a buyer. But the link between commerce and the female body in Greg is obvious; there could hardly be a more pointed way of conveying the purpose of all women than characterizing marriage as "the recognized mode" of obtaining their "companionship." Likewise, Irigaray's thinking on embodied woman comprehends the idea that woman is an object to be traded, as the title of the second of the chapters mentioned--"Women on the Market"--no doubt suggests. Thus, if the market approach of the Review author and Greg is to be considered representative, we can predicate a finer congruence between a Victorian conception of women and Irigaray's thought than their beginning from the body. For in Irigaray's analysis of "women on the market," we encounter, theorized, the very ideology which conservatives like Greg disclose when describing women as commodities. In other words, Irigaray's work offers an explicit analysis of the commodifying system through which Victorian single women (ultimately owing to obscured desire) were effaced.

According to Irigaray, women function in "patriarchal societies" in the same way as commodities function in Marx' capitalist societies: "as the elementary form of...wealth" (172). This means that their usefulness as physical objects is subordinated to the abstract value which men, as producers, assign to them and which represents not "some intrinsic, immanent value of the commodity," but the value of the labour expended by men in its "fabricat[ion]" (176) (174-75). Because women, as commodities, have no value in themselves, this abstract value can only be apprehended when they are compared to one another, using the "measurement [of each] against a third term that remains external to her" (176). "Woman thus has value," emphasizes Irigaray, "only in that she can be exchanged" (176). She sums up the apportionment of a woman into a useful body and a valuable body in the following:

> Women-as-commodities are thus subject to a schism that divides them into the categories of usefulness and exchange value; into matter-body and an envelope that is precious but impenetrable, ungraspable, and not susceptible to appropriation by women themselves; into private use and social use. (176)

In accordance with this system, women in patriarchal society are defined by the situation of their bodies, resulting in three possible classifications: mother, virgin, or prostitute (184-86). Because the usefulness of her body to society outweighs any abstract value men could assign it

(and thus presents a threat to the system), the mother is kept out of "circulat[ion]"; she is "marked with the name of the father and enclosed in his house...[as] private property" (185). In contrast to the mother, who is all matter-body, the virgin, untouched, is all fabrication; she is "pure exchange value"(186). At the other extreme, the prostitute, like the mother, is all useful body, but hers is a usefulness which belongs to men rather than eluding them; in consequence, she, unlike the mother, can be circulated without threat, yet, unlike the virgin, represents no value to exchange (186).

As "pure exchange value," the virgin, of all women, is most dissociated from her body and most associated with the values of men:

> She is nothing but the possibility, the place, the sign of relations among men. In and of herself, she does not exist: she is a simple envelope veiling what is at stake in social exchange. (186)

But the spinster, a confirmed virgin, cannot be even this. If the virgin in and of herself does not exist, but only as the possibility of what she can mean to men, then the spinster does not exist at all, since she is nothing either in and of herself or to men. She no longer represents the possibility of relations among men because she no longer has any exchange value; her body no longer "constitutes the material support of [her] price"(175).[18] She is out of

circulation, but has never been claimed as private property; she is on the shelf.

What such defining of women has to do with the way any woman might experience herself is a point engaged also in the discussion of "women on the market." Irigaray entertains psychological considerations of both a socially prescriptive and an experiential nature. For instance, in detailing the process through which a flesh-and-blood woman assumes "a transparent body," that is, the body of exchange, Irigaray adverts to the social imperative that women become what they are not (179). "Participation in society requires," observes Irigaray, "that the body submit itself to a specularization, a speculation, that transforms it into a value-bearing object, a standardized sign, an exchangeable signifier, a 'likeness' with reference to an authoritative model" (179-180). Further along in the discussion, in fact bracketing her review of the classification of women, Irigaray addresses this imperative in explicitly psychological terms. She considers how society represents the objectification of women as the model of "'normal feminine" "'development'" (185-187).[19]

Subject to the truth prescribed for them, women are positioned to experience themselves as what they are not. On the one hand, they become intent on the object that is valued by men; on the other, they become oblivious to their

own desire. Irigaray treats each effect within a larger discussion of the hegemony of male desire. Considering the extent to which women collaborate in the system that belies them, she observes that they end (as men wish them to end) "preoccupied with their respective values"(179). At the same time, they are alienated from what they value, from what they want. To belong to a society powered by male desire (184) means "that woman maintain in her own body the material substratum of the object of desire, but that she herself never have access to desire," affirms Irigaray(188). Significantly, women experience themselves in this way even in the absence of men, or "among themselves," as Irigaray prefers. "Among themselves," she determines, "they are separated by his speculations" (188). In other words, the influence of commodification is absolute; women are "uprooted from their 'nature'" and, not themselves, can only "relate to each other...in terms of what they represent in men's desire, and according to the 'forms' that this imposes upon them" (188).

The idea that women cannot <u>be</u> themselves, that they are denied the role of subject, is one which Irigaray reshapes throughout <u>This Sex Which Is Not One</u>. One of the forms which this development takes is her play with the mirror. Although it represents in part a reply to the teachings of Lacan and Freud on the mirror stage of psychological

development, Irigaray's employment of the mirror as a way to conceptualize the relationship between men and women pertains primarily to her own schema; in other words, the mirror in Irigaray functions as a substantive image.[20] In "Women on the Market," Irigaray deploys the mirror to unfold the operation by which women are made signifiers of men's labour and strangers to themselves. There, she explains that the exchangeability of women means not that they partake of community but that they each reflect the intervention of man. As "fabricat[ions]," women are mirrors of man's "activity" (176-77). "The mirror that envelops and paralyzes the commodity," writes Irigaray, appending this new image to the body/envelope construct (176), "specularizes, speculates (on) man's 'labor.' Commodities, women, are a mirror of value of and for man" (177). By showing women as mirrors, Irigaray reveals the magnitude of their alienation from self: they exist as nothing more than specular surfaces to reflect the only subject in society, man.

An appeal to the visual realm as a means of conveying the non-existence of women is not confined, however, to Irigaray's play with the mirror; she engages the politics of vision directly in "This Sex Which Is Not One," assigning to it primary importance in the unmaking of women. Where Irigaray explores this unmaking from a socio-economic

perspective in "Women on the Market," in this chapter she addresses it from the point of view of desire itself. Thus, we find here a discussion of, for one thing, the disjunction between "female eroticism" and "the predominance of the visual" obtaining in the Western "sexual imaginary" (25-26). This "dominant scopic economy" ensures that women cannot participate as subjects: their sexual anatomy necessarily excludes them because it "represents the horror of nothing to see" (26). At the same time, their bodies stand in as erotic objects, there "to stimulate the drives of the 'subject...'" (26). "Woman...is to be the beautiful object of contemplation," affirms Irigaray; she is to arouse male desire and remain a stranger to her own (26). In this chapter, then, we gain particular insight into Irigaray's election of the visual to demonstrate the defining of women in terms of what they are not. It signifies a way in which women are excluded at a fundamental level--by virtue of their bodies--from active participation in society.[21] Moreover, it is practised in such a way as to render the pleasure of looking remote from women's experience of vision (25-26). As well as revealing the extent to which the politics of vision can be implicated in the objectification of women, then, "This Sex Which Is Not One" particularizes its effects. Not only does objectification result in women becoming intent on their status as objects, it results in

their experiencing men's gaze as a measure of that status; not only do they become oblivious to their own desire, but also to the possibility that vision could bear any relation to it. We learn here that to be objectified means more than to have one's being eclipsed by a fabrication; it means to have one's entire relationship to vision distorted.

Vision, it will have become evident, occupies a privileged position in the thinking of both Irigaray and Foucault. Whether one is considering the objectification attendant on individualization discussed in Foucault, or the objectification (and commodification) of women treated in Irigaray, vision plays a central role. It is observation which powers the process Foucault discusses, while it is the visual realm which provides imagery for and an exemplar of the process Irigaray discusses. Moreover, each conceptualizes vision as a hostile force. In each construct, a fabricating gaze comes between a body and its essence. The gaze produces of that body an object of use to society, dispensing with its wilful subjecthood. In other words, the product eclipses the being, rendering her/him, to all intents and purposes, invisible.

What Foucault and Irigaray show us, then, are ways of thinking about the spinster within a visual framework, a framework particularly illuminating with respect to the Victorian spinster. Her predicament turns on her continuing

presence in the face of every social interdiction against it. In spite of the fact that there is no place for her in a society where women exist to marry, there she is. In spite of the fact that her unused body has been made immaterial, there it is. This offending visibility is laid bare by the theories of Foucault and Irigaray. We see the shadowy figure beyond the glorified object of desire and its essence with the help of Irigaray. And we appreciate, because of that view, what small appeal might lie in such glorified objectification to the spinster, for whom even the basest recognition might seem preferable to utter nullity. Yet, as we gather from Foucault, the recognition accorded the spinster when taken as a woman--that is, when observed from the standpoint of her material attributes--is monstrous. When the spinster appears in her bodily form it is as the product of a society which wishes to dispense with her and offers her to view accordingly. Exhibited as an "anomaly," a representative of "a sort of sub-animal class," the spinster garners attention which she would no doubt rather do without. Hence, we are confronted, in the Victorian era, with a world in which a single woman is either shadow or spectacle; indeed, in which it is this woman's very insubstantiality which exposes her as spectacle. We are confronted with a world, at last, in which every single woman must feel a terrible pressure, body

and soul, to disappear.

Making her way through such a world was Charlotte Brontë. Although she lived the last months of her life as a married woman, for the most part, her life was lived in the face of such social negation. Moreover, hers was the lot not merely of the unmarried woman of the early Victorian era, but of the unmarried woman whose misfortune it was to need to support herself.[22] The eldest of three living daughters in the family of a clergyman whose resources were committed to the only son, Brontë found herself at nineteen charged not only with the responsibility of supporting herself but also with the opportunity of providing support (in the form of a free education) for another of the sisters (Gérin 92 and 98).[23] Taking on her duty, she went to teach at Roe Head school, a situation which became, in part due to her disinclination for teaching (98), "very nearly intolerable," according to Winifred Gérin (108). Desire, however, did not enter the province of the genteel working woman, and Brontë continued to take teaching positions as long as "Duty--Necessity," the "stern mistresses" to whom she adverted on first going out as a teacher, demanded it ("To Ellen Nussey" 2 July 1835, W&S 1: 129).

The person to whom she avouched this submitting to necessity was Ellen Nussey, a friend from Brontë's student days at Roe Head. What she declared to Nussey next,

though, intimates that she submitted ruefully. "Did I not once say Ellen you ought to be thankful for your independence?" Brontë writes. "I felt what I said at the time, and I repeat it now with double earnestness...." The nature of teaching at the time, in particular of private governessing, explains in part Brontë's aversion to what was the single woman's prime option for earning a living. As letters from her first situation as a governess attest, this dependant was required to behave as a resource only, while sharing a home with her employer's family. From the Sidgwick household, Brontë writes to her sister Emily in June 1839, "I see now more clearly than I have ever done before that a private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living and rational being except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil" ("To Emily Brontë" 8 June 1839, W&S 1: 178). The extent to which the governess was required to conform to this utility model, in effect suppressing any signs of her humanity, is suggested by an incident recounted by Brontë in a letter to Ellen Nussey written a few weeks later. In it, Brontë describes how "seem[ing] depressed," she "was taken to task on the subject by Mrs Sidgwick with a stress of manner and a harshness of language scarcely credible" ("To Ellen Nussey" 30 June 1839, W&S 1: 180). It is little wonder that the keynote of a subsequent dispatch to Emily is Brontë's desire

to liberate herself. Whether picturing herself "at home" or "work[ing] in a mill," Brontë projects herself into a situation in which she can "feel mental liberty" and suffer "this weight of restraint to be taken off" ("To Emily Brontë" July 1839, W&S 1: 181).

Having experienced the nullifying nature of teaching firsthand, Brontë now no doubt felt the truth of her charge to the financially secure Nussey (Barker 176; Gérin 73) with renewed weight. But she was equally cognizant of the incontrovertibility of her own lot. "[T]he Poor are born to labour, and the Dependent to endure" Brontë reminds herself after Mrs. Sidgwick's scolding (as she tells Nussey in the letter describing it) (W&S 1: 180). She leaves the peculiarity of this form of dependence to single women, however, for another school-friend to evince. It is Mary Taylor who, in commenting on Elizabeth Gaskell's recent biography of Brontë (1857), exposes the customary nature of thwarted selfhood for women who are dependent. Picking up the phrase used by one of two reviewers to describe Brontë's life, Taylor writes to Gaskell, "Neither of them [the reviewers] seems to think it a strange or wrong state of things that a woman of first-rate talents, industry, and integrity should live all her life in a walking nightmare of 'poverty and self-suppression.' I doubt whether any of them will" ("Mary Taylor to Elizabeth Gaskell" 30 July 1857,

Stevens 133). Taylor's location of Brontë's financial and psychological suffering within a feminist context sets up a relationship between female labour and the negation of self; the woman in Brontë's position who needs to support herself will necessarily endure the pressure to fade away. But it is Taylor's estimation of her contemporaries' oblivion to this injury, evidence of the aplomb with which it was viewed, which leaves the more lasting impression perhaps of what the working single woman had to face.

Not all Brontë's experience of single life pertains to her years as a wage earner, however. The constraint of which her biography speaks belongs too to her subsequent time at home. Moreover, given her age at the point at which circumstances conspired to commit her to the parsonage (almost twenty-eight), we might consider Brontë's time there as most representative of her experience of spinsterhood. Certainly her early years at home as an older unmarried woman represent a time in which she thought in a deliberate way about what was clearly becoming her fate (although she claimed at twenty-three, "I made up my mind to that fate ever since I was twelve years old") ("To Ellen Nussey" 4 Aug. 1839, W&S 1: 184). To her former teacher and colleague at Roe Head, Miss Wooler, she writes at the beginning of her third year at home, "I speculate much on the existence of unmarried and never-to-be married women now-a-days" ("To

Margaret Wooler" 30 Jan. 1846, W&S 2: 76). Yet it was undoubtedly the very nature of life at home for an unmarried daughter which engendered such speculation.

As Frances Power Cobbe puts it in "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?", life for a woman not following "a pursuit" was likely to be "helpless, aimless, and miserable" (597). In fact, she identifies this "life without aim or object" as what "goads a[n unmarried] woman into accepting any chance of a change," that is, into marrying to escape it (597). With endless hours of purposeless time on her hands, Beatrice Potter, one of the unmarried women in Pat Jalland's case study, already at twenty described life at home as "almost a torture, a silent misery" (qtd. in Jalland 10). By twenty-eight, "reluctantly resigned...to spinsterhood," according to Jalland (256), she had distilled her feelings into the following terse account: "The position of unmarried daughter at home is an unhappy one even for a strong woman"(qtd. in Jalland 257). Moreover, in keeping with Cobbe's assessment, Potter recognized the source of her suffering as the "absence of any occupation" (qtd. in Jalland 10). Such reports of the life afforded the woman without husband or occupation offer a sense of its power to destroy--of the removal from participation in "real" life and the endless hours in which to brood over it.

Brontë's fresh consciousness about the existence of

unmarried women coincides with an acute awareness of time: time lying heavily over the parsonage yet fleeting away with her unlived life; time owned only by others. From the beginning of her tenancy at Haworth she evinces a conviction that to be at home is to be consigned to oblivion. The letter to Nussey in which she details her decision to stay, for instance, closes with Brontë's admission that "Haworth seems...buried away from the world" and that she "no longer regard[s] [her]self as young." The sense of regret with which she considers these facts of her existence is patent. "[W]hat I wish for now," Brontë has begun this reckoning, "is active exertion--a stake in life"; what she has realized is "[her] duty to restrain this feeling," "to deny [her]self in this matter, and to wait" ("To Ellen Nussey" 23 Jan. 1844, W&S 2: 3).[24]

More than a year after beginning, Brontë is waiting still "to live a life of action" ("Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey" 24 March 1845, W&S 2: 28). Her description of day-to-day existence at the parsonage conveys a sense of the enervating pressure Brontë feels when required to live "without aim or object" (Cobbe): "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" ("To Ellen Nussey" 24 March 1845, W&S 2: 28). At the same time, she is alive to life's

potential and to the erosion of hers by every heavy day at Haworth. "Meantime, life wears away," she broods. "I shall soon be thirty; and I have done nothing yet" [her twenty-ninth birthday is 21 April 1845] ("To Ellen Nussey" 24 March 1845, W&S 2: 28). A year and a half later, Brontë writes again of the passing of time and of her inertia, her letters, like the days, resembling one another. This time, however, a note of urgency has crept into her musing with the recognition that "when [she is] free to leave home," she could be "quite past the prime of life." "[I]f I could leave home Ellen--I should not be at Haworth now," she writes, "--I know life is passing away and I am doing nothing--earning nothing a very bitter knowledge it is at moments--but I see no way out of the mist" ("To Ellen Nussey" 14 Oct. 1846, W&S 2: 115). Her fourth year at home sees her contemplating the approach of another birthday with, as Winifred Gérin estimates it, a "genuine" "sense of the futility of her life" (335). "I shall be 31 next birthday," recites Brontë. "My youth is gone like a dream--and very little use have I ever made of it--What have I done these last thirty years?--Precious little" ("To Ellen Nussey" 24 March 1847, W&S 2: 130).

While her letters indicate that she experienced with considerable pain the pressure on the employed and home-bound single woman alike to suppress life, they indicate too

that she responds to this constraint on a conceptual level. Moreover, her response is marked by an attentiveness to the ways in which the body facilitates this obliterating of single women. For instance, when she reads Harriet Taylor Mill's "Enfranchisement of Women" (1851) in the Westminster Review, Brontë sees "admirable sense," as she writes to Elizabeth Gaskell, in the author's case against the limiting of all women at all times to "one animal function and its consequences," as Taylor Mill styles motherhood (188-189) ("To Elizabeth Gaskell" 20 Sept. 1851, W&S 3: 278). What the activist is taking on is "the maternity argument" against broadening women's vocational choice, that is, "that women must be excluded from active life because maternity disqualifies them for it" (188-89).[25] That Brontë should respond to a portion of "Enfranchisement" that addresses directly the disregarding of single women ("[t]he maternity argument deserts its supporters in the case of single women"(189)) is perhaps unremarkable. But that she should commend in particular the one portion of Taylor Mill's lengthy essay on equal rights in which the author addresses questions of biology is suggestive.[26] Although the argument for the recognition of women's rights is an argument for the single woman's recognition, what stays with Brontë is the obscuring by and the liberation from the socially expedient woman's body.

But Brontë is cognizant too of a further constraint placed on unmarried women by a fabricated womanhood. While they are obscured by being situated on the unproductive side of a reproducing body, they will be subjected to a commodifying gaze if they attempt to cross over. Self-described as "unattractive," to Brontë the prospect of undertaking to become a wife and mother is unappealing ("To Ellen Nussey" 1 April 1843, W&S 1: 296). In fact, she considers it an act of "imbecility" for women lacking what the market values ("To Ellen Nussey" 1 April 1843, W&S 1: 296). A letter to Nussey conveys her sense of the prohibitive risk involved in attempting to cross over. When one considers her position at the time--at the brink of public spinsterhood, yet circulating still in the world outside Haworth--one cannot but be impressed with the danger of what she can not contemplate. A few weeks shy of twenty-seven, she informs Nussey that she "reject[s] with contempt" the idea that she might "make marriage the principal object of [her] wishes and hopes"; women like her must "be able to convince themselves that they are unattractive," she writes, "and that they had better be quiet, and think of other things than wedlock" ("To Ellen Nussey" 1 April 1843, W&S 1: 296). The painful consequences of not convincing themselves remain unspoken, but loom nevertheless as a silent threat informing Brontë's words. Moreover, her final sentiment

directs us back to the constraint operating on the other side of the Victorian spinster; for what other things were there for her to wish and hope for beyond wedlock?

Thus Brontë inhabited a world in which women were circumscribed by their bodies; on the one hand, prevented from exercising any but their physical capacities; on the other, prohibited, if they lacked market value, from exercising even those. What is more, she was sensible of it. Yet the thwarting of the unmarried did not end there. For to remain unmolested by the fabricating gaze, the single woman had to divest herself of her bodily form, to "act and look like marble or clay" ("To Ellen Nussey" 2 April 1845, W&S 2: 30). As Brontë's assertion suggests, she bears witness also to this site of bodily constraint. Writing to Nussey about the behaviour required of the woman who wants not to appear on the market, Brontë agrees that the only recourse is to suspend the transmission of genuine life to the surface, to become "cold--expressionless, bloodless." "[F]or every appearance of feeling of joy--sorrow--friendliness, antipathy, admiration--disgust," concludes Brontë, "are alike construed by the world into an attempt to hook in a husband" ("To Ellen Nussey" 2 April 1845, W&S 2: 30). Although she does not formulate it in this way, in effect, Brontë testifies to the demand on single women to disengage from their bodies if they wish to remain neutral;

in a world in which the female body belongs to society, it appears impossible to conspicuously inhabit one's own without being subjected to interference.

But Brontë's letter to Nussey also apprises its readers of the importance the author places on complete personhood, on traversing the full extent of one's body and soul. "[D]o not...be too much afraid of showing yourself as you are...," Brontë exhorts her friend; "do not condemn yourself to live only by halves, because if you showed too much animation some pragmatical thing in breeches...might take it into its pate to imagine that you designed to dedicate your precious life to its inanity" ("To Ellen Nussey" 2 April 1845, W&S 2: 30-31). Her directness and her withering sarcasm convince us that she "feel[s] rather fierce" about the subject ("To Ellen Nussey" 2 April 1845, W&S 2: 31). Moreover, we are offered a select illustration here of Brontë's view of women as relative creatures. That a woman, on her own, is an organic and valuable entity stands as an unmistakable conviction in Brontë's letter.

While she shows herself sensible, then, of the social pressure to disappear, she is sensible also to an internal pressure to resist. Perhaps most compelling as instances of this internal pressure in action are the three occasions on which Brontë turned down an opportunity to escape, that is, rebuffed a suit of marriage. Although the opportunities

reflect the gap between the social construction of marriage (which Brontë credited) and marriage practice, more importantly, they reveal the inviolability of selfhood to Brontë. Her refusal, in each case, of a socially legitimate suitor[27] stems from a commitment to an animate self.

By her own testimony, Brontë declined her first offer of marriage because she, as the person she knew herself to be, did not figure in the upcoming enterprise. On the one hand, she could not envision the coupling of her character to his; on the other, she discerned that he had no vision of what her character was ("To Henry Nussey" 5 March 1839, W&S 1: 172-73; "To Ellen Nussey" 12 March 1839, W&S 1: 174-75). "...I was aware that Henry knew so little of me he could hardly be conscious to whom he was writing," affirms Brontë in explaining her decision ("To Ellen Nussey" 12 March 1839, W&S 1: 174). The second proposal was rejected for the same reason. Having been asked to marry a man of one day's acquaintance, Brontë clearly did not figure as a complete person in his prospect either. Although she does not spell it out, her disdain at being reckoned so lightly is evident. In fact, to relate even how she answered would be to invite further insult, she implies to Ellen Nussey ("To Ellen Nussey" 4 August 1839, W&S 1: 184). Yet both proposals materialize at a time when Brontë, at twenty-two and -three, is able to treat such matters with a certain degree of ease

herself. She appears also gratified, for instance, by her "adventur[e]" with the precipitate suitor ("To Ellen Nussey" 4 August 1839, W&S 1: 184). Nevertheless, on both occasions, she makes reference to the formidable prospect of becoming an "old maid" [Brontë's words], evincing that the obliterating social pressure was an abiding one.

The third overture to marriage played out before a woman in very different circumstances. Alone now at home, after the deaths of her three siblings, she was confronted with this opportunity to take part in life around the time of her thirty-fifth birthday; moreover, to this suit, her only remaining family, her father, appended his approval (Barker 670-71). Winifred Gérin underscores the seduction of such a chance for Brontë, quoting Brontë's own words of disappointment at the chance fallen through. "'[A] more entire crumbling away of a seeming foundation of support and prospect of hope than that which I allude to, can scarcely be realised...,'" Brontë wrote (qtd. in Gerin 470). Yet it was Brontë herself who forestalled the prospect.

Here we see clear evidence of the competing pressures at work on Brontë. Much as she might wish for a life more supported than her own, she cannot violate the claims of selfhood to secure it. Of the visit paid to her by "the man who had come to engage her troth," as Gérin constructs a visit that could mean only this at the time (469), Brontë

confesses, "I did not want to be proud nor intend to be proud--but I was forced to be so" ("To Ellen Nussey" 9 April 1851, W&S 3: 222). Interestingly, she attributes to God this compulsion away from a man whom she was "predisposed...to regard...very favourably" ("To Ellen Nussey" 4 April 1851, W&S 3: 221); but what signifies is Brontë's consciousness that her "will" has been over-"ruled," that in her there is a force at work more potent than the urge toward orderly conduct ("To Ellen Nussey" 9 April 1851, W&S 3: 222). Because despite her profession of faith, it seems clear that the demand to which she is subject is the demand of an organic self: if she invokes a divine power, she invokes the god within.

The descriptions Brontë provides of her reaction to this suitor are those of a jeopardized self in revolt. "[E]ach moment he came near me--and that I could see his eyes fastened on me--my veins ran ice," she attests ("To Ellen Nussey" 9 April 1851, W&S 3: 222). Unburdening herself again she avows, "Were I to marry him, my heart would bleed in pain and humiliation..." ("To Ellen Nussey" 23 April 1851, W&S 3: 229). Using images of a body and soul responding to encroachment, she makes it clear that she can take this man in neither; her whole being participates in his rejection.

In a contest in which Brontë would have preferred that

the will to accede take precedence, this more insistent power prevails. In coming to a conclusion about the prospect, she bows to the prior claim of self. "No--if Mr. Taylor be the only husband fate offers to me," she writes, "single I must always remain" ("To Ellen Nussey" 23 April 1851, W&S 3: 229). For ultimately, there is no doubt as to which annihilation Brontë holds in greater dread. What Victorian society does to her every day, she cannot do to herself.

Yet Charlotte Brontë was and was not placed as other single women of her day. She speaks herself to the difference in a letter to W.S. Williams, her publisher and friend. Contrasting her lot to that of "many old maids who have neither," she emphasizes how her writing has given her "a hope and motive." Without "a career," she "should have no world at all...," Brontë testifies ("To William Smith Williams" 3 July 1849, W&S 3: 6).[28] But it is her own vocation in particular which allows her to escape the oblivion visited upon other single women, both with and without careers. Because against the pressure to disappear, Charlotte Brontë had this: a public space in which she could affirm with every word, I am here.

Of all her novels, Brontë's last conveys this most insistently to the public. In fact, Villette can be read as a novel which owns as its animating spirit an insistence on

the materiality of single women.

For one thing, its reflection of the pressure constraining the single woman is remarkable. Brontë takes as her protagonist an unmarried middle-class woman without the means to support herself, which means that, at the very least, the novel will reflect something of the spinster's basic struggle to survive in an unaccommodating world. But we are offered a vision of much more complexity in Villette. In Lucy Snowe's journey through the dawning years of spinsterhood,[29] we see unfolded an entire network of observational forces arrayed against the lone woman. As much as her struggle is to provide food and shelter, it is to escape the forces which seek to describe, and thus eliminate, this social misfit.

Yet the experience of constraint does not end there, and Villette reveals what further incursions the spinster must endure. On the one hand, she must contend with the sexual economy which throws her body into shadow; on the other, with her own intractable desire to become the very object which hides her. Like the struggle over her place in society, Lucy's struggle to control the female body takes place at a political level. But her struggle to control her own body as well means that, in this case, the conflict has become internal. Lucy's victories here are less clear-cut, and here, we form a new appreciation of the extent to which

her anomalous position affects her.

Begun soon after the dénouement of the James Taylor affair (Gérin 495) and completed before the courtship by Brontë's future husband (Barker 710-11), Villette chronicles the struggle of a woman on her own against the social and psychological forces which determine her to be nothing. It transforms that image both through its exposure of those forces and its representation of her efforts to overcome them, providing us with the image of a complete human being instead. For her entire adult life, Brontë had lived with the various assaults on her dignity, responding consistently to the pressure on the unmarried woman to be less. What that pressure felt like can be gauged by a comment made by Brontë even after she had escaped it. "[I]f I hear Mr. Clapham or anybody else say anything to the disparagement of single women," she wrote in 1854, "I shall go off like a bomb shell" (qtd. in Foster 74). Perhaps in Villette that is precisely what she did.

Notes

[1] Here Perkin refers directly to "Of Queen's Gardens," and the assessment is made in light of the challenge to the status quo to be found in the sensational fiction of that decade (the 1860s).

[2] Although I have styled it a matter of strategy, as the Showalters point out, the subject of menstruation remained largely untouched due to its indelicate nature (38, 41-42).

[3] Shirley Foster's reference in her introduction to the designation "relative creatures" re-directed my attention to the corresponding passage in Women of England but, more importantly, fixed it on this particularly catching expression of Ellis' fundamental belief (Foster 6).

[4] A. James Hammerton discusses the complexities of the subject of emigration for single women in "Feminism and Female Emigration, 1861-1886," including the controversy over the goal of emigration and Greg's role in it (57).

[5] Constance Rover points out in her survey of Punch's response to women's issues that the inclusion of this type of news item made the magazine's position on women clear (20).

[6] The quotation in full reads as follows: "The physician says that, on the female side of the lunatic asylums, the largest class, but one, of the insane are maids of all work (the other being governesses)." I have exercised some licence with the original in light of its knotty construction.

[7] Yates explains that "Mrs.," originally an abbreviation of the word mistress, was in use until the end of the eighteenth century as an indicator of "female authority in the household." She notes, too, that Martineau was one of a number of single women of the time who moved to reclaim this sign of respect (23).

[8] Less provoking but equally reductive, perhaps, was an objection to career training entertained by Cobbe in "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?". Acquiring the skills required for a career would mean that a young woman would have to "devote to such training the precise years of life wherein the chances of marriage are commonly offered," concedes Cobbe (597). Her answer to such an objection is

that the woman who tries to acquire those skills once these years have passed finds herself in a worse predicament still.

[9] The pupils are at an age when they would be receiving the education standard for younger girls, that is, one that included the study of grammar, history, and geography in addition to the musical, artistic, and language skills that formed the basis of the ornamental education. The academic side of the girl's education was gradually eclipsed by the focus on accomplishments, so that by her mid-teens, the female Victorian student was being schooled primarily on becoming a lady (Hughes 60-61).

[10] In Independent Women, Martha Vicinus provides a telling illustration of the obstacle the poor education of women presented to those women searching for work. She cites the case of "[a]n early group of feminists" whose efforts to secure ladies work in shops meant teaching them arithmetic (22).

[11] Both Vicinus and Hughes point out that women were expected to be able to teach and to nurse without formal training. Hughes goes on to say that nursing became acceptable as a profession only after the pioneering work of Florence Nightingale (Hughes 35).

[12] Not all governesses had the same social, and therefore, educational background. Kathryn Hughes points out that the profession was one where "a substantial minority" of women trying to advance themselves socially met the majority of governesses, leaving behind privilege with their adopted profession (33). She outlines the range of training young women might have for the position (38-42), including the case of daughters of the clergy, who might attend training schools without censure "because their gentility was assumed to be beyond question" (39). Her overall point in this section (38-42), however, is that the prerequisite of gentility precluded formal training for governesses and meant that any young lady without the benefit of the genteelest education would have to supply any deficiencies on her own. Presumably, it meant also that most young ladies would have to upgrade their skills in order to achieve the proficiency of a teacher, not having been prepared by an education sufficient to a student.

[13] Helping individual women find employment and covering employment opportunities in individual publications also formed part of the effort (Vicinus, Independent 24).

But this effort represents only part of what the group, described by Vicinus as the "first organized feminist group," took it upon themselves to do (305n). Their periodical was dedicated to the women's issues of the day, they worked to improve woman's legal position, and it was they who presented the suffrage petition to John Stuart Mill to introduce in Parliament, for instance (Vicinus, Independent 24; Robson and Robson xxviii).

[14] Vicinus' close examination of the statistics represents only part of her excavation of the problem of the spinster for Victorians. In fact, her first chapter, "The Revolt against Redundancy," is organized around the components of the problem as seen from the feminist effort to solve it (Independent 12). In contrast, Jalland provides a brief outline of the status of the spinster, that is, that she represents a problem to society, and goes on to catalogue the responses of individual single women to their status. Both authors concentrate on the lives of women in the later part of the nineteenth century.

[15] Vicinus notes that working-class women employed under "far worse conditions" did not attract attention, because they were struggling in the place society had set them (23).

[16] At this point in the first of the two chapters, Foucault is discussing how, with the advent of disciplinary power, "the everyday individuality of everybody" becomes subject to description. His point here is that what was formerly a privilege of the powerful is now the undoing of the people. Although his subject is the cataloguing of everyday individuality, while I refer to the effect of such attention (the obliteration of everyday individuality), I have quoted from this section because in adverting to this individuality, Foucault distinguishes between it and the fabricated, exploitable individuality to which he normally refers. In other words, here he distinguishes between what exists prior to description and what materializes during it.

[17] As Pat Jalland signifies in reviewing the pathologization of the spinster, the idea that single women were supposed to suffer psychological damage from being sexually inactive runs contrary to an idea then current in medicine that women were sexually inert (256). For an exposition of the twists and turns involved in a Victorian grammar of sexuality, see Peter Cominos, "Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict," especially 159-163.

[18] In distinguishing between a value inhering in women and a value assigned to women by men, Irigaray asserts that "[w]oman's price is not determined by the 'properties' of her body--although her body constitutes the material support of that price" (174-75). Given a context in which this matter-body is tied to reproduction (174), it seems fair to assume that the capacity to support a price is dependent on age.

[19] As she does throughout This Sex, Irigaray effects reverberation here against a version she develops elsewhere by repeating key terms. In this case, she introduces terms which feature in her discussion of Freud's "Femininity" and other writings on women. See "Psychoanalytic Theory: Another Look," 34-49.

[20] Irigaray responds directly to Lacan's analysis of the mirror stage in "The 'Mechanics' of Fluids," 116-118; alternately, she engages the politics of both Freud and Lacan in the discussion of discourse which makes up chapter four, "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine." For the relation of the mirror to this discussion, see in particular 80 and 75.

[21] The equation Irigaray makes explicitly is between objecthood and "passivity" (26).

[22] In Independent Women, Martha Vicinus distinguishes between this generation of middle-class women, "pac[ing] narrow gardens, locked out of wider experience and the opportunity to serve themselves or others," and the next, for whom securing employment was a less formidable task (2).

[23] Brontë was educated at Roe Head for three terms from age fourteen with the purpose of preparing her to be a governess (Barker 169, 181; Gérin 76). Regarding such training, see 43n12 above.

[24] The particular "matter" to which Brontë refers here is the opening of a school, towards which goal she has spent the previous two years studying in Brussels. Both her Belgian venture and the plan to open a school were made possible through the financial support of her Aunt Branwell (Barker 432, 361-63, 409). Now, however, Brontë feels compelled to stay at home, in the absence of her brother and sister Anne, to care for her father, whose sight is failing ("To Ellen Nussey" 23 Jan. 1844, W&S 2: 3). Although her brother's and sister's self-support (Barker 409) make this financially feasible, within the next eighteen months all

the siblings will be at home (Barker 450, 467). But the family situation--brother Branwell's self-destruction through drugs and alcohol now joining her father's visual impairment--means Brontë will continue at home and eventually abandon the school project (Gérin 308). It was under these circumstances that the Brontës, with a view to earning money, began to apply themselves purposefully to authorship (Barker 499; Gerin 308, 331-32). Charlotte Brontë's financial future was transformed with the success of Jane Eyre (1847), for which she received £500 (Barker 527) (twenty-five times her salary at her second governessing job) ("Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey" 3 March 1841, W&S 1: 226). But the deaths of Branwell and then Emily and then Anne within the space of eight months the following year (1848-49) carried away with finality questions of place or money.

[25] There is a close connection between this work and John Stuart Mill's The Subjection of Women, as there was between the two authors, who were married. For a discussion of the relationship between the couple and their work, see the Introduction in Sexual Equality: Writings by John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor Mill, and Helen Taylor.

What Taylor Mill says here about maternity and choice corresponds to what Mill says about marriage and choice in The Subjection, the difference amounting to Taylor Mill's emphasis on the biological aspect of the determinism. See 28-29 above and 328-331 in The Subjection of Women.

[26] The other assertion in "Enfranchisement" for which Brontë offers specific praise concerns the judging of women's employability by the same standard as men's, not by notions of their inherent capability; "let them try," as Brontë phrases it ("To Elizabeth Gaskell" 20 Sept. 1851, W&S 3: 278). It is at this point in the discussion at which Taylor Mill declares her intention to leave aside the issue of sex difference (186-187).

[27] Brontë's suitors were, in order, Henry Nussey, a clergyman, David Pryce, a clergyman, and James Taylor, manager at Smith, Elder & Co. (Barker 300-1, 314, 585, 669-71), all men who might be considered reasonable "matches."

[28] By her own account, the recent deaths of her siblings enter into, but are not solely responsible for, what would be her blank existence ("To William Smith Williams" 3 July 1849, W&S 3: 6). The description surely resonates, then, with the one that has emerged of the common experience of spinsterhood.

[29] As we learn through Ginevra's pointing it out in "The Fête," Lucy is twenty-three years old at the time of Madame Beck's party (215), which takes place about six months into her sojourn at Villette (108, 196). Lucy herself tells us that when Paul proposes, she has been at the pensionnat for a year and a half (592). This means that she is at least twenty-four at the time of the proposal. The age set by Richard Carlile for the onset of "old maid"ism was "about twenty-five," so for most of Lucy's story, this destiny looms distinctly on the horizon (see 54 above). But aside from the question of how closely Lucy's experience approximates that of the spinster in terms of her narrative age, it is presented to us by a woman who clearly has reached the spinster years by the time of telling. A woman with newly white hair when she unfolds her story (105), Lucy Snowe might reasonably be expected to construct the experience of those earlier years in terms of the point she has now reached.

CHAPTER 2

The Struggle for the Soul

Villette may be her unfolding of the spinster's story, but Brontë had demonstrated a concern with the spinster's economic predicament from the start. Being single meant dependence. Some middle-class women were dependent on their families for financial support; others, on a job market not intended to include them. From Brontë's first novel, we can see an effort to include something of the trials "the Dependent," as she had written of her own experience, "[had] to endure." As her treatment of dependence became more extensive, Brontë's discontent with the social position of the spinster became more marked, so that by her third novel, we confront an essay-length passage which directly censures the lot she has been given. Her own story emerges, then, in a space that has been opened up gradually by the preceding novels. Further, its detailed account of the trials Lucy must undergo to secure a livelihood serves as one marker of that progression.

Although Brontë's first novel, The Professor (c. 1846; pub. 1857), centres on the efforts of a young man to make his way in the world, it offers a compelling portrait of female dependence as well. In the "narrow" world of Frances

Henri, Brontë captures the atmosphere of constraint attending similar efforts on the part of a woman (172). Frances' situation is striking in its remoteness from choice. Although she finds her work at Mlle. Reuter's school "tedious," she remains there until she is dismissed (169). Until she is able to obtain another position through a lace-mending client (217), she struggles to subsist on that income alone. The way in which such straitened circumstances perpetuate her lack of choice darkens the picture; "forced to calculate every item, to save in every detail," Frances may light the fire only on special occasions, for instance (205). Yet, Frances is a woman with initiative, furthering her teaching qualifications on her own (170), actively pursuing another place when she is dismissed (202), following a dream, moreover, to emigrate (170, 203). Thus, it becomes clear that, in the case of women needing to earn their keep, even the efforts of the most active are impeded.

The impression deepens when we place Frances' experience beside that of the novel's hero. Although William Crimsworth, in place of the silver spoon, was "born with a wooden spoon in [his] mouth," his way appears to be much freer (232). In fact, it takes the shape of a kind of fantasy of will. Crimsworth gives up the financial support of his uncles because he does not wish to enter the church

(42); he leaves his position in his brother's counting-house because it has become insufferable; he gets a letter of recommendation from Hunsden for a position in a school in Brussels, which position he is given; he leaves that position when it becomes insupportable to him, after leaving his position in Mlle. Reuter's school for similar reasons; he gets a position in a college on the recommendation of another friend (238) and makes five times what Frances makes for teaching (217, 238). It is a career which demonstrates to the reader that the female dependant must contend with a different grade of restraint.

But the explication of single life does not end there. Near the close of The Professor, we are presented with another picture, this one assembled by Frances herself. It encapsulates the fate Frances, now married to Crimsworth, has avoided, introducing directly into the narrative the figure of the spinster. Further, Frances' description of the life she might have led centres on the psychological experience of spinsterhood, so that we learn something of the effects of constraint, a subject about which the portrait of dependence has only hinted.

Frances' evocation of the spinster's life speaks to the negation besetting her. It is a picture of absence:

> An old maid's life must doubtless be void and vapid -- her heart strained and empty. Had I been an old maid I should have spent existence in

> efforts to fill the void and ease the aching. I should have probably failed, and died weary and disappointed, despised and of no account, like other single women. (279)

At the same time, however, the cause of this experience of emptiness is not identified; beyond affirming that she is "despised and of no account," Frances makes no reference to society's treatment of the spinster or the role it plays in assuring her discontent. Moreover, she goes on to exclaim gratefully to Crimsworth about his sparing her such a fate (279). In other words, we gain insight into what it feels like to be a spinster, but not into how that feeling might be ameliorated; the remedy as readily might be a husband.

The significance of the description alone, however, is not to be overlooked, especially when one considers its status in the text. Although it has been introduced into the story through the device of a question-and-answer session between Crimsworth and his wife, its assimilation is by no means complete. Whether the result of inexperience or intention, the overall effect is to draw attention to the cameo and to give the impression that the spinster is a figure about whom the author has a desire to speak.

Jane Eyre (1847) sees Brontë again exploring the experience of dependence. This time, however, it is the young woman who is at the centre of the tale and they are her efforts to make her way which constitute the norm. Yet

this is not the restricted world of Frances Henri; here, we encounter a dependant as heedless of impediment as William Crimsworth. In fact, in Jane Eyre's exercise of will, we might envision the playing out of a single woman's fantasy.

When Jane Eyre feels confined in her teaching position at Lowood, she does not suffer on, but determines to seek "at least a new servitude" (117). Although her repudiation of actual "liberty" suggests a recognition of limitation, it appears as nothing more than the recognition of any male dependant (117). Her depiction of the world before her reveals the boundless desire of one who expects to secure a place in it. "[T]he real world [is] wide, and...a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, await[s] those who ha[ve] courage to go forth into its expanse...," Jane tells herself (116). Moreover, her determination to "get [at least] so much of [her] own will" betokens the experience of one who has been disposed to get it (118). Accordingly, Jane thinks over her options until she has a "scheme...in a clear, practical form" and takes the necessary steps to achieve her desire (118).

While Jane's experience of love dominates the story once she takes up her new position, there follows, after the crisis with Rochester, a sequence which we might consider an extension of the dependent woman's fantasy. Strange as it might seem to fashion Jane's immeasurable suffering on the

passage from Thornfield to Moor House as something about which a woman might dream, there she gains, as she has eulogized it from her room at Lowood, "real knowledge of life amidst its perils" (116). Whereas her opportunity to choose marks her earlier experience as out of the ordinary, here it is the occasion to struggle alone. Taking as the motto for this sequence Jane's declaration to Rochester, "The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself," we might think of it as an expedition into independence (344). Sleeping on a heath, dining on berries, begging for bread in a strange town, Jane discovers the extent of what a human being can do without (349-355). It may be hard-won knowledge, but it is the knowledge of one who has ventured forth into the wider world. From the close rooms of the single woman, this indeed might seem the stuff of dreams.

That we inhabit the realm of the extraordinary when it comes to Jane's experience of dependence is confirmed by her ultimate release from it. With the unexpected inheritance of her uncle's estate, Jane becomes "an independent woman" (459). Exactly what this means to one familiar with compliance is spelled out by Jane to Rochester after her initial revelation. "'...I am independent, sir, as well as rich. I am my own mistress,'" she elaborates (459). By making explicit the link between money and mastery, Jane

reveals what constrains the working single woman and the single woman dependent on family alike; she captures in one phrase the goal the single woman, unmoneyed, cannot reach: to be her own mistress.

Because Jane Eyre not only moves the experience of female dependence to its centre, but also offers a fanciful version of it, the novel expands the space accorded the single woman in The Professor. While Frances' experience in The Professor exposes the limits of the single woman's world, Jane's experience belies them. She travels a world wider than any the average single woman can expect to encounter. In fact, her experience exceeds even the limits of Crimsworth's world. By ignoring its realities, Brontë indirectly challenges the single woman's lot. To imagine life outside it is to throw into doubt its immutability. From there, it is but a growing conviction to outright rebellion.

If the storyline itself sows the seeds of discontent, however, a memorable address in Jane Eyre takes discontent as its subject. In it, Jane warns the reader of the possible consequences and advises him of the causes of discontent among women. Although nominally about women in general, Jane's address more properly concerns unmarried women. Her description of the activities to which women are supposed "to confine themselves" reflects the standard role

for women outside marriage (141). As well, her reference to women's possible interest in other occupations or in increased education in practice applies only to single women. But, primarily, it is Jane's picture of life suppressed which evokes the single woman's lot. Taking as a reference point her own position as governess, in which she feels confined, Jane insists, "Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot" (141). Elaborating on its mutinous effects, Jane continues to sketch out this familiar picture of "rigid restraint":

> Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer.... (141)

Written at a time when Brontë herself was suffering from "too absolute a stagnation" (as her letters from home attest),[1] the passage is stamped with the particular consciousness of the Victorian single woman. Moreover, Jane is plainly single when she makes the address, the marriage plot-line not yet having begun. Thus, in context and in content, the passage can be linked to the single woman.

Without directly identifying the sentiments--and the fermenting rebellion--as the single woman's, Brontë has

moved considerably closer to launching an outright attack on her social position. Where the discussion of her position in The Professor was camouflaged in a teasing exchange between husband and wife (and by the inclusion of another hypothetical scenario), in Jane Eyre it is on display. Jane's addressing the reader directly signals to her/him that this is a meaningful issue. Moreover, her analysis of the problem goes beyond the simple description that Frances offered to Crimsworth. Jane not only assigns a reason for the single woman's discontent, but also projects an outcome: eventual rebellion. Were it not for the unspecific presentation, we might take this as a rallying cry for the unmarried. That open defiance, however, is yet to come.

It is in Brontë's next novel, Shirley (1849), that a clear call for change appears in the narrative. Closing the significant chapter "Two Lives," in which the narrator contrasts the occupations of its active hero to those of its house-bound heroines,[2] is a three-page monologue on the untenable situation of the unmarried woman. Delivered by Caroline Helstone, whose struggle with the lot of the spinster forms a central part of the narrative, the monologue offers an incisive assessment of the situation. Although Caroline begins by "blam[ing]" "nobody in particular" for what she vaguely describes as "something [being] wrong somewhere," she goes on immediately to declare

exactly what is wrong and, eventually, who is responsible for fixing it (390). In between, the somewhat meek heroine (by Brontë's standards) delivers a speech of such passion that we become convinced that the single woman now commands a position of privilege in Brontë's novels.

"I believe single women should have more to do--better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they possess now," professes Caroline (390). Belying the passionate nature of the remarks to follow, Caroline states the issue simply at the outset of her monologue. Her composure quickly falls away, however, when she turns to society's treatment of the problem. Not only does she expose the "deformed weakness" behind society's "tinselled cloak" of "scorn," but also, as such imagery suggests, turns her own scorn on society in doing so (391). She shows little compassion for "[p]eople" whose scorn covers a desire to avoid "mak[ing] some unpleasant effort" toward improving the situation, who do not want "their ease" "troubl[ed]" or "their self-complacency" "shak[en]" by being made aware of such "an obligation" (391). Her pique is most evident, however, in her stripped-down synopsis of society's attitude, dropped like lead as she closes the subject and moves on to the next. "Old maids," Caroline mocks,

> like the houseless and unemployed poor,[3] should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world: the demand disturbs the happy and rich: it

disturbs parents. (391)

What we discover, in addition to the passion such an issue draws out of Caroline, is the extent of what she desires for single women. Expanding her conviction that they "should have more to do" to include the notion that they should have "a place...in the world," Caroline canvasses for society's full acceptance of single women. But what she goes on to skewer, continuing in the same satirical vein, is the ideology governing the place they hold now. After describing their predicament--that they are driven by the "stagnant state of things" at home to attempt "to ensnare husbands," only to be "sneer[ed]" at by "[t]he gentlemen" and "order[ed]...to stay at home" by the fathers --Caroline gives in to her exasperation (391). She shows up the ridiculous nature of what society expects from single women by imagining such an ideology shaping the lives of "men...themselves" (391). Referring to the fathers, who expect their daughters to stay at home and "sew and cook," Caroline jeers:

> They expect them to do this, and this only, contentedly, regularly, uncomplainingly all their lives long, as if they had no germs of faculties for anything else: a doctrine as reasonable to hold, as it would be that the fathers have no faculties but for eating what their daughters cook, or for wearing what they sew. (391)

An effective device for pointing up their common humanity, Caroline's satirizing of the notion that single women need

nothing also betrays her feeling. Her passion serves once again to indicate that the single woman, in this novel, has become a vital figure.

Some genuinely playful addressing of sexual ideology intervenes before Caroline, returning to her earnest mood, holds someone accountable for the redressing of this wrong. (The banter about the "patterns of...'the sex'" perhaps represents an attempt to sweeten a uniformly bitter monologue [392].) She appeals to both the "Men of Yorkshire" and the "Men of England" before settling on "Fathers" as the most susceptible group, presumably, to whom she might appeal (392). Although she concedes that it may not be in their power to do it "all at once," Caroline nevertheless makes a direct request to fathers to change the situation of their unmarried daughters (392). Moreover, she closes her remarks on the issue with a series of directives indicating how this task is to be accomplished. What was once a matter to be regretted only, as Brontë's first novel attests, is now one to be confronted, analysed, and changed; and Brontë's third novel wills that this be done, with a forwardness and a passion on behalf of single women not seen before in the author's work.

Accompanying this call for change is a new attentiveness to the spinster's life. For the first time, Brontë incorporates into the plot the self-conscious

struggle of a single woman with the nature of her existence. When Caroline Helstone faces the apparent closing of the door to some future with Robert Moore, the crisis is not only that of the rejected lover, but also of the single woman facing a life of utter negation. Brontë devotes the last two chapters of volume one to this crisis.

In "Old Maids," Caroline sets herself to answer, not very successfully, "the question which most old maids are puzzled to solve": "What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world?" (174). Her musings have begun at a point destined to lead to such intimations of futility--the parade of empty days with which the home-bound spinster is faced. A member of her uncle's household, Caroline has no responsibilities of her own; she assesses her situation thus:

> I have to live, perhaps, till seventy years. As far as I know, I have good health: half a century of existence may lie before me. How am I to occupy it? What am I to do to fill the interval of time which spreads between me and the grave? (173)

Although Caroline finds no positive answer to the puzzle of her place in the world, with the example of Miss Ainley, she does light upon a way to occupy her time. The visits Caroline pays to Miss Mann and Miss Ainley, the two "old maids" in her neighbourhood, enrich the emerging portrait of what it means to be single. Situated differently, and with

distinct personalities, the two figures serve to humanize the monolithic old maid. From Miss Mann, Caroline learns to look for the life behind the facade, and from Miss Ainley, to act in spite of the invitation "to grow old doing nothing" (183). She resolves to try to live a charitable life, like Miss Ainley. The chapter closes, however, with the narrator pointing out that despite the "gleams of satisfaction [that] chequered her gray life here and there," "the mind's soil and its treasures were freezing gradually to barren stagnation" (184).

The particular nature of Caroline's experience of single life--both its blankness and her leisure to brood over it--can be attributed to the heroine's financial situation. Unlike Frances Henri and Jane Eyre, Caroline Helstone does not have her living to earn; she is supported and will be provided for by her uncle, the rector (190). Although Jane and Frances must struggle to survive,[4] and although both display discontent with the narrowness of their lots, they nevertheless have "[some] place and [some] occupation in the world." Caroline, however, is living the "stiller doom" against which Jane Eyre has measured her lot. In "Fieldhead," it is to this other world that Caroline aspires to escape. She unfolds to her uncle her wish to become a governess. Accordingly, it is in this chapter that we learn the real price of Caroline's form of dependence;

her uncle immediately quashes her plan and requires that she "[not] mention it again" (191). Thus Caroline neither can find her place at home nor go out in the world to seek it. Her muttered reply to her uncle's imperative "put all crotchets out of your head and run away and amuse yourself" captures the frustration of the woman precluded from adult life: "'What with? My doll?' asked Caroline to herself as she quitted the room" (191).

As its title suggests, the second of the two chapters also ushers in Caroline's acquaintance with the new inmates of Fieldhead, Shirley Keeldar and Mrs. Pryor. Signalling a change in her aimless existence, these new relationships do bring Caroline some solace, to which we are witness in the second volume of the novel; however, after many intervening chapters, the narrative returns to the worm at the core of Caroline's life. Without an "object in life," as she describes her lack at the beginning of the third volume (432), Caroline will "never [be] well" (391). We are apprised of this fact by her own words concerning single women in "Two Lives," the penultimate chapter in volume two, and by the description of her life which prefaces these words. "Existence," she maintains, "never was originally meant to be that useless, blank, pale, slow-trailing thing it often becomes to many, and is becoming to me, among the rest" (390). Not only does the narrative dwell on

Caroline's predicament over the course of two chapters at the end of volume one, then, but also it revisits her and other single women's distress at the close of volume two. The book-end approach reminds us that Caroline's condition will not be changed with diversions. When a visit is described in the next chapter as being the means by which Caroline can "escape for a few hours...the nightmare of her life," we appreciate the greatness of the nightmare, and the meagreness of the escape (395).

Like Jane Eyre before her, and Frances Henri before her, Caroline Helstone eventually does escape her lot: she marries. Although Brontë has given the single woman space in Shirley not allotted to her before and, for the first time, identified the experience of dependence as her experience, she has not suffered her to arrive at the story's end unmarried. This fate belongs to Lucy Snowe. The single fact of her remaining unmarried alters the entire landscape of Brontë's last novel. Now, the single woman's reality dominates the story. The need is gone for set pieces describing her condition; Villette unfolds this experience on every page. Further, the single woman's economic predicament now takes its place as part of the story. Villette offers an extended, realistic account of the dependence which characterizes spinsterhood. What began as a minor theme in The Professor, and one not directly

linked to spinsterhood, is now of central concern, as we follow Lucy Snowe's attempts to wrest an inheritance from a miserly world.

If, as Heather Glen suggests in her introduction, The Professor (Penguin 1989) is an exploration of the Victorian self-made man, we might consider Villette to be, on one level, an exploration of the self-made woman. The difference in their experiences, of course, lies in the extent to which society is structured to accommodate each person. William Crimsworth can move with relative ease in the working world; Lucy Snowe, never meant to enter it, cannot. That Brontë tells the particular story of the working woman in Villette is evident in the extent to which Lucy's story differs from Crimsworth's. The removal of each to Brussels--its antecedents, the journey, and its results--provides a fixed measure of the difference and, consequently, of Brontë's efforts to acknowledge it.

As underscored above, it is by choice that William Crimsworth leaves his first position in the working world, a position that has come to represent to him "the most nauseous slavery under the sun" (73). Although he attributes his indisposition to endure it to the rancour of his employer (62), Crimsworth's later rejection of two similar positions, and his declaration that he had "hated" his first, suggests that job satisfaction is a priority

(90). In fact, Crimsworth points out of the rejection, "I believed there were other occupations that would suit me better" (90).

Lucy Snowe, in contrast, has been "disciplined by destiny" to suit herself to the kind of occupation available to women (97).[5] Her initial recoiling (95) from becoming companion to "a crippled old woman" within "[t]wo hot, close rooms" does not prevent her from accepting this first position (97). Moreover, she points out to the reader that such a life "ought to appear tolerable" (95), which underlines the fact that a "life of privation" is unexceptional for a single woman (97). Further, unlike Crimsworth, Lucy remains in her job, watching "[a]ll within [her] bec[o]me narrowed to [her] lot" (97). Although she cites the "little morsel of human affection" which she has found as what is holding her there, her reason for staying appears to have as much to do with a reluctance to re-enter a hostile world (97). Indeed, as Crimsworth shows himself unwilling to stay in an oppressive situation, Lucy shows herself unwilling to leave one. "[S]hrinking" and "cowardly," she "would have crawled on with [Miss Marchmont] for twenty years," she tells us, to avoid encountering the trials of the wider world (97). It is only her employer's death which prevents her from doing so. When we consider the difference in the world each enters, we do not have far

to go to understand why each maintains such a different attitude towards it.

Once unemployed, Crimsworth moves smoothly through the network sustaining the male public sphere. He decides to go to Brussels after being coaxed by the influential Yorke Hunsden and provided with a letter of recommendation by him (83-84). His description of the removal to Belgium accords with the significance of travelling alone for a man; he merely refers to his "waiting for the sailing of the packet" as part of a more constructive description of the difference in his Brussels and his London accommodations (88). In other words, the facility with which Crimsworth makes his way stretches to his literal movements as well. His journey to London too passes without incident. Crimsworth's first, "very fine" morning in Brussels is spent visiting Mr. Brown, to whom Hunsden has addressed his recommendation (90); after rejecting the two positions in trade, Crimsworth receives the promise of a teaching position from Brown, who will recommend him to M. Pelet, his recommendation being nearly equated with acceptance (91). By late that afternoon, Crimsworth not only has a position with M. Pelet, but also, as he informs us, "the terms on which M. Pelet had engaged me were really liberal" (92). Even a young Englishman in a foreign country, with little money and few connections, has access to the system which makes finding employment a

relatively simple matter for the genteel Victorian man.

For the single woman, on the other hand, the difficulties are myriad. Unlike Crimsworth, Lucy Snowe decides without encouragement and without references to go abroad. She grasps at the casual mention of the fact that there are English women with places in foreign households, building her future on an offhand remark (105). Her description of her decision to head for Brussels emphasizes that it is a "daring--perhaps desperate--line of action" (110). Readers of the time would recognize that this was the case given that she was a lone woman with little money and no connections. Lucy reminds her readers, however, "I had nothing to lose" (110), which emphasizes the fact that she has a dearth of alternatives.

The decision to go to Brussels is placed in an even more desperate light when viewed against the backdrop of her earlier decision to go to London. She has felt the need to assure her reader that in taking that step, "[she] ran less risk and evinced less enterprise than the reader may think" (105). That declaration itself is as evocative of the risks as the contrary. When placed in the context of what she goes on to say, however, it makes her decision to go to London seem a risky one indeed. Although Lucy intends to stay there, she cannot permit herself to conceptualize her move in this way:

> I regarded it as a brief holiday, permitted for once to work-weary faculties, rather than as an adventure of life and death. There is nothing like taking all you do at a moderate estimate: it keeps mind and body tranquil; whereas grandiloquent notions are apt to hurry both into fever. (105)

The controlled way in which she discusses the move, given what she has shown already of the fever that often lies below her control, suggests that Lucy is as intent on convincing herself as she is on convincing her reader of the judiciousness of this step. Further, Lucy describes how her "staid manner" reassures her old nurse, so that "she did not charge me with being out of my senses" (104). That one otherwise would charge a young single woman contemplating such a step with being "out of her senses" reinforces the danger of it. As well, the image of Lucy, vigilant before her one supporter, is cause for alarm. But the incident also provides a sharp contrast to the experience of Crimsworth, who is reassured by his one supporter that he will be taking a very "[p]ruden[t]" step (84). Ironically, his hesitation shows that he has choices; he, unlike Lucy, seems anything but desperate.

In light of the risk involved in a mere transfer to London, then, Lucy's planned journey to Brussels appears still more desperate. That Lucy herself, controlled when explaining her plan to go to London, does speak in terms of a life and death adventure regarding Brussels serves to

heighten the sense of the precariousness of her position. When her story unfolds, we learn just how vulnerable Lucy is.

Given the significance of making the journey both to London and to Brussels, it is little wonder that Lucy devotes a good deal of space to the description of her travels. While Crimsworth completely passed over his journey to Belgium and described his stay in London in a few lines (88), Lucy explains over the course of two chapters how she made her way to London and then Brussels. Each journey is fraught with difficulty.

Although she writes about her feeling of "[e]lation and pleasure" as she explores London on her own, this pleasure comes between moments of despair (109). "How difficult, how oppressive, how puzzling seemed my flight!" she writes of simply moving from coach to inn (106). Most of her difficulties arise from her inexperience of city life, a natural consequence of a single woman's circumscribed existence. Not familiar with the conventions of the world of travel, Lucy is "hugely cheated" by the porter and tips the waiter an "absurd" amount, for instance (106, 110). Yet inexperience is not exclusive to single women; an inexperienced man might suffer the same humiliations in travelling. But a number of Lucy's difficulties do relate specifically to a single woman's impediment--the ongoing

threat of physical harm.

Before experiencing the pleasure and elation she does in exploring London alone, for instance, Lucy must decide whether it is safe to do so (109). When she decides to go to Belgium, she must head out into the night to board the ship and, rather than being watched over by the coachman who has been directed to do so by the waiter at the inn, is treated thus: "he offered me up as an oblation, served me as a dripping roast, making me alight in the midst of a throng of watermen" (110). Lucy goes on to describe how their vulgarity is still vivid to her. Upon arriving in Belgium, Lucy makes her way to Villette, or Brussels, only to be trailed and hounded by two men so that she loses her way. She arrives in both London and Brussels in the dark of a rainy night, the darkness and the rain heightening our sense of her vulnerability (106, 122).

That Lucy repeatedly draws attention to the cycle of conflict and rest means that we are never allowed to lose sight of the "stringent difficulties" she encounters in travelling (118). Having reached another safe haven, she closes the first of the two chapters with this assessment of her position, for example:

> Again I might rest: though the cloud of doubt would be as thick tomorrow as ever; the necessity for exertion more urgent, the peril (or destitution) nearer, the conflict (for existence) more severe. (119)

We are made aware in no uncertain terms that this is no fortune-seeking endeavour, as Crimsworth's journey is (Professor 83), but a true struggle for survival, in which the possibility of failure is real.

Lucy's course to employment once in Villette (Brussels) also represents a marked departure from Crimsworth's experience. As we have seen, Crimsworth awakes on a sunny morning, heads off to meet the man for whom he has a letter of introduction, and finds employment that same day. While he is conducted smoothly along his way by professional connections, Lucy must rely on vaguer forces. Without being afforded even the luxury of safely reaching the inn to which she has been directed, Lucy finds herself lost on a rainy night in a city to which she is a stranger. Indeed, her presence in Villette is the result of "catching at straws," Lucy having grasped once again at the casual mention of possible employment (121). It is by accident that she finds herself in front of the pensionnat her fellow-passenger has mentioned. Driven by desperation rather than a well-considered plan, Lucy rings the bell, trusting that "Providence" will find a place for an unknown foreigner in this establishment (126). The desperate wildness of her action is reflected in the self-control she must exert in order to carry it out: "While I waited, I would not reflect. I fixedly looked at the street-stones, where the door-lamp

shone, and counted them, and noted their shapes, and the glitter of wet on their angles" (126). Under such conditions, Lucy naturally possesses a different criterion for employment, as well. There is no question about the appeal of a job. For Lucy, being given a position by Madame Beck that night means one thing: "I was spared the necessity of passing forth again into the lonesome, dreary, hostile street" (129).

What emerges when one compares the careers of Lucy and Crimsworth, then, is a picture of two worlds: one, encouraging, orderly, secure; the other, frustrating, random, hostile. That the difference in their worlds owes its origin to their different social positions--Crimsworth on the inside, Lucy on the outside--appears clear also. In fact, Lucy's estimate of her place in the world foregrounds this difference. Alone, in a strange inn in London, she is forced to confront her exile. "All at once my position rose on me like a ghost," she tells us. "Anomalous; desolate, almost blank of hope it stood" (107). Although she refers to her own particular position, she could not have devised a more straightforward description of the territory occupied by every spinster, couched, moreover, in the language of the day. Thus, we gather from Lucy's progress what it is like for one particular single woman to occupy this anomalous position day after day.

Of course, in offering the single woman's story from this perspective, Brontë shifts the centre--and its definitions. Looking at the world through Lucy's eyes, we are compelled to recognize her not as an anomaly, but as a human being. Yet this is only the beginning of what Villette, as uncoverer of the single woman's experience, does. When Lucy enters Madame Beck's "Pensionnat de Demoiselles" that night (126), she enters a world in which "'[s]urveillance,' 'espionage,'...[a]re [the] watch-words"(135). She enters, in others words, a world in which the hostile force of observation replaces the employment difficulties she has faced. Now, we discern not how Lucy's anomalous position impedes her, but how her status as anomaly is produced.

It is remarkable how Villette offers a veritable diagram of the kind of functioning of disciplinary power discussed by Foucault. In "Panopticism," the chapter following the one in which he treats the production of useful individuals by disciplinary power, Foucault explains how that power is spread through a disciplinary society. The key to its diffusion is "surveillance" (209, 216-217).

Beginning with a discussion of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, Foucault assembles a picture of the formative power of continuous observation. The Panopticon, a circular building with a central viewing tower, is designed so that

"in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen" (202). Because the inmate always is visible, but never knows when he actually is being watched, he behaves as though he is always watched (201). In other words, the Panopticon allows the authorities to relax physical control over their subjects, since this omniscient gaze affords them psychological control; the inmates, in effect, control themselves (202-03). "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it," explains Foucault, "assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself..." (202). Since the Panopticon is not simply a building, but also "a figure of political technology," its system of surveillance can be deployed in any disciplinary institution, producing the "particular form of behaviour" that institution requires (205). Thus, we learn how "hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons" (205), for instance, can "mak[e]...[their] power more intense" through this form of surveillance (206). It is when Foucault describes its migration from these dedicated sites, however, that we discover Panopticism's true potential.

What Bentham "dreamt of," expands Foucault, was "'unlock[ing]' the disciplines" from their stasis, of "transforming [them] into a network of mechanisms that would

be everywhere and always alert, running through society without interruption in space or time" (208-09). "The panoptic arrangement," he continues, "provides the formula for this generalization" (209). Bearing in mind that knowledge accompanies observation, a point Foucault makes regarding both the Panopticon (204) and Panopticism (224), we arrive at the picture of a society in which "the individual is carefully fabricated" by these disciplinary mechanisms (217).[6] In "Panopticism," then, we learn how disciplinary power, as described by Foucault in "The Means of Correct Training," is transmitted through society by particular disciplines, resulting in the production of a body of exploitable beings.[7] When we remember that one of the functions of this disciplinary power is to exert especial force on those it renders abnormal, we gain particular insight into the struggles of Lucy Snowe in the city of Villette.

Although its end is not identified explicitly as the anomalizing of Lucy the single woman, we are presented in the world of the pensionnat and environs with a society intent on manufacturing an exploitable version of her. Each of the disciplinary mechanisms Lucy encounters--educational, ecclesiastical, medical--shows an insidious interest in Lucy, taking her up as an object to know and regulate. Moreover, they are shown to be in league with one another,

creating the vision of a society operating, as Foucault would have it, as a "panoptic machine" (217). From her position within that machine, Lucy may not remark their ultimate end, but she certainly recognizes and advises us of the disciplines' immediate effects.

The pensionnat initiates both Lucy and the reader into this society of surveillance. Not only does it act as a transmitter of panoptic principles, but also, as a panoptic model, it serves to sensitize the reader to the network operating in the society at large. Lucy's manoeuvres as narrator also work to this end. She draws attention to the power invested in the gaze by withholding from the reader or sharing with the reader selected pieces of information. This marker of observational power primes the reader for the novel's panoptic vision. Yet, within the world of the novel, Lucy the protagonist holds little power. Though she arrives at the pensionnat with a keen awareness of what observation entails, an awareness which prevents her from being completely caught in the machine, hers is the story of the struggle to escape the disciplines. As one of their most observed targets, Lucy does not have an easy time of it; her own powers of vision waver and she becomes subject to their determinations. Ultimately, however, she recognizes their complicity and renounces their descriptions, claiming the right to self-determination. As

a cue, perhaps, to the reader, Lucy the narrator exercises this right all along. Thus, while the panoptic drama unfolds in the city of Villette, we are reminded that, in this other world, it is the single woman who is in control.

There is no doubt about whose "watchful eye" controls the pensionnat (134). As the title of the chapter in which Lucy describes this panoptic institution suggests, "Madame Beck" is at its centre. From her issues the ethos of surveillance and espionage (135). Lucy explains how Madame Beck "ruled...[over one hundred and twenty students], together with four teachers, eight masters, six servants, and three children, managing at the same time to perfection the pupil's parents and friends; and that without apparent effort..." (135); the key, explains Lucy, is Madame's "system for managing and regulating this mass of machinery": continuous observation (135). Fulfilling the necessary condition of the controlling gaze in the Panopticon, Madame Beck sees all, but is herself not seen: "she would move away on her 'souliers de silence,' and glide ghost-like through the house watching and spying everywhere, peering through every key-hole, listening behind every door" (136). As Lucy points out, in listing the catalogue of talents that makes the school of too small scope for Madame Beck's "powers," she is both "watchful and inscrutable" (137). But, while the ability to know others without being known is

essential to remaining dominant in a world in which knowledge is power, what clinches her hold on the inmates of the pensionnat is their awareness that they are being watched. Madame Beck herself implies this is so when explaining to Lucy why her system of surveillance is necessary. "[S]he averred," Lucy tells us, "that ruinous consequences would ensue if any other method were tried with continental children--they were so accustomed to constraint, that relaxation, however guarded, would be misunderstood and fatally presumed on..." (136). Madame Beck's implication is that the girls behave only because they know they are watched. Thus, discipline in the pensionnat operates according to panoptic principles: the inmates do not observe Madame watching them, yet they know they are under her watchful eye; this knowledge subjects them to her control.

Fittingly, the process by which Lucy is hired initiates her into the workings of the pensionnat. Lucy arrives there on a rainy night, a foreigner with no references. However, Madame Beck is willing to employ her after subjecting her to M. Paul's gaze. The directress' instruction to her kinsman to "[r]ead that countenance" indicates her faith in the power of the eye alone to gain the knowledge of character usually gained through written testimony (128). Indeed, Lucy's description of Paul directing his gaze at her affirms the connection between looking and knowing: "The little man

fixed on me his spectacles. A resolute compression of the lips, and gathering of the brow, seemed to say that he meant to see through me, and that a veil would be no veil for him" (128).

The interview continues, foregrounding M. Paul's scrutiny of Lucy: "[H]e gazed steadily. ... [S]till he scrutinized" (129). That Lucy's employment hinges on Paul's gaze and not on the information he gathers serves to fix our attention on the power inherent in the act. Essentially, the "indefinite" nature of Paul's pronouncements is of no account (129). Since the bearer of the gaze is also the producer of knowledge, the nature of what he knows refers back to his power rather than to some objective truth. In keeping with this fact, the episode builds to the essential product of M. Paul's observation: power over Lucy. "The judgment," we are told, "...at last came..." (129). That Lucy is engaged without knowing why, yet with the knowledge that she has been thoroughly scrutinized, provides a fundamental lesson in the school's disciplinary dynamic.

Yet Lucy has still to learn the extent of her subjection. In the incident with Paul, she is subjected to a controlling gaze but retains the power of a subject to return that gaze, as Paul stands in front of her. As noted, for observation to be panoptic, its subjects must know they are watched yet not be able to see their supervisor; this

makes them "object[s] of information" alone (200). Lucy, then, has not yet learned about the system of one-way observation at Madame Beck's that places students and teachers alike under the directress' control; however, this lesson is not long in coming.

Madame Beck's first appearance in the pensionnat foreshadows the way in which she operates her establishment. The narrator recounts how all was stillness in the room in which she waited, so that when Madame suddenly addressed her "at [her] elbow," she "almost bounded, so unexpected was the sound; so certain had [she] been of solitude" (127). Madame Beck has entered the room unseen and unheard by Lucy, presumably making use of the opportunity to survey the unwitting stranger. This foreshadowing of the system of surveillance in operation in the pensionnat materializes that very night into a working model. Madame Beck, "[m]oving without perceptible sound," takes the opportunity presented by the apparently sleeping Lucy to make the new employee the subject of her observation (131). After spending "a quarter of an hour...gazing at [Lucy's] face," Madame proceeds to "inspect" her folded clothes (131). Once she has completed her "scrutiny" of Lucy's person and effects, Madame makes wax imprints of the keys to Lucy's trunk, work-box, and desk (132). As the action makes clear, this is to be merely the beginning of Madame's surveillance

of Lucy. What is more, as we learn from the narrator, Madame considers this search to be her "duty," a reminder that in spying on Lucy, Madame Beck simply carries out her responsibilities as overseer of the institution (132). Further, although she never tells Lucy she is watching her, Madame Beck freely confesses to the necessity of spying on her pupils (136), leaving the newcomer, no doubt, to draw her own conclusions. In that case, Lucy would have experienced at a personal level the various conditions which result in subjection within a panoptic dynamic, the dynamic operating in the school at large.

Although Madame Beck controls the school with her gaze, however, she is not omnipotent in the society in which she lives. There is another eye under whose scrutiny the events of that world unfold: the eye of the Church. The narrator describes the source of the Roman Catholic Church's power, which permeates the lives of the majority of the inhabitants of Villette, using the same term that she uses to describe the source of Madame Beck's power; both rule through "surveillance" (503). With the appearance of another system of surveillance in the novel, this one outside the confines of Madame Beck's pensionnat, the straightforward lesson on watching and power begins to complexify.

On the one hand, the idea of there being a system in place to superintend even the great Madame Beck appears as a

comforting one. Foucault explains that Bentham planned to subject even the watcher in the tower to scrutiny; inspectors and even members of the public might arrive at any time to observe the proceedings. In this way, the Panopticon would be furnished with a mechanism to guard against the abuse of power (207). That Madame Beck's power might be subject to a similar check, in this case by an interested Church, suggests that Lucy has fallen under limited control.

On the other hand, since the Church provides our first glimpse of observational control in operation outside the pensionnat, we might greet it with some apprehension. Indeed, this second level of supervision might represent the disturbing ability of panopticism to thrive beyond the confines of particular institutions, of its ability to "increase and multiply" "throughout the social body" (Foucault 207-208). In that case, its presence would only intensify the feeling of confinement generated by the claustrophobic world of the pensionnat.

Lucy's reaction to the Church accords with this scenario. Near the end of her struggle to be free of the forces in Villette that seek to define her, Lucy describes the Church in terms which leave no doubt as to its panoptic nature. This "power," she maintains, exercises "the surveillance of a sleepless eye...through that mystic

lattice...the sliding panel of the confessional" (503). There could hardly be a more apt description of the disciplinary mechanism, spreading its power through society by means of the simple act of normalizing observation. Moreover, Lucy goes on to affirm that the interest "Rome" evinces in the behaviour of men and women exists only to "spread the reign of her tyrant 'Church'" (515). She describes a Church interested only in extending its own power:

> For man's good was little done; for God's glory less. A thousand ways were opened with pain, with blood-sweats, with lavishings of life; mountains were cloven through their breasts, and rocks were split to their base; and all for what? That a Priesthood might march straight on and straight upward to an all-dominating eminence, whence they might at last stretch the sceptre of their Moloch 'Church.' (515)

Lucy's reference to the Church as Moloch resonates with the original religious meaning of the word as well as what became its secular application. Not only does the Church demand from its devotees "horrible sacrifices" (OED), but also it is a false idol, set up for its own glorification, against the glory of God. When Lucy denounces priests as "lovers of power," then, and pronounces that "God is not with Rome," she may be expressing, in part, her categorical rejection of the attempts of social forces to produce an exploitable version of her (515).

Villette represents Lucy's own religion as a kind of

counterwork to this panoptic Roman Catholicism. Although God is the ultimate watcher in the tower (He sees all but He cannot be seen), in Protestantism, there is not a system of human surveillance in operation administrating this supernatural realm. Accordingly, each person is free to determine what behaviour is coincident with divine will, in essence, returning the power of the gaze to the subject.

Paul's assessment of Protestantism, presented in conjunction with Lucy's denunciation of the Roman Catholic Church, emphasizes this difference. His characterization of Lucy's religion as a "strange, self-reliant, invulnerable creed" appears to assert the connection between Protestantism and this power of the individual over himself or herself (512). Moreover, he formulates his first objection to its effects on Lucy within a visual framework. Paul tells Lucy that "[her] terrible, proud, earnest Protestantism...expresses itself by [her] eye at times..." (512). "[T]he danger" Paul detects in Lucy's religion, then, as evinced by her eye, is the power it transfers to her (512). Essentially, Protestantism is figured as interrupting the panoptic dynamic of Roman Catholicism.

If we are schooled by Madame Beck and the pensionnat in the principles of panopticism, the representation of the Church in Villette instructs us on its general application. Although the ecclesiastical system surveilling Villette

society represents only one in a network of disciplines, because it is most clearly delineated--and denounced--as a system, it serves to introduce us to the others. We see more clearly, because of the Church and its sleepless eye, that there are whole disciplines sustaining the other powers whom Lucy encounters. Moreover, that Lucy herself appears to conceive of the Church in panoptic terms tends to affirm the notion that these other struggles take place at a systemic level. Lastly, because Lucy's own creed figures in her denunciation of the Church, we can envision that contest repeating itself in other contexts. That is, when we consider her other struggles, we can see Lucy clearly, standing on the ground of self-determination.

In order ultimately to reach that ground, and to render the systems of surveillance ineffectual, however, Lucy had first to have her own sense of the power inherent in the act of observing. Thus, the tale recounted by the adult spinster of the single woman's struggle to escape the disciplines' constraints foregrounds Lucy's investment in vision, even when it addresses her pre-spinster years.

In the opening chapters of the novel, the narrator introduces her young self to the reader as an observer. The frequently appearing forms of the verb "to watch," along with a cluster of related words, describe with near-comprehensive accuracy Lucy's activity in this section of

the story. Her role as observer goes beyond the function of narrator. This is, after all, the story of Lucy's life, yet she barely figures in the opening chapters beyond her role as observer. From the outset, then, we are acquainted with the importance of vision to Lucy and prepared for a tale in which her, and others', observational activities play a significant role.

It is as this initiate of observation that Lucy enters the panoptic society of Villette. Although she becomes subject to the disciplines on her entrance into it, she retains some of the power she has cultivated through her own observational activities. She may be under surveillance, but in watching those who watch her, and, even more, in comprehending what their watching means, Lucy practices a form of counter-surveillance which prevents her from being under their complete control. Thus, when Madame Beck searches Lucy's things on her first night in the pensionnat, Lucy, unbeknownst to Madame, searches the actions of the directress at the same time and has "divined her motive for this proceeding" (131). Not only does Lucy subvert Madame's spying to a certain extent by spying on her, but also, she enjoys it. As she informs the reader on a later occasion, "I will not deny that it was with a secret glee I watched her" (186). The pleasure Lucy takes in observing Madame's attempt to get power over her attests to Lucy's valuing both

observation and the power it confers.

Yet, Lucy's powers of resistance at this point in her tale are minimal. She has not yet begun to appreciate the extent to which observation is a force of societal control in Villette. On the other hand, as narrator, Lucy is in complete control.

Far from having to struggle to gain control of the way in which she is defined by society, Lucy has that control from the beginning by virtue of her position as the teller of the tale. In this context, the foregrounding of her role as observer in the opening chapters of the novel does serve to show up her position as narrator. By drawing attention to her role as the reader's eye from the outset, Lucy establishes a dynamic of control with him/her. In essence, she can use this position of power to reflect the struggle for power taking place within her tale. Demonstrating her control over the story at various points in the narrative, Lucy highlights the ability of an observing force to manufacture reality, the very intervention Lucy the protagonist must struggle to avoid.

The narrator draws attention to her control over the story by, for instance, withholding the truth about Dr. John's identity for a significant portion of it. Her invitations to the reader at the beginning of "Miss Marchmont" and at the end of "Finis" to "picture

[her]...happy" (94, 596) when clearly she is not are further examples of this emphasis. Moreover, in the case of these examples, Lucy not only draws attention to her power as narrator by withholding the true picture, but also questions the vision of any reader who subscribes to the false view.

What this, in turn, emphasizes is that while Lucy's narrative control reflects what her story is about, it also functions simply as narrative control. That is, Lucy exercises control over the way in which her life is viewed. In this sense, it stands as a model of success in self-determination. By emphasizing the control that Lucy exerts over her own vision of her life, Villette reminds the reader that it is possible to control one's own identity rather than being caught in the web of disciplinary systems bent on manufacturing it. In view of this example, we can appreciate how far Lucy has yet to travel when she enters the world of the disciplines.

To a certain extent, Lucy's narrative power obscures her essential impotence in this world. When Madame Beck searches her things, for instance, her position as narrator allows her to brag about her own undetected search to her readers. As a result, we might project the power she exercises at this level onto her position within the world of the disciplines. But, while Lucy revels in her narrative power, she also exposes her incapacity within the world

about which she writes. There, she is subjected by, rather than in control of, observation.

What Lucy points out about her initial position as observer in the pensionnat reflects this tension. After describing the directress and the school to the reader, Lucy explains:

> Thus did the view appear, seen through the enchantment of distance; but there came a time when distance was to melt for me, when I was to be called down from my watch-tower of the nursery, whence I had hitherto made my observations, and was to be compelled into closer intercourse with this little world of the Rue Fossette. (138)

She occupies the controlling position in the panoptic world of the pensionnat, making "her observations" from "the watch-tower"; but it is the watch-tower of the nursery, the nursery representing the nadir rather than the zenith of power in society. In addition, the nursery represents a descent within the middle-class working woman's world. As Ginevra Fanshawe sniffs of Lucy's first position at Madame Beck's, "I have seen you carry little Georgette in your arms, like a bonne--few governesses would have condescended so far..." (393). This image of the watch-tower, then, is suggestive both of Lucy's omnipotence as narrator and her lack of power as an actual presence in the pensionnat.

Her comments as a whole direct the reader to the disparity between the two positions. While she controls "the view" of the pensionnat, describing it to the reader as

it "appear[s]" to her, she intimates that it is only in her watch-tower--a place of "enchantment" because of its distance from the "little world of the Rue Fossette"--that her gaze is potent. Once that "distance...melt[s]," Lucy implies, so too does her power. That she must be "compelled into closer intercourse with this little world" reminds us that Lucy is diminished in the transition from distant observer to participant. For her, closer intercourse with the Rue Fossette means not only holding a less sanguine view of it, but also, contending with what little impact her observation has on her actual existence there.

This forewarning to the reader about her actual powers of observation comes to pass in her narrative of schoolroom life. Once Lucy enters the discipline of education, her impotence as overseer is made manifest. Although she ostensibly holds a position of power, it is clear because of her failing eye that Lucy is not in control in this world. Her attendant role as student (under M. Paul's tutelage) and her need to resort to physical force to control her students accentuate this reality.

When we consider Lucy's first experience in the classroom in the context of the experience of one of society's less regulated members, William Crimsworth, we appreciate just how little power she has. Once again, we note that Crimsworth has access to a system that Lucy does

not. In this case, it is the system of control on which the disciplines operate. When Crimsworth conducts his first class, he employs the pedagogical technique passed on by the school's director, M. Pelet (93); he gazes his students into submission (95). That he is a full participant in the system is further marked by his holding the position of teacher alone.

Lucy, on the other hand, later to be revealed in the subjected position of student, does not have access to this technology of power. When she enters the classroom, she is met by "a row of eyes and brows that threatened stormy weather--eyes full of an insolent light, and brows hard and unblushing as marble" (142). In keeping with her description, which suggests some discomposure, Lucy is overpowered by her students' stares and accompanying whispers. Instead of gazing them into submission, "'Miss Snowe,'" we find, is soon considering the manner of object she presents to their gaze: "...I knew I looked a poor creature" (143). Further, when she thinks of what circumstances might ameliorate this "oppressive" situation, it is to the power of language that her mind turns, rather than the power of the eye (143). In her current situation, she is stripped of whatever power of speech she usually holds, because she cannot speak French. This, however, is more reason than ever for her to turn to the power of the

gaze. That this form of control, which does not depend on speech, never occurs to her suggests that it is a tool that she is incapable of employing.

What does occur to Lucy is to use the only means available to her: physical force. Hence, we read with some surprise how Lucy, doing "[a]ll [she] could now do," first tears up the book of one student, then forces another into a closet and locks the door (143). When we recall that the relaxing of physical constraint is one of the marks of visual control, however,[8] Lucy's actions are not at all surprising. And we are not at all surprised to find that the student who must be locked in the closet has "a dark, mutinous, sinister eye" (144).

Lucy's relationship with Madame Beck, directress of this educational institution, provides another measure of her ineffectuality, and, indeed, subjection, within the discipline. We have seen that the powers of observation with which Lucy is equipped when she arrives at the pensionnat afford her some retaliatory power in the school; they allow her to subject Madame Beck at least to knowledgeable scrutiny when the directress searches her things. Further, her role as narrator allows her to share this information with the reader, a boon of which she takes special advantage on the second occasion. But, her ability to counter Madame's activities does not extend to requiring

the directress to stop. Despite Lucy's own "watchful eye," then, there is an obvious power imbalance between teacher and directress.

Lucy addresses this dynamic on the occasion of the second search, when she explains why she does not confront the directress. Although in this case she does not admit to her vulnerability, her representation of what confronting Madame Beck would mean manifests the imbalance. Lucy expounds:

> a retreat must be beaten. The searcher might have turned and caught me; there would have been nothing for it then but a scene, and she and I would have had to come all at once, with a sudden clash, to a thorough knowledge of each other: down would have gone conventionalities, away -- swept disguises, and I should have looked into her eyes, and she into mine -- we should have known that we could work together no more, and parted in this life for ever.
>
> Where was the use of tempting such a catastrophe? (186)

Significantly, Lucy figures the projected power struggle in visual terms; it would be played out through Lucy and Madame Beck looking each other directly in the eye. This situates Lucy's explanation within the larger context of the dynamics of vision and power in the pensionnat. It is not simply that Madame Beck and Lucy Snowe could not peacefully co-exist, then, if they were to strip the disguises from what Lucy implies are their antithetical natures; it is that Madame Beck and Lucy can never look each other in the eye if

Lucy is to remain within the educational discipline, subjected. Lucy's long and unconvincing explanation following this passage of why it is in her best interests not to tempt such a catastrophe directs the reader away from the surface meaning of the passage and towards some unspoken discomfort on Lucy's part. By laboriously piling up the reasons for her choosing not to confront Madame Beck, Lucy convinces us not that she has made a choice, but, rather, that in her current position, she has no choice and wishes to explain this away. Far from assuring us that Madame Beck's "system...did [her] no harm," she convinces us that, on the contrary, it maintains her in a subjection she lacks the power to evade (186).

This idea is borne out by the fact that, ultimately, Lucy does tempt such a catastrophe between herself and Madame Beck. However, it is only once she has struggled with all the disciplinary systems at work to control her that Lucy enters into this confrontation. In other words, once she has worked to free herself from her subjection to the disciplines, she has gained enough power to enter into precisely the power struggle with Madame Beck that she earlier attempts to avoid.

In the way Madame Beck has changed in her treatment of Lucy well before this confrontation, we can see Lucy gaining ground in her struggle. Lucy herself points to a change in

Madame Beck's behaviour which has taken place sometime after the spying episodes, episodes in which the directress clearly treats Lucy as an object for her observation. She links Madame Beck's alteration to a recognition on the directress' part of Lucy's inexorable nature. Other teachers have been rewarded with gifts for good behaviour during an unexpected absence of Madame Beck. To Lucy, she has pledged, "...I [can]...leave you alone with your liberty" and Lucy confirms that "[e]very slight shackle she had ever laid on me, she, from that time, with quiet hand removed" (383). It is fitting that the practical effect of disciplinary systems, imprisonment with psychological shackles, is captured in the imagery Lucy uses. That the directress removes these shackles now suggests that Lucy's sense of self has become sufficiently potent not to be easily manipulated.

The context in which Lucy introduces the subject of Madame Beck's changed behaviour supports this emphasis. She uses her current employer's recognition that "[her] qualifications were not convertible, not adaptable" to elaborate on the fault with Count de Bassompierre's offer to become his daughter's paid companion (383). Taking the opportunity presented by the offer to acquaint the reader with some facts about her "nature," Lucy makes clear that to accept the post would be to break troth with herself (382).

That this shift in her relationship with Madame Beck forms part of an address on identity highlights that aspect of the power dynamic between them. As Lucy cleaves to and asserts her own substantial nature, she becomes less liable to the control of disciplinary systems which define what her nature is.

Once Lucy has gained enough power, and is sufficiently provoked, she resists a renewed attempt by Madame Beck to control her. That there <u>is</u> a renewed attempt by Madame Beck lends credence to the idea that the directress' earlier liberation of Lucy has been the result of a breakdown in strategy. Now, however, the directress is back, reaching her hand into the most intimate workings of Lucy's life. The intrusion into every area of its objects' affairs is characteristic of the disciplinary system (211). This permeation is reflected in Lucy's rebuff of Madame Beck, whose attention to Lucy's sorrows with Paul is not disinterested. "Keep your hand off me, and my life, and my troubles," Lucy demands (544). At the same time, her order denotes that the directress has resorted literally to the use of her hand. In that fact, we perceive Madame Beck's fall. Now, the power of the subjecting gaze belongs to Lucy. She describes her resistance to Madame Beck in the same terms of power and vision she has used when imagining what such a confrontation would be like; but in the actual

confrontation, Lucy alone holds the power to penetrate her opponent:

> Two minutes I stood over Madame, feeling that the whole woman was in my power, because in some moods, such as the present -- in some stimulated states of perception, like that of this instant -- her habitual disguise, her mask and her domino, were to me a mere network reticulated with holes.... (544)

This marks Lucy's liberation, then, from the disciplinary system she entered into when she arrived at the Rue Fossette. Furthermore, contrary to what she asserted would happen as a result of this confrontation, Lucy neither quits the school nor her acquaintance with Madame Beck. In fact, Lucy creates the impression that her acquaintance with Madame Beck continues on, untroubled, for some time. She informs the reader, "[T]o the end of our mutual lives there occurred no repetition of, no allusion to, that fiery passage"(545). That what she asserted would happen does not confirms the idea that Lucy did not reveal the real reason for avoiding a confrontation. Now that she has discovered her own power, however, that reason has vanished. While, earlier, she could not confront Madame Beck because the directress' system held her in subjection, now, she can confront the directress and remain in the pensionnat, her sense of self securing her from its discipline.

As well as by her resistance to her employer's rule, Lucy's struggle is marked by her resistance, as a student,

to the rule of the examination. As "a concentrated or formalized form" of disciplinary technology,[9] the examination represents another face of the educational discipline at work to define Lucy. Its representation in the novel as a determining force serves to emphasize its confederacy with the system at large.

When M. Paul first requests that Lucy take part in a public examination of the students' writing skills, Lucy, as part of a longer argument, offers these words of resistance: "'Law itself should not compel me. I would pay a fine, or undergo an imprisonment, rather than write for a show and to order, perched up on a platform'" (446). Not only does Lucy refuse to be subjected to such a trial, but she does so in terms which point to the appropriation of self at the heart of the procedure. In asserting that she would rather submit to discipline imposed by the legal system than undergo an examination, Lucy draws attention to the parity of the two trials. In both cases, the subject is delivered up to the scrutiny and judgment of a social power. That for Lucy the scrutiny of educational examination constitutes the greater threat underlines its hostile nature.

When, contrary to her wishes, M. Paul subjects Lucy to a "forced examination," we obtain a fine view of this nature (496). In the first place, the instinctive quality of Lucy's refusal to take part in the proceeding establishes

the examination as an antagonistic force. As she informs us, "I either could not, or would not speak -- I am not sure which" (493). What causes Lucy to comply, ironically, is the theme on which her "judges" (494) then require that she write: "Human Justice" (495). The trial to which they are subjecting her is so clearly injurious that in that context alone their choice is cause for scorn; but Lucy goes on to inform us that these are the very men who hounded her on her first night in Villette. That her pursuers then are her judges now subverts the concept of human judgment, as Lucy herself points out (495). With this in mind, she writes the exam, creating a picture of a personified "'Human Justice,'" wreaking havoc around Her (495). By subverting the concept of judgment herself, Lucy subverts the process in which she has taken part. Deprived of its determinative power, the examination becomes meaningless. After presenting the professors with this vision. Lucy leaves the room--without "[w]aiting...comment"(496).

Lucy's struggle with each of the other two disciplines besetting her follows a pattern similar to her struggle with the educational. In each case, she moves from a position characterized by her lack of observational power to one in which she can parry a disciplinary gaze with her own vision of self and the world. Her progress does not follow a simple course, however. Not without observational powers to

begin with, Lucy becomes vulnerable to each discipline when these powers falter. We can trace a pattern, in fact, in which she turns to these greater powers when the soundness of her own observations fails. To that extent, Lucy is complicit in her own subjection, which affords us insight into how the disciplinary network prevails.

Although, in one sense, Lucy is saved when she stumbles on to the Rue Fossette on her first night in Villette, in another, she clearly is lost. We have seen how her vulnerability as a lone woman in a foreign city makes the pensionnat a haven for Lucy, but this same status also makes the school a trap. That she is about to be delivered up to the disciplinary network when she reaches Villette proper is marked in the text by her visual disorientation. Lucy is navigating a city in which, she tells us, "I could not tell" a church from a palace (125). Her inability to read the signs delineating one disciplinary system from another signals her vulnerability to them. Interestingly, this is the point at which the men who become her judges chase Lucy off her path--a patrol perhaps of the waiting panopticism. But whether the system is working to draw her in or not, Lucy obviously cannot depend on her own discernment at this point. "...I no longer knew where I was," she relates; "...puzzled, out of breath, all my pulses throbbing in inevitable agitation, I knew not where to turn"

(125). That she turns to Madame Beck's door marks the first in a succession of stumbles for Lucy--of points at which she turns, during a crisis of vision, to an authority other than her own.

The extent of her confusion is revealed once Lucy enters the pensionnat. As she awaits the appearance of Madame Beck, she is taken by surprise by the directress. Lucy's startled impression that a spirit must be in the room with her is intimated in her comic description of the very material Madame Beck: "No ghost stood beside me, nor anything of spectral aspect; merely a motherly, dumpy little woman, in a large shawl, a wrapping gown, and a clean, trim night-cap" (127). Yet Madame Beck, so earth-bound in aspect, is also "ghost-like" in her surveillance activities (136). This alertness to apparitions betrays a certain disorder in Lucy's powers of vision. While in the inn in London, Lucy has reported, "All at once my position rose on me like a ghost,"[10] here, she has taken to spying them out. The shift in emphasis from a concern with her social position to a concern with the ghosts themselves is indicative of her new struggle. No longer concerned with material survival, Lucy now undergoes a psychological trial, a trial to which she exposes herself.

At the same time, her sensitivity bespeaks the deployment of the disciplinary powers. Having turned to

Madame Beck at a point of vulnerability, Lucy appears to have experienced a further breakdown in visual integrity; this suggests that she is now subject to new pressures. That each successive involvement with a disciplinary power coincides with the sighting of a ghost confirms this suggestion. Moreover, each time Lucy turns to another authority, the observational disturbance is more serious, signalling her increasing entanglement in the panoptic machine.

Although the references to ghosts in these early scenes indicate observational skittishness on Lucy's part, they are primarily comic in nature, as the first description suggests. When Lucy next describes an involvement with a disciplinary power, however, the evocation of visual disturbance is of a different order. There is no comic detachment in evidence here; now Lucy's observational authority itself is in question.

It is after Lucy has spent the greater part of the long vacation at the Rue Fossette with only "a servant, and a poor deformed imbecile pupil," and then, only the servant, that she is driven to the confessional to find comfort (227). It is on an evening when

> [t]he solitude and 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 eye-holes. (232)

Not only are Lucy's powers of sight wavering, so that she sees spectres instead of beds, for instance, but also the image of sightlessness appears as one of the marks of horror in her vision. That the heads of these spectres feature "wide gaping eye-holes" intensifies the sense that Lucy's powers are in crisis. Moreover, she goes on herself to intimate the connection between her failing vision and her failing sense of self. The next spectres she describes are inner ones, the gloomy representatives of a spiritual crisis. Further, even in this realm Lucy imagines a grim sightlessness, demonstrating the magnitude of her observational fall. She continues:

> That evening more firmly than ever fastened into my soul the conviction that Fate was of stone, and Hope a false idol--blind, bloodless, and of granite core. (232)

Lucy's abandoning herself to the confessional, which, as we have seen, she later characterizes as the "sleepless eye" of a panoptic Church, signals the commencement of her subjection to the ecclesiastical discipline. But it also ushers in her involvement with the next. It appears that once Lucy's observational disintegration has begun, the action of the panoptic machine intensifies. Now subject to the pressure of both the educational and ecclesiastical disciplines, Lucy is about to fall under the scrutiny of

another. Lucy herself evokes her panoptic abandonment in her description of losing her way on leaving the church. "I got immeshed in a network of turns unknown," she explains. "I was lost..." (235-36). This literal figuring of Lucy's entanglement in the disciplinary network--which itself originates in her undiscerning turns--extends to take in her subjection to the next discipline; she is passed literally from the arms of the priest, in which she lies fainting, to Dr. Bretton's arms. Graham's account of the incident captures nicely the confederacy of the disciplines. In explaining to a bewildered Lucy how she came to be "consigned to [him]" (257), Graham states simply, in summary, "'The priest came to your succour, and the physician...supervened'" (259). The transference of a disciplinary subject from one authority to another takes place without interruption.

In the sense that she delivers herself up to it, however Lucy becomes truly subjected to the medical discipline after seeing, for the first time, the nun. The most serious of her disturbances, this fully formed apparition causes Lucy to question her very mental soundness. While she has assured the reader, of the incident in the dormitory, "I was in my sane mind" (232), after seeing the nun, Lucy "[is] left secretly and sadly to wonder" (333). The process by which she arrives at such

self-doubt, however, reveals the insidious interference of the disciplines.

It is the doctor who first suggests that Lucy's experience is the product of mental disorder (329). And, in spite of the fact that she is certain at the time that "'[t]here is something in the grenier'" (so certain that she exhorts others to "'[g]o and look at it'"), Lucy credits him (325). Graham is able to draw Lucy in further by retaining the professional demeanour he has adopted prior to this first pronouncement. "Won to confidence," Lucy explains, "I told him exactly what I had seen" (330). The radical personal surrender involved in such disclosure manifests itself in their new relationship: Lucy is now Graham's "'case'" (330). When he impugns her mental competence this time, it is his to describe. Lucy surely now is lost.

Ironically, however, this nadir of self-abandonment also appears to mark a pivotal point in Lucy's struggle with the disciplines. Considering the doctor's diagnosis with "secret horror," Lucy asks Graham about the "'cure.'" Her evident vulnerability creates a corresponding hope in the reader that, this time, the beleaguered heroine might meet with encouragement rather than control. But the moment does not last long. Graham is clearly powerless to do anything but subject Lucy to his normative wisdom. "'Happiness is the cure...,'" he advises her: "'cultivate [it].'" The

prescription meets with a terse reply; with the reader, however, Lucy shares her scorn. "No mockery in this world ever sounds to me so hollow," she protests, "as that of being told to cultivate happiness. What does such advice mean? Happiness is not a potato, to be planted in mould, and tilled with manure." Both her disdain at the doctor's solution and the very Lucy-like way in which it is phrased signal a resurgence in identity. Graham's failure to heal the self that Lucy has delivered up to him appears to have effected its return. And Lucy appears to have begun the long slow turn toward her own vision (330).

Yet, at a time when her spirits are confessedly shaken (333), Lucy can extract from Graham a tonic which will help her strengthen herself. She has earlier described the salutary effect of Graham's temperament on her own. When consigned to his care after the fainting episode, Lucy asserts that Graham's is a "tempe[r], bland, glowing, and genial, within whose influence it is as good for the poor in spirit to live, as it is for the feeble in frame to bask in the glow of noon" (271). Different from the doctor's considered care, in which Lucy has shown herself to have little confidence, this spiritual care comes to her without his initiative; she feels better simply by being around him. After the episode with the nun, Lucy gains free access to this "influence" (334). But in order to secure Graham's

companionship, she has had to submit to becoming his patient.

Submission to that other, debilitating influence, disciplinary power, when she has begun her turn away makes the bargain a dubious one. Yet her rueful description of Graham's attitude towards her indicates that at least Lucy is aware of her position. "In short," she avouches of their new relationship, "he regarded me scientifically in the light of a patient, and at once exercised his professional skill, and gratified his natural benevolence, by a course of cordial and attentive treatment" (335). Her compromise is mitigated, moreover, by the amount of attention she receives. Referring, herself, to Graham's letters as "elixir," Lucy informs us that their number has multiplied "since the adventure of the garret" (334). As well, Graham has become her steady companion: "I did not live on letters only: I was visited, I was looked after; once a week I was taken out to La Terrasse; always I was made much of" (335). This attention seems bountiful, in particular, in light of Graham's initial treatment of Lucy. We might recall Lucy telling us on the doctor's first appearance at the pensionnat that he paid her as much attention as "what is given to unobtrusive articles of furniture, chairs of ordinary joiner's work, and carpets of no striking pattern" (162). By becoming his patient, Lucy changes this.

Moreover, she appears to retain enough self-determination while under his care to struggle out of it when Graham lodges his real affections with Paulina. Her compromise, then, has not meant renewed self-abandonment, and, through it, she has gained access to encouragement not available before; nevertheless, Lucy exposes her self to continued manipulation in exchange for this encouragement and, in doing so, certainly impedes her progress.

When she does end her involvement with the medical discipline after Graham withdraws his affection, the event is marked by a demonstration of commitment to her own judgment. As in the case of her self-assertion over Madame Beck and against the procedure of examination, Lucy's self-assertion here involves a contest of observational authority. But since it is her own observational authority that has been at issue in her dealings with Graham, in this case, the contest takes place within herself.

After the symbolic act of burying the letters Graham has sent her as part of his treatment, Lucy is again confronted with the spectre of the nun. Whether or not she is able to handle the vision on her own--to remain committed to her observational integrity even though her powers waver --will determine her success. Both Lucy's recognition that Graham can no longer be a resource and her formulation of a creed of self evince that this time, she is prepared.

Immediately before the nun has appeared, Lucy has recognized the inexorability of personal responsibility. "If life be a war," she has asseverated, "it seemed my destiny to conduct it single-handed" (381). When the nun appears, she attempts to touch her, and speaks to her, apparently beginning this single-handed combat with life. She makes clear that the effort reflects her determination to abjure medical intervention by adverting to Graham's absence immediately following. "This time," she muses, "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). Although her words are wistful, they consolidate her creed; there can be no one to whom she dares submit her vision, now that she has taken responsibility for it herself.

It is clear that, just as there is a physical break in the text at this point, there has been a breakthrough in Lucy's struggle for self-determination. The very next scene (introducing the job offer from Mr. Home) provides the occasion both for Lucy's discussion of her nature and of Madame Beck's altered behaviour towards her. We have seen how the sequence conveys the protagonist's burgeoning sense of self. As well, the next chapter finds Lucy articulating the way in which Graham has attempted to fabricate a useful version of her, an important realization in her appreciation

of disciplinary power. "With now welcome force," she relates, "I realized his entire misapprehension of my character and nature. He wanted always to give me a role not mine. Nature and I opposed him" (404). As Lucy begins to cleave to self-definition, and realizes the extent to which disciplinary power interferes with it, she moves substantially closer to extricating herself from the panoptic machine. But her freedom ultimately comes when she begins to recognize that she is indeed caught in a machine, that the disciplines co-operate to mismake her.

Not surprisingly, the recognition first takes shape within the context of Lucy's involvement with the Church. When Lucy arrives at Madame Walravens' house on an errand, she falls into the company of a priest clearly bent on manipulating her (483-84). Because the Church always has represented an apparatus of control to Lucy, she soon finds herself considering the extent to which she is being manipulated. Among her discoveries is that Madame Beck, the power with whom she must contend at the pensionnat, is in league with the priest; she has sent Lucy here to facilitate his control. Tellingly, Lucy envisions the "arrangement" in panoptic terms. It is "that quick-shot and crafty glance of a Jesuit-eye" that has "threaded" the manipulations together "like [a] rosary" (486). That the priest is revealed to be Père Silas, to whom Lucy earlier has trusted her confession,

compounds the sense of intimate control. Lucy realizes, then, that the Church mobilizes more than ecclesiastical forces to achieve its ends, her first intimation that she faces a compact of forces arrayed against her.

We have seen how, in spite of her always-wary attitude toward the Church, Lucy earlier has succumbed to its interference at a moment of personal frailty. By this point in her story, however, she has gathered the fortitude to withstand it. When Père Silas confirms that he has "coveted the direction" of her soul since the earlier episode, Lucy admits that she is tempted by his transformed vision of her (487). But even while admitting this, she intimates to the reader that the vision will not come to pass. Her echoing of Père Silas' controlling language foregrounds what will save her. Having accepted responsibility for self-definition, Lucy will not allow herself to be "passed under discipline, moulded, trained" by the Church (487). A simple "Not so" following her admission conveys her immunity in concrete terms (487). Moreover, Lucy presents us with her fully realized vision of a panoptic Church very soon after,[11] a clear indication that she now appreciates its insidious nature.

Yet neither her consciousness of its "sleepless eye" nor of its collusion with other forces causes Lucy to eschew the Church's interest. In fact, she submits to a series of

"temptation[s]" by Père Silas, undeterred by what she perceives to be his "mixture of motives" in courting her soul (514-15). Given the implication that Père Silas' profound attention is what has tempted her at Madame Walravens' house, we might wonder whether Lucy will withstand ecclesiastical interference still. Even more problematic, however, is her relationship with Paul. Now the "'intimate'" friend of this servant of the Church--his avowed "'sister,'" to use Paul's final denomination--Lucy is made vulnerable to the Church through Paul's submission (500). Though Lucy may secure herself against its control, she is delivered up to the ecclesiastical discipline each time Paul visits the confessional. Aware of her vulnerability (503, 514), in fact creating her panoptic vision to reveal the import of his visits, Lucy nevertheless cleaves to him. This real affection, then, for which Lucy neither has had to consider the transfer of her soul, as in the case of Père Silas, nor actually has transferred it, as in the case of Graham, may yet undo her. Instead, it provides the context for her confirmed liberation from the Church.

Not only does Lucy not succumb to Père Silas' view, but also, through their affection, she opens Paul to hers. While, in part, Lucy has attended to the priest's representations to please Paul, when her "conscience"

demands it (516), she "declare[s] [her] faith...and...widely sever[s] [herself] from [her friend]" (517). Paul's affection for Lucy, on the other hand, emboldens him to heed his conscience over the precepts of "'priests of controversialists'" and recognize a common faith between him and Lucy (517). In itself, this privileging of personal judgment represents a challenge to the subordinating eye of the Church. But Paul's elaboration on their shared belief tenders a more serious challenge. He celebrates the perspective of a "'mighty unseen'" God which diminishes the perspectives of men. "'How seem in the eyes of that God who made all firmaments, from whose nostrils issued whatever of life is here, or in the stars shining yonder--how seem the differences of man?'" he reasons (517). In keeping with this panoptic investment of the Creator, Paul extols too the judgment of this "'incomprehensible'" God, in turn leaving "'neither...Measure, nor Comparison'" for man (517). Like Lucy, then, as we discovered in our initial assessment of the Church, Paul seems to reserve the privilege of panoptic regulation for God.[12] Although he remains a practising Roman Catholic (594), by subscribing to this view which subverts its panoptic authority, in effect he too rejects the control of the Church. By joining Lucy outside the scope of intimate regulation, then, Paul has made possible a further gain for Lucy. As she emerges from her entanglement

in the disciplinary network, she may secure not only a self unmolested by disciplinary power, but also affection unmarred by it--an experience up to this point Lucy has not known.

As well as ushering in her final contest with the Church, Lucy's discovery of disciplinary co-operation sets the stage for her final encounters with educational power. It is immediately after her experience at Madame Walravens' that Lucy is confronted with and overcomes the procedure of examination. Her final contest with Madame Beck too succeeds this revelation. Her discovery appears, then, to have bolstered Lucy in her determination to be free of disciplinary power, a determination formed, in turn, in her encounter with the medical discipline. When Lucy discovers all these forces at large, however, in the "dream-like" park on fête-night, she evidently sustains a vision which frees her completely (551). The night ends with Lucy "relieved from all sense of the spectral and unearthly," just as her entanglement has begun with an alertness to apparitions (570). It appears that Lucy's ghosts are laid to rest with this final, grand vision.

Appropriately, given her strengthened powers of observation, Lucy's "marvel[lous]" vision arrives courtesy of an opiate (550). Thus, although "every shape [is] wavering, every movement floating" when Lucy surveys the

park (551), she is not "left...to wonder" about the state of her vision, as she has been when her powers seemed to fail her; she is aware from the time it is administered that the drug affects what she sees (546-47). Moreover, ironically, Lucy receives the opiate because Madame Beck, over whom she has newly prevailed, attempts now to manipulate her in this way. Instead of "h[o]ld[ing] [her] quiet" in her bed, however, the drug sends Lucy forth to the park, where its dislocating effect heightens the embattled heroine's sense of opposition (546); it creates the ideal condition for Lucy's discernment of panoptic community, an event which renders the machinations of Madame Beck and the others futile.

Lucy's hostile stance towards the directress and the priest, discovered together in the park, comes as no surprise, given her earlier recognition of their collusion (not to mention the fact that Madame Beck has just had her drugged). But her recoiling from Graham when she finds herself within his compass does elicit some wonder. Although Lucy has parted company with Graham in his capacity as doctor, she has remained on friendly terms with him as part of her Villette acquaintance. In fact, he appears now in the company of these other friends. Yet it is his "oppressing" gaze in the retiring Lucy's direction that makes Lucy relinquish her friends when she "might have

spoken," despite her alienated state (554). Her reaction to Graham's "scrutiny" suggests that, this night, her experience with the "always powerful" doctor has not been forgotten (554); she feels the pressure of his defining notions still.[13]

The contiguity of this implied judgment to Lucy's open indictment of Madame Beck and Père Silas implicates Graham too in Lucy's panoptic vision. As narrator, Lucy foregrounds this idea through the embracive image she employs to introduce the next encounter. She explains how she had been reluctant to leave the park after encountering Graham and the others because she sensed "that the night's drama was but begun, that the prologue was scarce spoken" (556). Her advancing almost immediately to the discovery of "the secret junta" of priest and directress suggests not only that the night's drama, at least at one level, concerns disciplinary intrigue but also that Graham participates in it (558).

About this next sighting of disciplinary players Lucy is unequivocal. In addition to identifying them as "the secret junta," Lucy spells out the importance to her self-restoration of witnessing Père Silas and Madame Beck in "conjuration" before her (558). "The sight of them thus assembled," she affirms, "did me good" (558). But the best measure of her integrity can be taken through her response

to this growing burden of realized opposition. If, at the inception of each new involvement with disciplinary power, Lucy has sustained a crisis in vision, what will she now experience when confronted with the spectacle of the disciplines en masse in the park? Lucy herself invokes the spectre of what might have happened, thereby emphasizing the fact that it does not.

When Lucy comes upon her ecclesiastical and educational overseers after turning from the gaze of the medical, she clearly feels the strain of her night's discoveries; she sits concealed among the spreading branches of trees, "[w]ith [her] head bent, and [her] forehead resting on [her] hands" (560). From the point of view of her observational struggle, however, no crisis follows upon the display of disciplinary might. Instead, Lucy prepares the reader for the greatest crisis to befall her yet--her meeting "face to face" with the "resurrect[ed]...flesh" of her ghostly nun--only to discount the vision as "[a]ll falsit[y]--all figmen[t]!" (562-63). That the crisis Lucy dreads does not materialize serves as confirmation that the disciplinary struggle is over. In fact, Lucy appears to mark the ending in a statement which transcends its immediate context. "It is over," she declares. "...The crisis and the revelation are passed by" (562). Although she refers only to the coming of the nun, Lucy's words reverberate with her whole

panoptic experience. The final crisis in her struggle with the disciplines has come with the revelation of their collectivity, and Lucy has proved herself equal to the vision. Having overcome each power in a contest for self-determination and been prepared for their daunting unity by her experience at Madame Walravens', Lucy has secured the strength to stare down the panoptic machine. Yet, free from the power of all eyes but her own, she returns to her bed at the Rue Fossette to find there her "old phantom--the NUN"; it is nothing more than "a long bolster dressed in a long black stole, and artfully invested with a white veil," the last instalment in an extended practical joke (569). Lucy discovers that the power to determine what she sees has been hers all along.

Notes

[1] See chapter one 72-73. Gérin points out that Brontë felt useless in spite of the fact that "she was at that very time engaged" in writing Jane Eyre; "a sad commentary," Gérin remarks, "upon the creation of a masterpiece" (335).

[2] Although the narrator visits both Shirley and Caroline at home, the real contrast emerges between the life of Caroline, representatively female, and the life of Robert Moore, representatively male. Shirley's position as "Captain Keeldar," head of a rather large household, sets her apart from most unmarried women. Unlike that of the average single woman, her day is marked by how little sewing she does and how much she does to please only herself, including participating in a number of unladylike activities.

[3] The situation of distressed workers is another social ill Brontë's third novel addresses. For a focussed discussion of the relationship between the two groups in Shirley, see Roslyn Belkin, "Rejects of the Marketplace: Old Maids in Charlotte Brontë's Shirley."

[4] Jane's efforts to support herself may take the form of a single woman's fantasy, but they represent nevertheless the authentic struggle of one who must depend on labour, rather than wealth, to survive. See 93-95 above.

[5] All references to Villette are to the Penguin edition.

[6] Foucault refers to "[o]ur society" (217), but, by way of historical reference, dates the establishment of such generalization to the 1830s (216). In other words, the kind of panoptic society which Foucault describes would have been flourishing at the time Brontë wrote Villette.

[7] The remainder of the chapter contains an exposition of the relationship between this development and other developments constitutive of modern society.

[8] See 116 above.

[9] The relationship between the examination and disciplinary technology is discussed in chapter one 50-51.

[10] See 114 above.

[11] See discussion on 124-26 above; see also as context for discussion of Paul's liberation from Church, 154-56

below.

[12] Lucy's declaration of faith here reflects her rejection of the Church's interference by disapproving of the "forms" it places "between [worshippers] and God" (516).

[13] Lucy's general anxiety surrounding the idea that Graham might touch upon "[her] identity" (her face is concealed) bespeaks her earlier experience with him (554). But her adverting directly (555) to one of the "epithets" which he has used earlier to create a convenient version of her confirms that the experience lives for Lucy (403). That Lucy has recognized the import of such description in the earlier scene (see 151-52 above) supports the idea that she means to avoid it here.

CHAPTER 3

The Struggle for the Body

If Lucy's experience on fête-night culminates in her encountering her own observational potency as she escapes the net of disciplinary fabrications, it also culminates in her getting caught in the net of her own delusions. With respect to her relations to the disciplines, Lucy's powers are at their height on fête-night. She leaves behind "all sense of the spectral and unearthly" after witnessing in the park the spectacle of disciplinary community (570), her fitness marked by the non-materialization of her nun. From another standpoint, however, Lucy's perception fails her. In place of the "spectre" she has anticipated (562), a "well-nourished" "girl of Villette" appears (563); yet Lucy lacks the discernment to create a reasonable account of who the girl is. While triumphing over the disciplines, she clearly suffers observational weakness on another front, these distortions referring the reader not to the panoptic system at all, but to another site of struggle in the novel--another contest for the control of another gaze.

Lucy herself lays the groundwork for such a distinction with her pointed commentary on the dual nature of her experience with the nun. It is when Lucy overhears her

disciplinary antagonists make reference to the approach of Justine Marie, a name she has come to associate with her ghostly nun, that she has a "presentiment" about coming "face to face" with the vision that has haunted her (562). We have seen already, however, how that "revelation" "passe[s]" Lucy "by" (562). There is no confrontation with a "risen ghost" (563). Instead, Lucy must face the truth that the well-nourished girl who does appear displaces Paul's nun, and by extension Lucy, in Paul's affections. When she addresses this "revelation," Lucy takes pains to link it to the other, using the occasion to mark out the difference between the two classes of vision. "The revelation was indeed come," she reflects.

> Presentiment had not been mistaken in her impulse; there is a kind of presentiment which never <u>is</u> mistaken; it was I who had for a moment miscalculated; not seeing the true bearing of the oracle, I had thought she muttered of vision when, in truth, her prediction touched reality. (565)

That the actual challenge to Lucy's perception comes not from the psychic realm but from the physical lends support to the idea that there too Lucy engages in a struggle relating to vision. That she marks the distinction herself between the two realms offers some suggestion that, as narrator, Lucy draws attention to this other frame of visual reference in the novel. At the very least, her careful construction of an experience of double vision in this

scene, along with her commentary on it, invites the reader to consider the complex nature of observation as represented in Villette.[1]

Lucy uses her position as narrator to draw attention also to her observational incapacity regarding the second revelation. She makes an extended point of demonstrating to us that when a flesh-and-blood Justine Marie appears, she cannot see her clearly at all. She emphasizes the fact that her vision is distorted by offering up prayers to the "goddess" Truth (564, 566); by praising Truth at length when she knows the truth she is praising to be a lie, Lucy underscores just how distorted her vision is. Her praise of Truth is punctuated by hints to the reader that what she is embracing is not the truth at all. When comments to that effect--such as "[s]ome perhaps would have held the premises doubtful, the proofs insufficient"(566)--are later confirmed by the revelation that, indeed, Justine Marie is not M. Paul's fiancée, we appreciate that this flesh and blood "nun" signals a different kind of weakness in Lucy's vision than the ghostly nun. A final comment within the scene at hand finds Lucy gesturing, as she did when first addressing the two nuns, to the other site of struggle in the novel. It is with respect to matters of the flesh that her mind's eye is "in this hour...so generous, so creative," Lucy specifies (566). From the mind of the Victorian spinster,

we might expect nothing less.

As we saw in chapter one, the nature of the fabrication early Victorian society called the old maid--a woman of "degenerat[ing]""for[m]" and "sink[ing]""features" at only twenty-five--meant that single women were divested of their own bodies.[2] This asexual creation provided a society which defined all women in terms of their physical utility with a way of exploiting the women it had rendered redundant: by defining them as "a sort of sub-animal class," Victorian society made single women wish they would disappear.

Through an exploration of the disciplinary network surveilling Villette society, we saw in chapter two the machinery which creates such social aberrance in action. Although Lucy does not record specifically what anomaly they attempt to create, she certainly provides a record of the disciplines' united effort to forge a useful version of her. In turn, her observational infirmity and repeated capitulation reflects, at least in part, the way in which each individual comes to enact his or her own aberrance;[3] in other words, in applying the theory of Foucault to Lucy's story, we learn something of the psychological effect of old maidism.

Yet, as the nature of the fabrication suggests, its full psychological effects are to be known through a consideration of the single woman's relationship to her

body, appropriated and drained of life by an efficient society. When we find Lucy Snowe gesturing to this other site of distress in the scene with the flesh and blood "nun," then, we should not be surprised. While we have witnessed her triumph over the panoptic machine, we have not yet come to know her full story. Here, we witness a crisis emerging from her more intimate struggle: her own, often contradictory, effort to thrive in this contested single woman's body.

The attention paid to the body itself in the novel at large tends to confirm the idea that Lucy's relation to her own forms an integral part of her larger struggle. To begin with, matters of the flesh occupy a significant portion of our narrator's time. How the body is fed, how it is clothed, how much it is desired are subjects of frequent description; moreover, as the second two designations suggest, primarily it is the female body which commands our attention. Since Villette is the story of the circumscribed life of a teacher in a girls' school, this is natural enough: there, except for the occasional visit of the doctor and the regular attendance of the French teacher, the round of female flesh remains unbroken; furthermore, life at the pensionnat has a great deal more to do with being than doing. Accordingly, fashioning a narrative of the life of its inhabitants will mean attending to these matters of a

retiring female body. Yet, although the attention reflects the reality of the subject matter, the way in which it is augmented by symbolic representations of women's bodies suggests that it constitutes more than the narrator's attempt to depict accurately pensionnat life.

In addition to routine descriptions of the female body, we confront in the novel the forms of two women who loom larger than life over the narrative. The painted Cleopatra and the actress Vashti take on a significance disproportionate to their function in the plot. Their symbolic significance is signalled by their proximity to one another in the centre of the second volume (within five chapters) and the fact that the chapters in which they appear bear their names. Moreover, in each case, our narrator records at some length her responses to these figures, thus according them a significance they would not otherwise hold.

Further, Lucy's nun makes her first appearance along with these figures, adding a third shape to the looming portraiture at the novel's centre. Although her function in the plot is more central, and revolves around her role as emissary from the spirit world rather than around her actual form, the nun clearly stands as representative of a type of female physicality as well.[4] When we consider her from this point of view, and in the company of these other women, we

confront, at the heart of the novel, three figures which suggest that Lucy's regular attention to the female body forms part of a larger scheme.

Her handling of the symbolic figures, in turn, attunes us to the nature of that scheme. Lucy approaches each figure in such a way as to point up the extent of the woman's fleshiness. Although in the case of the nun she accomplishes this by association (an approach telling in itself), in the case of Vashti and the Cleopatra Lucy evaluates the women's bodily substance directly.[5] In fact, her treatment of the women, including her indirect categorization of the nun, establishes an order in which the woman who appears fully fleshed pays the price of that display, passivity; while the woman who displays an active soul is consigned to a bodiless realm. If we apply the theory of Irigaray to this distribution of flesh, we appreciate that it relates to the patriarchal appropriation of the female body. According to Irigaray, as we discovered in chapter one, when the female body appears in patriarchal society, it is as object only, shaped according to the desires of men. In this realm of fabrication, the body as extension of female subjecthood does not exist (59-62). Lucy's treatment of the women exposes this great divide, then--the woman of body has no soul, the woman of soul, no body. But as we learn first at this symbolic level, the

objectification of women will not be exposed only in Villette. Because it affords women like Lucy (whose bodies are no longer desirable) not even this object role, it will be challenged.[6] After all, this is the spinster's--this undesirable woman's--story.

The point at which Lucy mounts an attack on the system that excludes her is the point at which it divides each woman.[7] Irigaray addresses, in both "Women on the Market" and "This Sex Which Is Not One," the means by which individual women are socialized into objectifying themselves. We laid out in chapter one her view in "Women on the Market" that women are allowed to "[p]articipat[e] in society" only through an object model of femininity, a model that is presented to them as psychologically "normal" (61; ch. 1). In "This Sex Which Is Not One," she emphasizes the visual component of this objectification. Her discussion of the way the visual shapes the patriarchal construction of desire, as detailed in chapter one, presents us with a model of woman as object of visual pleasure, there "to stimulate the drives of the 'subject'" (64; ch. 1). Irigaray's characterization of the process by which women become objects also draws on the visual realm; she employs the mirror to account for women's distraction by objecthood.[8] Because the patriarchal construction of desire not only reflects male sexuality exclusively, Irigaray points out,

(the "mirror [is] invested by the (masculine) 'subject' to reflect himself"), but also "prescribe[s]" "the role of 'femininity'" as part of that reflection, women are obstructed from recognizing any but a male view of femininity (30).[9] Thus, "This Sex" makes us aware of the involvement of visual politics in the socialization of women. From it, we gain an appreciation of how women are dazzled by the view of men into seeing themselves as objects of visual pleasure. We realize that not only are women separated from their bodies by the patriarchal system, but their own bodies become show-pieces to them, to be shaped, adorned, dressed for men. It is with this visual aspect of objectification in particular that Lucy takes issue, the aspect which makes most plain the attending enshroudment of the spinster.

By fashioning a narrative which visits a variety of the sites where women confront the fabricated image of themselves, Lucy unfolds the tale of their physical alienation. In each case, she offers up a mode by which women might learn to objectify themselves. Indeed, at the centre of her tale, Lucy recounts the particulars of her visit to an art gallery, an occasion which provides her with the opportunity to feature explicitly the visual model of objectification. Not only does she present us with the object of visual pleasure in the Cleopatra, but also, she

engages the politics involved in gazing on such a woman. As well, Lucy draws our attention to a series of paintings which represent the obscured side of this object-lesson. These active women, without physical substance, remind us that the female body emerges to titillate only. Moreover, because the series depicts the various stages of a woman's ownership by man, it conveys a more important lesson still. The spinster, without substance, yet without even this private relation to mark her existence, is noticeably absent from La vie d'une femme.

Although her origins in schoolyard lore bring before the reader another mode by which women apprehend their place in society, the nun, as suggested above, passes by without narrative comment. Her contiguity to and affinity with the insubstantial women allows us to extrapolate on her place, but Lucy herself leaves this representative of single women alone. Instead, she comments on the order that excludes her by constructing her own lesson on women and desire.

Lucy transforms a night at the theatre (open, as any vehicle of culture, to upholding the norm) into a night of revelation. Although the necessity of representing her model of desire in transcendent terms signifies the intrusion of the patriarchal system, Lucy nevertheless manages to construct in Vashti woman as desiring subject. Further, she does so within a visual context, although the

medium this time does not require it. Thus, Lucy's lesson constitutes a challenge in particular to the visual economy, blotting out its disengaged bodies (and disembodied women) with the apparition of female desire.

Even before Vashti appears, however, Lucy has begun this challenge by submitting the other representations of women to the test of lived experience. In the novel at large, where she treats daily life among "real" girls and women, Lucy applies this strategy in reverse. Pairing her knowledge of her acquaintances with the constructed version of femininity, she displays and discredits a system that belies them all.

Appropriately, Lucy deploys her companions Ginevra Fanshawe and Paulina de Bassompierre to diagram the literary mode of socialization, wherein the Victorian woman meets the heroines of the day, romantic and domestic. By representing Ginevra as the object of desire and Paulina as the woman of spirit within the context of these respective roles, Lucy shows how the literary models perpetuate the partriarchal division of body and soul. At the same time, she shares her intimate knowledge of them, ensuring that we apprehend Ginevra and Paulina not as types, but as people. In fact, her revelation of the secrets of Ginevra's flesh explodes the constructed notion of femininity; while, ironically, her tracking of Paulina's <u>disappearance</u> into the role of wife

reminds us that spirituality is a form of objecthood too.

Although Lucy does not foreground the visual element of this literary division (beyond offering a telling analysis of each woman's looks), Ginevra's involvement in a visual economy is clear. To a great extent, we come to appreciate her position as show-piece through Lucy's representation of the pensionnat, not as a site for the reflection of femininity, but as a site for its cultivation. Using her position within the pensionnat, Lucy affords not only an authentic view of how female bodies are, but also a view of how they become other. Her explication in particular of the preparations for and dynamics of a school ball locates Ginevra and all the young women in an environment in which they are groomed to be objects on display. As a site dedicated to the making of young ladies, the pensionnat provides an ideal background for Lucy's critique of socialization.

As a group, Lucy's betrayals of the Victorian standard signal her interest in breaking it down. But her challenges to the system at a personal level demonstrate the extent of her resolve. In the first place, as if to elude the gaze of any recalcitrant reader, Lucy reveals very little about her own appearance. Exceeding any constraints placed on her as first-person narrator, she guards her body from the same objectification that she works against in the case of the

other women. In light of the attending depreciation of the spinster, moreover, this objective seems all the more likely. At the same time, she uses her position as narrator to subvert the dynamic that powers objectification. Directing her admiring gaze at not one, but two men, she destroys the fiction that women exist only to be looked at. Yet, last, in her own world, where she exercises less control, Lucy demonstrates that simply shunning practices that lead to objectification seems the best strategy. Dressing, and even eating, in a manner different from the other pensionnat residents, Lucy ensures that her body will not be subject to the same scrutiny as theirs. Thus, in her personal affairs, Lucy pursues a course as unflinching as her site by site demolition of the social system. She obstructs at each level the practice of objectifying women.

And yet, has Lucy defeated this system? Has she not, in entire compliance with what it requires of her, disappeared? Moreover, in avoiding the practices that expose women to the gaze of desire, has Lucy not mortified her own? She herself emphasizes, for instance, the delight Ginevra takes in sustaining her body. From this perspective, our heroine's strategy looks less like a challenge than an unwitting testimony to the system's psychological effects. We learn from Lucy's personal response the extent to which she herself has been

socialized.

Before even taking into account her physical self-repudiation, we recognize in the contradictory nature of Lucy's strategy the impact of her social position. As outlined in chapter one, the Victorian spinster could find no unoffending ground with respect to visibility. Within the structure of femininity, she was dismissed as a shadow, yet because she remained, she became a spectacle, endowed with the very lifeless attributes which were supposed to render her invisible in the first place (65-66). That Lucy turns herself into a shadow to avoid being pilloried as one, then, stands as evidence of her entrapment in a system she undertakes to destroy. But her thwarting at this strategic level is only the distant effect of her entrapment. What really matters is that her predicament has forced her into combat with her own flesh.

Although her habits alert us to her most intimate struggle, for the most part, Lucy deletes it from her account of objectification. Primarily, we mark a responsible physical ethic which supports her commitment to woman's physical freedom. When her relationship with Paul enters the physical realm, however, Lucy's reserve breaks down. She cannot keep from us (or Paul) her desire to have her body used in the very way which she has campaigned against: she wants him to look at her, in purely physical

terms. That Lucy harbours this lust for objectification is a source of obvious conflict for her, one to which she draws our attention and, hence, one which offers us new insight into her second crisis in the park. Having gestured only, to the nature of what ails her when she is confronted by Justine Marie, Lucy now provides us with the information to read the situation. We see mobilized in her meeting with the nun of the flesh all the anxieties inscribed in the single woman by an objectifying system. Moreover, once this view has been opened up, we begin to suspect what has drawn Lucy to Paul in the first place. Among these anxieties lurk Lucy's appetites, both real and inscribed, and Paul, all along, has touched them. In responding, he gives substance to the flesh which society--and Lucy--have done their best to live without.

Perhaps in spite of herself, then, Lucy <u>does</u> furnish us with her full story. She shows us not only how she attempts to negotiate the difficulties of her position, but also the extent to which she fails. And Brontë, in creating a narrator whose most formidable opponent becomes her own body, furnishes us with a moving portrait of the psycho-sexual consequences of spinsterhood in the mid-nineteenth century.

Lucy's challenge of the system may break down at a personal level, but directed at the sources of

misinformation, it is forceful and sincere. It is a clear-sighted Lucy who, in the thick of her campaign, takes us on a tour of a Villette art gallery. In fact, the remarks with which she prefaces this visit might be seen as directing us to the political content to follow. In these remarks, she first establishes that such visits are for her as much about analysis as enjoyment. In a gallery, she "[is] happy," she informs us; "happy, not always in admiring, but in examining, questioning, and forming conclusions" (274). By forming a conclusion about the importance of authenticity in painting, she then establishes an analytic context for her later remarks in the gallery. Paintings which win Lucy's approbation are those which capture "[n]ature's power," she advises us, whether it be in landscapes (where she applies this phrase directly), portraits, or historical paintings (275). By establishing authenticity as her criterion for judgment, Lucy prepares us for a discussion in the gallery in which representation itself will be the focus, that is, the extent to which an artist does or does not reflect reality.

On the one hand, this instructs us on how to read Lucy's criticism of the paintings. For instance, when Lucy exclaims of the series <u>La vie d'une femme</u>, "What women to live with!", we know to hold the artist responsible for these "insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless

nonentities" not women themselves (278). On the other, it puts in place a framework suited specifically to her analysis of socialization. With representation in mind, we are prepared to consider Cleopatra and La vie d'une femme as constructions of femininity and to recognize how these constructions work together to render women's reality invisible.

As well as directing us to the analytic purport of this gallery visit, Lucy furnishes us with a taste of the commentary to come in her prefatory remarks. Referring to a school of painting to which the fleshy Cleopatra will clearly belong, she both swells up and deflates a group of "very well executed and complacent-looking fat women" in one wry remark. Of the women, she observes, they "struck me as by no means the goddesses they appeared to consider themselves" (274). Not only does Lucy represent and dismiss with this remark the portraying of women as flesh-goddesses, but also she dismisses the portraying of a desire in them to be flesh-goddesses. Although too weighty a construction to place on Lucy's one-liner here, the critique of objectification will seem inevitable once we view the Cleopatra. In any case, her comment serves to engage the theme of flesh-worship from the beginning and to provide a sample of how Lucy will combat it.

Building on this theme, Lucy sets the stage for the

unveiling of the Cleopatra, as the gallery tour begins. "[T]his picture...," she informs us, "seemed to consider itself the queen of the collection" (275). She describes how there is "a cushioned bench duly set in front for the accommodation of worshipping connoisseurs, who, having gazed themselves off their feet, might be fain to complete the business sitting" (275). The worship of this goddess-queen of flesh is, of course, accomplished through the eyes; but, not only that, gazing on her flesh leaves the gazer weak, one presumes, with desire. Before unveiling the object responsible for its stimulation, then, Lucy emphasizes how looking is inextricably bound up in the experience of desire.

She continues this emphasis after describing the voluptuous Cleopatra, featuring Paul's reaction to her gazing at the portrait. He is shocked at her "[a]stounding...audacity" in viewing the portrait "with the self-possession of a garçon" (277). Clearly, "that picture" is meant for male eyes only (277). Paul's further pronouncement that married women might view the painting without compunction while single women could not reinforces the idea that it portrays an object of desire (278). Since married women may look and single women may not, the picture must be sexually charged.

This kind of dictum in a world in which women have been

cut off from their desire is, of course, telling. It betrays an anxiety about the single woman which suggests that she can never be as alienated from her desire as the Victorians might wish. Presumably, the married woman, as private property, no longer poses the threat of being a free agent who might gain access to her desire; while the single woman, on the other hand, representing pure desire for men, must be kept pure of her own desire. The irony, of course, is that this picture is not going to gain any woman access to her desire; objectification, as Lucy's response indicates, is not stimulating.[10]

It is not only that Lucy discredits the "doctrine" because she "d[oes] not see the sense of it," as she tells Paul (278); it is also that, earlier, she has denounced the picture to the reader as "an enormous piece of claptrap" (276). Making clear that this object of desire, which leaves other worshippers weak, does nothing for her, Lucy at the same time points up its inauthentic nature. This suggests an intriguing subtext for her discrediting of Paul's pronouncement.[11] That is, Lucy may reject the rule dividing married women from single women not for the obvious reason that they deserve an equal opportunity to view the painting, but for the more subversive reason that they will view it with equal equanimity. In other words, she recognizes the portrait as a fabrication nurturing male

desire, one which affords women only the pleasure of imagining themselves as objects. Both married and single women alike could view such a painting without compunction, then, because it would arouse none of their real desires; it would leave them, as Paul charges of Lucy, "coolly" perusing it (277). Although this is not the danger he has in mind when he steers Lucy away from the painting, perhaps Paul does right: if unattached women were to gaze openly on the patriarchal construction of desire and recognize it as such, they would be more likely to recognize, also, their own effaced desire; this truly would be something "astounding" and "audacious."

Framing her actual description of the painting with intimations on viewing and desire, Lucy teases out the issues inherent in visual objectification. But her direct attack on the construction of women as objects is to be found in the description between. Employing the strategy of which we had a taste in her prefatory remarks, she deflates the version of femininity with which we are presented in the painting; that is, she robs it of its power by laughing at it.

Lucy's description of the Cleopatra is a delicious piece of satire on the objectified female body. The subject of the painting is a passive female whose ample proportions are portrayed as existing only for the gratification of male

pleasure. Lucy begins by ridiculing the sheer excessiveness of such a fantasy, pointing out that to reach such ample proportions, a lady would have to have some very unfeminine desires indeed: "She was, indeed, extremely well fed: very much butcher's meat--to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids--must she have consumed to attain that breadth and height, that wealth of muscle, that affluence of flesh" (275). What, Lucy goes on to ask, is a woman of such clearly robust health doing "loung[ing] away the noon on a sofa" when the room is in such obvious disarray (275)? The profusion of "vases and globes" is to Lucy "[p]ots and pans...rolled here and there on the foreground"; the remainder of the ornamentation "a perfect rubbish of flowers...and an absurd and disorderly mass of curtain upholstery" (275-76). Lucy neatly turns what is intended as evidence of the object of desire's luxuriant sensuality into evidence of her slovenly habits, neatly transforming her from one who <u>is</u> to one who <u>does</u> (or should do), from an object to a subject. Similarly, our narrator makes short work of the depiction of the clothes created to titillate the viewer rather than clothe the wearer. Lucy makes both the intention of the artist and her disapproval of that intention clear in her description of Cleopatra's clothes: "out of abundance of material--seven-and-twenty yards, I should say, of drapery--she managed to make inefficient

raiment" (275). By exposing, through humour, then, the extent to which this fantasy female is removed from a real woman and her real, practical world, Lucy exposes and rejects the male construction of desire--and has a great deal of fun in doing so.

Her exposure and rejection of the other side of that desire, while not so playful, is equally decided. On the other side of the male construction of desire--objecthood--is the male construction of the parameters of subjecthood for women--the roles women are permitted to play in society. While they may not act in the sexual arena, they may act in socially sanctioned ways outside that arena: not surprisingly, ways that are defined by a woman's function with relation to a man and that are void of any relation to the body.

Lucy turns to this reverse side of objecthood in the second painting of woman, or rather, series of paintings, that she chooses to describe for the reader. This is the series entitled La vie d'une femme, that life consisting of four phases: youth, marriage, motherhood, and widowhood. Although the relation of woman to man in the first phase is not marked clearly by its very title, as are the others, this painting, in its depiction of a young girl, "her dress very prim," (277) coming out of church, makes the girl's place in the patriarchy as clear as the places of the other

three. While they serve or have served as wives and mothers, she is a servant of the Church until she secures--which, as a "little precocious she-hypocrite," she will surely do--an earthly master (277). All the paintings feature woman, in her active role, as disembodied; she has, of course, a body in these pictures, but it is not the body of vital flesh, the body of desire, that Cleopatra has; it is a body, rather, marked by its lack of vitality, marking the woman, in turn, as an artificial construction, as much so as the Cleopatra.

In responding to these figures, however, Lucy replaces the humour with which she ridiculed the Cleopatra with disgust. Her description of the Jeune Mère, for instance, points up the same adherence to convention (albeit a different convention) that is found in Cleopatra, but points up, in this case, the unhealthy nature of the distortion of reality rather than its absurdity. The woman is portrayed as "hanging disconsolate over a clayey and puffy baby with a face like an unwholesome full moon" (277). Lucy may be responding with disgust to these figures because, as "bloodless...nonentities," they bear closer resemblance to the figure of the spinster as it is socially constructed than does the Cleopatra (278).

Lucy notes that the women are "cold and vapid as ghosts" (278) and are "painted rather in a remarkable style

--flat, dead, pale and formal" (277). She has used both descriptions with relation to herself in the narrative. To begin with, Lucy portrays herself, on a number of occasions, as cutting only a ghostly figure in the world.

Significantly, one of these occasions is when she begins her stay with Miss Marchmont, the spinster. Lucy, who appears to herself "in the glass...[as] a faded, hollow-eyed vision[,]....[a] wan spectacle," soon loses touch with the "life at life's sources" that, in spite of her appearance, beats in her, so that her appearance becomes a more faithful indicator of her existence in these straitened circumstances than it initially did (96). Miss Marchmont is both the "little morsel of human affection, which...[she] prized as if it were a solid pearl" and the spectre of what is to come for Lucy. Her description of herself accords with both aspects of this relation to Miss Marchmont. As a young woman without connections, she is a nonentity, someone who makes no more impression than a vision among the substantial ranks in society. "[A] wan spectacle," then, is a fitting representation of the person who, experiencing life as a negation, has "clung to" whichever person of substance is accessible to her (97); it is telling that Lucy imagines Miss Marchmont's affection in the most substantial of terms: as food, the substance most essential to life, and a precious gem, one of the most prized. However, as much as

Miss Marchmont represents substance to Lucy, despite her "fortune," she is "impotent" (95) and has lived her life as "a woe-struck and selfish woman" (101). To these hallmarks of a certain type of spinsterhood is added the fact that "she ha[s] the character of being very eccentric" (95). Lucy's rendering of Miss Marchmont, then, is decidedly a portrait of a "maiden lady" (95). Thus, as much as she represents substance to Lucy, she must represent, also, the kind of insubstantial existence Lucy herself has thrust upon her. In that sense, Miss Marchmont appears as "a hollow-eyed vision" of the confirmed spinster Lucy is to become.

As Lucy continues her life as a single woman, in Brussels, the life's sources that have been stemmed already in Miss Marchmont's service must be plugged up altogether. At this point in her narrative, she describes herself in terms similar to those with which she describes the style of La vie d'une femme; that is, she sees herself as "flat, dead, pale and formal," as well as seeming as "cold" as the ghostly women in the paintings. Lucy gives the following description of her existence as she settles in to life at the pensionnat:

> I had feelings: passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days, I could feel. About the present, it was better to be stoical: about the future -- such a future as mine -- to be dead. And in catalepsy and a dead trance, I studiously held the quick of my nature. (175)

Lucy now seeks out the state which her appearance suggested she was in when she arrived at Miss Marchmont's; she no longer assures the reader that her appearance belies her inner life; rather, she now seeks to stun any inner life that threatens to stir in her, to become the hollow-eyed vision in the mirror.

Immediately after describing for the reader her death-like state, Lucy describes the agony and the effort of maintaining such quiet in herself, of ridding herself of her "longing[s]" by "driving a nail through their temples" (176). Her elaboration intensifies an already memorable image: "[T]hey 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). If one thinks in terms of the ideas of Irigaray, the violence of the image she constructs is an apt reflection of the experience of woman in a patriarchal society and of the single woman in particular.

As a woman, Lucy experiences the disjunction between who she is and what she is constructed as being; trying to live within the confines of an unnatural construction necessitates a certain amount of violence to the self. Lucy's description of herself here captures both the disjunction and the self-violence necessary to maintain it. While both descriptions of herself liken her to the

bloodless women in the series of paintings, this description reveals the suffering behind the construction of womanhood; in other words, it reveals what must be sacrificed in order to turn out women modelled after these ghostly images.

When one considers the sacrifice necessary to approximate the social construction of womanhood, the self-violence necessary to undertake spinsterhood becomes striking. As a woman, Lucy would experience a certain disjunction between her self and her socially constructed self; as a spinster, however, she would experience an utter negation of self. This negation is reflected in the absence of the spinster from La vie d'une femme. It is one thing to be represented as being little more than a ghost; it is another not to be represented at all. Lucy's descriptions of herself, then, accord with the representations of woman in the second paintings she describes; but, more precisely, they operate as a further commentary on that series: they announce both Lucy's kinship with the women in the paintings and her insubstantiality when compared even to such a group of shades.

What Lucy goes on to say after describing how she deadens her longings provides support for the idea that the description has specific reference to her experience as a spinster. Indeed, within the description itself Lucy refers to herself as one whose experience sets her apart from most,

her reference to "such a future as mine" marking her future as unspeakably different from the futures of others. That this unspeakable future means living as a confirmed spinster becomes evident in what follows. Upon describing her interception of what may be "a billet-doux" during a walk in the garden, Lucy enters into a satirical digression on the teachers' and older girls' preoccupation with suitors (177). While satirizing "[a]ll the teachers [who] had dreams of some lover; [and] one (but she was naturally of a credulous turn) [who] believed in a future husband," Lucy also lays bare the loneliness of her own lot (177). She has digressed in order to explain why she "d[oes] not dream...for a moment" that the love-letter is for her (177). Unlike the teachers who harbour delusions about their futures, Lucy gazes clear-eyed on hers. Her acceptance of her future as a lone woman provides the standard against which the ridiculous behaviour of the other teachers is measured: "So it came to pass that I heard the others talk, wondered often at their gaiety, security and self-satisfaction, but did not trouble myself to look up and gaze along the path they seemed so certain of treading" (178). Like much of the satire in her narrative, this digression is flavoured with pain. What becomes clear, then, through her commentary on the love-letter is that Lucy views herself as a confirmed spinster and that she does so not without pain.

Coming after the evocation of her own nullity, this accession to spinsterhood draws a clear line between the two states.

Yet, in this chapter in which Lucy advertises her annihilating singleness, and also mentions for the first time a figure which bears an obvious relation to her unmarried state (in this case, the nun of schoolyard lore) (172), Lucy refuses to make a further connection herself. We are free to draw what inferences we like from her description of walking "solitary" or "alone" through the garden which she has just established as the nun's haunt, but Lucy herself offers no comparisons. Indeed, she makes a point of separating her experience from that of the nun, although her emphatic break between subjects is not rhetorically necessary. After dismissing the "romantic rubbish" about the young woman's suffering, she moves to an account of her own enjoyment of the garden (173). Clearly unmoved by the same spirit of confession as she exhibits in the other sequence, Lucy makes no effort to establish a line of connection here.

That what inhibits Lucy is a creeping discomfort with the nun rather than an indifference to her is suggested, however, by a passing reference in the other sequence. Buried within the otherwise bland love-letter, in a passage left untranslated by Lucy, we discover a brisk reference to

our narrator as a nun. In addition, we find Lucy's own suggestion (by way of an apology for not translating the passage) that the reference causes her pain. The retreat behind such a device suggests that Lucy is unwilling, herself, to identify with a figure who embodies too plainly her own suffering.[12] At the same time, because she conspires to have the connection between them made (by allowing the passage to stand), we are reminded of her investment in doing so. As one of the three symbolic figures involved in Lucy's exposition of the female body, the nun will stand in for Lucy's particular physical experience. Accordingly, she does not suffer this first reference to pass without affording the reader some indication of the connection to come.

When Lucy arrives at the central section of her narrative, however, we find her proceeding by the same indirection. Rather than addressing the nun's physicality at some length, as she does with the Cleopatra and will do with Vashti, Lucy passes over it quickly. She offers only the briefest sketch of the "image" that in this case appears before her, submitting no accompanying commentary on the nature of the figure's femininity (325). Nevertheless, she has made the nun's role as neutralized single woman clear through her placement of her. Situated between the conventional object of desire and the subversive desiring

subject, whom we will come to meet in Vashti, the shadowy nun clearly is not part either of the fleshly or of an alternative realm. Contiguous to the insubstantial women of La vie d'une femme, however, she takes her place beside the woman who forfeits her body in an objectifying system. Yet her difference from these women sets her apart again: unlike them, she bears no social relation to man to mark the place that her body cannot. In other words, she fills the space left absent in the narrative by La vie d'une femme; she comes to represent the obliterated single woman without Lucy's commentary.

Still, what Lucy does say about the nun's appearance provides some indication that she is a participant in this symbology of the body. As her appearing at all signified her involvement in Lucy's struggle with observational power, the way she looks signifies her involvement in Lucy's struggle with the flesh. Although she emerges in "that ghostly chamber," the nun, as depicted by Lucy, is a spirit with form. Using her clothes to draw a woman in outline--"the skirts straight, narrow, black; the head bandaged, veiled, white"--Lucy affords the nun shape without giving her substance (325). Her womanly nature thus intends her involement in Lucy's cataloguing of the body, while her value as spirit indicates what that involvement is.

That Lucy herself deploys the nun in this way, of

course, is beyond reckoning.[13] Given her silence on the figure's femininity, we can ascertain no more than the nun's relation to the other women in the section. Indeed, to arrive at a judgment by Lucy on this version of femininity, we must turn again to the immediate context. Closest in nature to the insubstantial women of La vie d'une femme, the spectral nun remains with them on the obscured side of the economy of desire. Lucy's final judgment on the sisterhood of La vie d'une femme might serve as a judgment on this other disembodied figure, then, operating as a corollary to her assessment of the object of desire. Lucy concludes of the second paintings that they are "[a]s bad in their way as the indolent gipsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, [is] in hers" (278). In other words, as models of femininity, Lucy finds both the woman of flesh and the woman as spirit wanting. It is to the figure who defies categorization as either that one must turn to catch a glimpse of the possibility of unconstructed femininity, and, thus, a space for all women, including the spinster.

When Irigaray envisions an other reality for women in the final chapter of This Sex, it is a reality in which women are not divided, in which "there's no rupture between virginal and non-virginal" (211). She revisits how women have been separated from their desire ("our pleasure is trapped in their system") and separated from each other,

reviewing in particular how the system constructs the virgin. She is a woman "[r]emaining in that candor that waits for [men], that is nothing without them, a void without them." Although Irigaray describes the inner woman rather than the body of desire that envelops her in this case, her description reminds us of what awaits the woman who is never "marked" (211). She, the spinster, will be consigned to perpetual nothingness, a perpetual void. But this system can be frustrated, women can "escape from [patriarchal] compartments," Irigaray suggests, when they recognize and reject constructed femininity. "How can I say it?", she begins. "That we are women from the start. That we don't have to be turned into women by them, labeled by them, made holy and profaned by them" (212). By not simply exposing the categories the patriarchal system creates, but offering an alternative in Vashti, Lucy seems to be working towards opening the same space.

The chapter in which she explores and rejects the constructions of womanhood as flesh and spirit, profane and holy, is followed closely by a chapter in which she presents a figure who is neither and both. When Lucy attends the theatre to see the famous actress Vashti, she awaits, she tells us, "a study of such nature as had not encountered my eyes yet: a great and new planet she was: but in what shape? I waited her rising" (338). This preamble to Lucy's

description of Vashti alerts the reader to the fact that, in Vashti, Lucy sees a shape of womanhood not constructed by society. Too, her use of the elaborate "encountered my eyes" to denote the act of seeing foregrounds that act, which provides further inducement to the reader to consider the sight Vashti presents within a patriarchal construction of vision.

Unlike the Cleopatra, Vashti does not represent a feast of flesh for the hungry male gaze. Drawing attention to this contrast, Lucy invites "the artist of the Cleopatra" to "come and sit down and study this different vision" (339). However, neither does Vashti represent, like the women of La vie d'une femme, the subject to Cleopatra's object, accorded the space to act because she has been stripped of all flesh. Rather, she brings together the substantiality of the body and the will of the soul; she rises as the embodiment of woman as subject.

Lucy's description of Vashti reveals both this nature and the difficulty of representing such a nature given the patriarchal construction of femininity. In order to give shape to Vashti as a substantial force, Lucy must find a way to describe her which transcends the categories of forceless substance and insubstantial force. She does this by fusing the two categories, thus creating a new possibility for women. Her dismissal of the first category is made clear in

her exhortation to "the artist of the Cleopatra" to replace "the mighty brawn, the muscle, the abounding blood, the full-fed flesh he worshipped" with the model presented by Vashti (340). She extends this invitation to "all materialists," in fact (340). However, this does not mean that Lucy denies all substance to Vashti and renders her in purely spiritual terms. Rather, she uses decidedly fleshy metaphors to give substance to Vashti's indomitable spirit. For instance, Vashti is both "a tigress" and a "maenad"; thus, she takes the shape not only of two creatures renowned for their "mighty brawn," "muscle," "abounding blood," and "full-fed flesh," but of creatures who amassed such substance feeding on flesh (340). Although Vashti is "[s]carcely a substance herself," then, she has the power that should invest a body like Cleopatra's (340). But because she is "[s]carcely a substance herself," she is free from the objectification being invested with such a body would entail, free to be a desiring subject.

Aside from what this strategy signifies in a larger context, however, Lucy's immediate reason for fusing the material to the immaterial appears to be to show how Vashti makes her inner world visible. "Scarcely a substance herself," Lucy tells us, "she grapples to conflict with abstractions" (340). It is in this context of grappling with her feelings that Vashti is a tigress who "rends her

woes" (340), so that her feelings, as well as Vashti herself, are made concrete forces to be reckoned with. The sum of Vashti's performance, then, is the embodiment of female power. Her performance, the performance of "genius," Lucy pronounces, "disclosed power like a deep, swollen, winter river, thundering a cataract, and bearing the soul, like a leaf, on the steep and steely sweep of its descent" (341). By disclosing her inner world--her feelings and her power--, Vashti makes visible the individual in the woman; she makes it impossible to regard woman as either matter without spirit or spirit that doesn't matter. She restores to woman her subjecthood.

It is little wonder, then, that Lucy, a woman who must murder her longings in order to survive, greets Vashti, who is "Hate and Murder and Madness incarnate," as "a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation" (339). It is not surprising, either, in this section relating the Vashti episode, in which the construction of femininity is of central concern, that this most striking statement on Vashti is couched in visual terms. Not only has the reader been prepared for this focus on vision by Lucy's comments before Vashti's appearance on stage, but Lucy continues to relate her experience of Vashti to the visual faculty throughout the episode. When compared to the sunny Graham, for instance, Vashti is "a fierce light, not solar--a rushing, red,

cometary light--hot on vision" (340-41). Later, near the close of the play, Vashti is the "one point" upon which "the vision of all eyes centred" (342). This emphasis on the visual faculty serves as a signal that the actress has a role to play in the study of gender and vision in the narrative; the twin statements the narrator makes about this woman and vision suggest what that role is.

Following her first striking statement about Vashti and vision, that she presents a marvellous sight and a mighty revelation, Lucy makes another. Vashti's performance is also, she pronounces, "a spectacle low, horrible, immoral" (339). Lucy hands down her judgment on Vashti's appearance on stage in an appropriately weighty manner:

> It was a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation.
> It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral.

The parallel structure of her statements and their privileged position within the type-set bring added force to words whose content marks them as significant already.

These statements suggest what Vashti's place within the order of visible and invisible women tends to confirm: that Vashti represents an alternative to the socially constructed forms of femininity, and that that alternative will not be recognized as such by the society that constructs those forms. To Lucy, Vashti may be a revelation, but to Graham, a pillar of this society, she is an abomination. Lucy

aligns Graham's "branding judgment" of Vashti with the second of the twin statements by informing the reader that "he judged her as a woman, not an artist" (342). As a woman, as constructed by Graham's society, Vashti is low, horrible, and immoral. Yet Lucy's juxtaposition of this determination to the other possibility--that is, that Vashti might be judged as an artist--challenges a system that categorizes every woman as moral or immoral, spirit or flesh, nun or Cleopatra. The presence of this alternative reminds us that Graham views Vashti through the conventional lens. In turn, we recognize that what truly renders her a spectacle in his eyes is that Vashti disrupts convention: she gives form to an alternative that should not exist and in doing so, becomes Graham's spectacle.

These two views of Vashti, captured in the narrator's double vision of her when she appears on stage, are engulfed in the apocalyptic vision with which the episode is brought to a close. The fire in the theatre, linked as it is to Vashti's performance, embodies both the revelation that she is for Lucy and the spectacle that she is for Graham. When all eyes are centred on Vashti, like a point under a magnifying glass, the theatre bursts into flames. It is a moment in which her centre, her subjecthood, is revealed. As an object under the intense gaze of the audience, one might have expected the passionate Vashti to combust; that

she is an agent rather than an object, however, is suggested by the reversal of the glass: she is the fierce heat which sets the audience under her gaze ablaze; she is one capable of making this revelation; she is a subject. At the same time, however, she is the abomination branded by Graham; she is one to be looked on with loathing; she is an object, a spectacle. In this case, the fire in the theatre takes the shape of Graham's dread. This is the kind of visitation that convention fears from women like Vashti; because they are feared, they are branded. Such a spectacle as Vashti is to be looked on with fear and loathing precisely because she bears the power of a woman who is a subject, the power to destroy the system of objectification that the patriarchy has constructed.

The apocalyptic conclusion of Vashti's performance marks the introduction into Lucy's narrative of the adult Paulina de Bassompierre. By this point in the narrative, Lucy has ventured into the art gallery and the theatre, where she has assembled for the reader her view of the construction of femininity. Paulina's reappearance in the story as an adult affords Lucy the opportunity to present yet another view of this construction: that is, the way in which femininity has been codified in the Novel. Although there is not the same consciousness revealed on the part of the narrator regarding this view, there is, nevertheless,

reason to construe her representations of Paulina and Ginevra Fanshawe as a review of the novel heroine and, consequently, the construction of femininity. Given Lucy's artful narrative practice in general, along with the fact that she plots the details of her companions' lives in patterns which accord with the two stories available to the heroines of the day, it seems fair to assume that she comments on the heroines in portraying Ginevra and Paulina.

Prior to Paulina's reappearance in the story, our narrator has taken a good deal of pleasure in exposing the undesirable interior of the "pretty and fair" Ginevra Fanshawe, as Lucy first describes the teenaged girl she sees on the boat headed to Brussels (113). Once Paulina, of a comparable age (365), enters the story, Ginevra's position in the narrative as the standard object of male desire becomes even more defined. Paulina is the woman-as-spirit to Ginevra's woman-as-flesh, as Lucy makes clear in her contrasts of the two. That the distinction between spirit and flesh can be linked to the two strains of novel heroines becomes evident when one considers the story-lines in which each is involved. The spirit-woman Paulina passes from her father's hearth to her husband's in accordance with the domestic pattern, while Ginevra, the flesh-bound, after toying with the affections of another man, elopes with a foppish colonel, a line of action in keeping with the

familiar twists of the romantic pattern. Although our narrator's sympathies lie with the woman-as-spirit rather than the woman-as-flesh, which is not surprising considering her own story, it is not difficult to detect a current of animosity below those sympathies. Ultimately, then, she dismisses both the woman-as-spirit and the woman-as-flesh, and in doing so, rejects a literary convention which affords women no reality between.

By continually confronting us with the unpleasant reality of Ginevra's character, Lucy makes it impossible for us to regard her either as untenanted flesh or as desirable, even while she delineates her as the conventional object of desire. Once Ginevra's "short, pretty lip" has been "curled" at Lucy when she first notices our narrator on the boat, it becomes impossible for us to adore her (114), in spite of the fact that Lucy assembles a sketch of her unspoiled flesh only lines above (113). Lucy continues to contrast Ginevra's character with her appearance as their relationship develops and delights in doing so. With characteristic humour, she re-introduces Ginevra into the story, after she herself has settled into life at the pensionnat, by describing at length certain flaws in that lady's character and crowning the lot with the following:

> Notwithstanding these foibles, and various others needless to mention--but by no means of a refined or elevating character--how pretty she

> was! How charming she looked, when she came down on a sunny Sunday morning, well-dressed and well-humoured, robed in pale lilac silk, and with her fair long curls reposing on her white shoulders. (149)

Wickedly exposing the unlovely state of Ginevra's soul before offering this first detailed tribute to her beauty, Lucy turns on its head the construction that counts beauty first. In fact, her inventory of Ginevra's inner flaws transforms the way we regard her exterior. When Lucy offers this portrait of Ginevra's looks, her curls and white shoulders a cameo of the romantic heroine, they seem absurd rather than attractive. The object of desire has become an object of derision in Lucy's capable hands.

Immediately afterwards, Lucy turns to Ginevra's "bragging" about a "suitor" she fancifully calls "Isidore" (149). The young woman's encouragement of, yet lack of real feeling for, the smitten fellow provides further testimony to her disagreeable nature, while her renaming of him testifies to her infatuation with the trappings of romance. Yet what Ginevra's dalliance with Graham Bretton provides the most fertile material for is an extended discussion between Lucy and Graham about Ginevra's nature, and thus, indirectly, about the nature of the romantic heroine. Given Graham's estimation of Miss Fanshawe as a "Graceful angel!", it is no surprise that in this discussion Lucy finds it difficult to maintain her characteristic stance of sardonic

amusement at gender stereotyping and veers dangerously close to rage and pain. Her repeated echo of Graham's description of Ginevra as her "'beautiful young friend'" suggests that she chokes on the phrase (221). As well, her taunting Graham with the image of de Hamal, his rival, cast in the same mold that Graham has made of Ginevra, serves as more than a satire of the young doctor's romanticization of Ginevra; in its vehemence, Lucy's response to Graham serves to alert the reader to her pain. She surely feels the smart of a recent wound when she declares of de Hamal, "'You, Dr John, and every man of a less refined mould than he, must feel for him a sort of admiring affection, such as Mars and the coarser deities may be supposed to have borne the young, graceful Apollo" (222). Further, having "rallied him [Graham] on his illusions" about Ginevra, Lucy admits to the reader that she has been "speaking in an unpremeditated, impulsive strain, which startled...[her] strangely when...[she] halted to reflect" (222).

The source of Lucy's pain is not merely that Graham loves Ginevra and does not love her, but that his love for Ginevra is based on appearances. Lucy has made it clear that because she possesses no physical charm for Graham, she has not attracted attention (162). Indeed, his estimation of her as a woman removed from matters of the flesh has become clear in the exchange over Ginevra. "'You--every

woman older than herself, must feel...a sort of motherly or elder-sisterly fondness'" for Ginevra, Graham has suggested to her, thus earning her ire (221-22). It is only when she becomes his patient that Lucy secures Graham's interest and friendship. Even then, however, his interest in Lucy is limited: it gives her pain to realize how prolonged acquaintance with her has given Graham no further insight into her character than when he "accord[ed]...[her] just that degree of notice...[that] is given to unobtrusive articles of furniture, chairs of ordinary joiner's work, and carpets of no striking pattern" (162). Now, Lucy "groan[s]" at the "attributes" he gives her:

> ...I wished he would just let me alone--cease allusion to me. These epithets--these attributes I put from me. His 'quiet Lucy Snowe,' his 'inoffensive shadow,' I gave him back; not with scorn, but with extreme weariness: theirs was the coldness and pressure of lead; let him whelm me with no such weight. (403)

The narrator whom we know to hold such passion and fire is no more to Graham than an inoffensive shadow. However, to Ginevra, whom we know to possess the inner substance of a shadow--Lucy has informed us of the "flimsy condition" of her "faculties" (148)--, Graham directs his full attention. Neither is he hesitant about declaring the reason for his attraction: "She is so lovely, one cannot but be loving towards her"(221). It is little wonder that when Graham looks for the same devotion in Lucy, he gets her biting

satire of his tribute to Ginevra instead.

Finally, not only does Lucy betray her own discomfort while dispatching Ginevra as an object of desire, but Ginevra herself registers a certain amount of distress at being objectified in this way. In a humorous confession to Lucy, she outlines the problem involved in being regarded by Graham as a "graceful angel," that is, that she must play a role rather than being accepted by Graham for her unlovely self. "'[T]he man is too romantic and devoted,'" she explains, "'and he expects something more of me than I find it convenient to be.'"

> 'He thinks I am perfect: furnished with all sorts of sterling qualities and solid virtues, such as I never had, nor intend to have. Now, one can't help, in his presence, rather trying to justify his good opinion; and it does so tire one to be goody, and to talk sense,--for he really thinks I am sensible. I am far more at my ease with you, old lady--you, you dear crosspatch--who take me at my lowest, and know me to be coquettish, and ignorant, and flirting, and fickle, and silly, and selfish, and all the other sweet things you and I have agreed to be a part of my character.' (155)

Ironically, Ginevra's frank avowal of the meagreness of her spirit--her self-knowledge--endows her with some of the inner substance she lacks. Indeed, her lack of sterling qualities and solid virtues provides a refreshing change from the character projected onto the romantic heroine (which is essentially an irrelevance anyway, as Graham's interest in Ginevra's lovely appearance points up). Her

unabashed owning of her faulty nature makes her a more rounded character than the conventional romantic heroine and gives us some appreciation of why our multi-faceted narrator can be bothered with her at all.

Lucy does not display only the gap between the character projected onto the object of desire and her homelier interior, however. She also exposes the gap between the object's body as it is constructed and her body as it is. Once again, Lucy's relationship with Graham provides opportunities for this gap to be exposed. The conversation in which Lucy rallies Graham about his delusions concerning Ginevra is preceded, for instance, by an exchange in which Graham reveals that his ideas about Ginevra's physical nature are as socially constructed as his ideas about her spiritual nature. Although Lucy does not contradict Graham at this point, the reader is not in need of her direction to see that Graham errs, in spite of being a doctor, in his assessment of Ginevra's physical hardiness. Worrying that Lucy and Ginevra "are...standing in a draught," Graham advises the dissenting Lucy that Ginevra "is delicate" and "must be cared for." Apart from ignoring the well-being of Lucy, whom we know to have suffered from indifferent health in the past, Graham, in requesting Lucy to "fetch her [Ginevra] a shawl," ignores Ginevra's ability "to judge for [her]self," as the young woman herself points

out (218). Moreover, we know from Lucy and Ginevra's experience in the crossing from England that Ginevra is no more susceptible to discomfort than Lucy or anyone else and that if she experiences the slightest discomfort, she will be the first to draw attention to it. Lucy's rather more rough treatment of Ginevra on the boat appears to accord with Ginevra's constitution, then, while Graham's is more suitable for the delicate romantic heroine he appears to think Ginevra is.

In fairness to Graham, however, he is not privy to the kind of intimate knowledge of Ginevra that Lucy is. It is for the inmates of the school alone to know the kind of regimen that turns out the "diaphanous and snowy mass" of girls and young women that parents and guests see on fête days (200). While the likes of Graham seem to believe that the young women are as delicate as the fabric that clothes them, those who live in the pensionnat know otherwise.

Lucy sums up the philosophy of the school, where "large sensual indulgence...[is] permitted," at the beginning of "The Fête," the chapter in which Graham's misconstruction of Ginevra is first exposed (195). "There, as elsewhere," Lucy explains, "the CHURCH strove to bring up her children robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning" (196). Although Lucy's version of the school's philosophy is coloured by her mistrust of

the Church, it, nevertheless, identifies the body as the target of the school's system of edification. The students at the pensionnat, then, are anything but delicate. They "exercise...their lungs and limbs" in the garden (173) and they eat "food...[which is] abundant and good"(136), so that "neither pale nor puny faces [a]re anywhere to be seen in the Rue Fossette" (136).

Miss Ginevra Fanshawe is no exception. Upon Ginevra's return from her summer holidays, Lucy reports that "she ha[s] become quite plump, her cheeks looked as round as apples" (312). Just as Lucy observes that the well-padded Cleopatra must have eaten a great deal "to attain...that affluence of flesh" (275), she reports that Ginevra regularly eats half of Lucy's portion of rolls at breakfast in addition to her own (312). Further, it is enough of a discomfort for Lucy when Ginevra "lean[s]...her whole weight" on Lucy's arm that Lucy prefers to "walk side by side" (393). In a comical aside to the reader further on in the narrative, she expands on the discomfort "bearing on...[her] arm the dear pressure of that angel's not unsubstantial limb" generates:

> she continued in excellent case, and I can assure the reader it was no trifling business to bear the burden of her loveliness; many a time in the course of that warm day I wished to goodness there had been less of the charming commodity. (470)

By drawing attention to the substantiality of Ginevra--and the student body in general--, along with the means by which such substantiality is achieved, Lucy undermines the conventional construction of the female body as object of desire. Her emphasis on the solidity of women like Ginevra and Cleopatra makes it difficult to envision their flesh as void of active will, pliant matter for the gratification of male desire. Her baring of their appetites serves to confirm the subjecthood their substantiality implies. Although the evidence of Ginevra's substantiality stands in front of Graham in the flesh, he is not presented with the corroborating evidence of her day-to-day existence which would make it difficult for him to adhere to the conventional notion he has of her female constitution. Graham's misapprehension of Ginevra's nature, then, both physical and spiritual, allows Lucy to exploit the constructed notion of femininity. She makes use of his outsider status to emphasize the extent to which conventional ideas about femininity diverge from the reality and, ultimately, to suggest just how ludicrous the construction of femininity is.

The pensionnat as a setting plays a central role in Lucy's deconstruction of femininity, not only because it allows for the presentation of the reality of daily existence as a female, but also because it allows for the

representation of the distinction between natural and learned behaviours. In other words, the pensionnat acts not just as a site for the growth of "robust" bodies, but as a site for the construction of those bodies as young ladies. As readers, then, we are privy to the "ablutions, arrayings and bedizenings curiously elaborate" that take place on the day of the fête, while Graham and the rest of the male elect at the ball see only the finished product (199).

We are exposed, too, to the economy that drives this behaviour: that is, to employ Irigaray's paradigm, the economy in which women are commodities on the market. We have seen already how Lucy, alone, of the teachers, does not "ha[ve] dreams of some lover" (177). According to Lucy, the students in the pensionnat are the same as the teachers. "All the pupils above fourteen," she advises us, "knew of some prospective bridegroom" (177). In other words, from an early age, all the inhabitants of the pensionnat define themselves in terms of their position on the marriage market.

Fittingly, the ball, for which they have performed such ablutions, arrayings, and so on, acts as a working model of that economy. Moreover, as her display of their visual attentions suggests, Lucy represents the ball in such a way as to foreground its visual dynamic. She informs us that Madame Beck has permitted some young, well-born men to

attend the ball because "their presence furnished a most piquant ingredient to the entertainment: the pupils knew it, and saw it, and the view of such golden apples shining afar off, animated them with a spirit no other circumstance could have kindled" (213). Although it is the young men who are on view in this selection, there is no doubt that it is appearing before them which animates the young ladies. That the pupils' parents are enlivened too underscores the potential for trading inherent in the encounter (213). Under the young men's eyes, such participants as Ginevra "bloo[m] and sparkl[e]" (212). (Ginevra's first words to Lucy at the ball serve as a motto for the evening. "'How do I look--how do I look tonight?'", she is desperate to know [214].) Indeed, the young men, denied by propriety the opportunity to dance with the continental maidens, occupy in fact the position that they hold in theory at the ball. They have been "admitted as spectators," their only purpose to watch the young maidens on the ballroom floor (212). With Ginevra, along with the others, "display[ing] ... her choicest attractions" before this group of eligible young men (212), we witness the coming together of the two paradigms afforded to us through our study of Irigaray. Thus, the inhabitants of the pensionnat, having been imbued with a market mentality, prepare themselves with care to take their places on the showroom floor, where spectator-

speculators appraise them.

If Ginevra and the pensionnat serve as markers of the trading in female flesh that operates under cover of what is presented as a natural state of femininity, Paulina de Bassompierre appears to serve as the antidote to that plague of flesh. While Lucy works to expose Ginevra's flesh for what it is at the same time as she constructs her as the object of desire, she presents Paulina as the antithesis of the fleshly Ginevra and, therefore, apparently, as a straightforward alternative to woman as object. Unlike Ginevra, Paulina is predominantly spirit. The following passage, not the only one in which Lucy draws such a contrast,[14] makes clear the difference between the young women:

> ...Paulina Mary was become beautiful--not with the beauty that strikes the eye like a rose--orbed, ruddy, and replete; not with the plump, and pink, and flaxen attributes of her blond cousin Ginevra; but her seventeen years had brought her a refined and tender charm which did not lie in complexion, though hers was fair and clear; nor in outline, though her features were sweet, and her limbs perfectly turned; but, I think, rather in a subdued glow from the soul outward. This was not an opaque vase, of material however costly, but a lamp chastely lucent, guarding from extinction, yet not hiding from worship, a flame vital and vestal. (359).

Not only is Paulina distinguished from Ginevra by her inner beauty, but the image Lucy uses to describe the source of Paulina's beauty--the vestal flame--allies Paulina to a type

of heroine different to Ginevra's type. While Ginevra represents the sexualized romantic heroine, Paulina represents the domestic heroine: chaste, soulful, a gift of light to be transferred with care from the vestal lamp to the hearth.

From her first descriptions of Paulina as a child, Lucy has foregrounded Paulina as spirit rather than Paulina as body. The "unearthly" child (69) has become a "delicate dame" who is part "fairy" (366) and "sprite" (362). However, as the passage above attests, it is Paulina's spiritual substantiality rather than her physical elusiveness that endears her to our narrator. Lucy appears to recognize in Paulina one of her own kind: that is, a woman whose spiritual substance is comprised of more than schemes to attract potential suitors. Our narrator remarks, for instance, on the difference she discovers between Paulina and other women when she is left alone with the young woman:

> ...she saw and delicately respected my inclination for silence.
>
> 'This will not hold long,' I thought to myself for I was not accustomed to find in women or girls any power of self-control, or strength of self-denial. As far as I knew them, the chance of a gossip about their usually trivial secrets, their often very washy and paltry feelings, was a treat not to be readily foregone. (373)

Having been made privy to the interests and secrets of Ginevra and the other young women and teachers of the

pensionnat, the reader has a good idea of the kind of treat Lucy prefers to forego. But her comments also alert us to the extent to which Lucy identifies with Paulina. She commends the young woman, for instance, for her self-control and self-denial, two qualities we have come to associate strongly with Lucy herself. As well, by referring to women and girls as "them," Lucy draws a line between herself and the constructed version of femininity, and marshals Paulina on her side of it. Moreover, Lucy holds out the intriguing possibility that Paulina, alone, set apart from even Paul Emanuel, has the capacity to understand her (386). Because Lucy marks Paulina in these ways, the young woman, on Lucy's testimony, appears to stand as an example of what shape woman as subject might take.

Running through Lucy's testimony, however, one detects a disquieting strain of dissent. In the first place, although such descriptions as how a "room...[was] not inhabited, but haunted" by the young Paulina serve to align her with Lucy, they serve also to distance her from the narrator (69). As with the ghostly women of La vie d'une femme, Paulina is in danger of being rejected by a narrator who identifies too closely with her insubstantiality. Apart from the issues of the flesh, however, while on the one hand Lucy lauds Paulina's substantial character, on the other, she seems to be questioning it. For instance, Lucy recounts

how, when Paulina first reappears in the story, with her "girlish voice" and inconsequential weight, she is mistaken for a child by Graham; consequently, the first impression Lucy gives us of the adult Paulina is that she is not fully developed (344). Further, Lucy's reference to Paulina's voice and call for "papa" suggests that this lack of development extends to the young woman's character as well as her physique. This suggestion is borne out as we learn more about Paulina, especially in her interactions with "papa." Although the construction of the adult Paulina as a child is engineered to a certain extent by her father, and, consequently, serves as a comment on that relationship, Lucy herself is unequivocal in pronouncing that "the child of seven was in the girl of seventeen" (365). Working against Lucy's portrait of Paulina as a young woman of spiritual substance, then, is this portrait of the young woman as a child, one who has not yet developed much inner substance, and, therefore, is subject to the will of others; that is, the portrait of Paulina as an object.

This latter construction of Paulina is bolstered by what otherwise appears as a strangely incongruous remark made by our narrator about her friend. Referring to a small spaniel, at this particular moment, "captured...and stowed away under his [Paul's] paletôt," Lucy comments, "I never saw her, but I thought of Paulina de Bassompierre: forgive

the association, reader, it would occur" (510). Although the wry tone is in keeping with Lucy's tone on a number of other occasions, generally, they are ones on which she is exposing the folly of her fellow humans. For the most part, Paulina escapes Lucy's critical eye. Further, the verbs used to describe Paul's carrying the dog emphasize its, and thus Paulina's, objecthood. It is as if, then, this jab at Paulina bursts through the portrait of the spiritual woman to reveal the woman as object below. However, when this incongruous comment is considered in conjunction with the way in which Lucy figures Paulina as a child, the portrait of the woman as object can hardly be regarded as being hidden; rather, a pattern emerges in the narrative, which seems to have as its purpose the delineation of Paulina de Bassompierre as an object, not a subject.

Given this pattern, it is not surprising to encounter Lucy treating Paulina here with the same kind of wry attitude with which she treats Ginevra, that other living object in her story. In fact, although Lucy disposes them as radically different creatures, we cannot ignore the fact that the end Paulina comes to lands her in the same position as Ginevra. Just as Lucy has exposed the extent to which the romantic heroine is an artificial construct, then, she exposes how the story of the domestic heroine leaves no more room for woman as subject. Despite the evidence of inner

substance Paulina has exhibited, she ends being passed from father to husband, an object in the domestic narrative.

The language M. de Bassompierre and Graham use in negotiating over Paulina emphasizes her role as property in the marriage game. To Graham, Paulina's father complains, "'you have taken my best[,]...the one precious thing that I had'" (529). Renewing his plea for Paulina's hand, Graham assures "'the possessor of the most valuable thing the world owns for [him],'" "'It must come from your generosity, as a gift; from your justice as a reward. I can never earn it'" (530). This bargaining is concluded when M. de Bassompierre "point[s] to his daughter" and declares, "'Take her" (531). That Lucy appreciates the mercantile nature of their exchange emerges in her analysis of the trio, which follows immediately on her report of this discussion. Focussing on Paulina's part, she envisions a scenario in which the young woman serves as a commodity between the two men. Not only has Paulina been passed as a valuable object from one to the other, but "[s]he was become a bond to both, an influence over each, a mutual concord" (532). Thus, her value lies in her capacity to facilitate relations between the two men, just as her happiness lies in her relation to them: "From them she drew her happiness, and what she borrowed, she, with interest, gave back" (532). Appropriately, Lucy employs the imagery of the market to describe Paulina's

inner state now that her existence as an object has been settled. There is, too, the implication in this description, coming as it does after the concord reference, that Paulina's happiness consists in making her father and husband happy: her pleasure as a commodity lies in her ability to please. There could hardly be a neater rendering of Irigaray's theory of the market. In any case, Lucy makes it clear that Paulina's happy ending, the happy ending of the domestic heroine, means the exchange of any vestiges of subjecthood for the selfless existence of the wife and mother. In her incarnation in Villette, the domestic heroine, marked by her spirituality, ends, nevertheless, no closer to subjecthood than the romantic heroine, whose body marks her as an object from the outset.

Lucy's juxtaposition of the two heroines physically, as, for instance, in the rose/flame passage quoted above, portends their fuller involvement in her mapping of femininity. But her physical descriptions of Graham and Paul, perhaps surprisingly, have a role to play too in her challenge to femininity. As the depictions of all the female figures, flesh and spirit, unfold the workings of an objectifying gaze on the female body, Lucy's depictions of these two men work to upset it. Because she describes in lingering detail the forms of the men she loves, Lucy claims for herself the gaze of desire. Moreover, because she

describes them both, she fortifies her claim; her enthusiastic delineating of two men is less likely to be construed as a chaste expression of feminine regard. By making visible her pleasure in this way, Lucy not only interrupts the dynamic of gazer and feminine object, but also indulges in a conspicuousness she cannot afford at another level.

Lucy leaves no doubt as to her motive in describing Graham's appearance at the fête. After listening with disgust to Ginevra compare Graham unfavourably to "[t]he doll" de Hamal, Lucy takes her turn at singing the praises of a man(218). In Ginevra's company, she has pronounced Graham "handsome as a vision"(218), but with the reader, she enters into a litany of his charms, from his "well-proportioned figure" to his "face and fine brow...most handsome and manly" (219). "An inexpressible sense of wonder occupied me," she confides to the reader, "as I looked at this man, and reflected that <u>he</u> could be slighted" (219). Both her rehearsing of the intimate details of Graham's appearance and her obliviousness to non-physical concerns--which set her observations apart from Ginevra's--convey to us that Lucy gazes with unmitigated desire at Graham. But what makes her sheer pleasure in contemplating him so clear is the redundancy of the portrait. Having provided us with a detailed description of Dr. John already,

and having indicated at that point that one would have "had [to have] been less than woman" not to have been pleased with his looks (160), Lucy can mean nothing more in this paragraph-long description than to convey her pleasure in looking at him. Furthermore, it is fitting that her tribute to Graham's charms is offered as part of her portraiture of the market-ball. Graham, like Ginevra, becomes a sample of the goods on view there: a problematic redressing of the imbalance of the gaze, perhaps, but a redressing nonetheless.

If Lucy's treatment of Graham in this case can be considered as outright objectification, her treatment of Paul appears as its antithesis because, in his case, Lucy never separates looks from personality. Rather, his appearance is inextricably linked to the state of his inner world. Of his smile, Lucy writes, "I know not that I have ever seen in any other human face an equal metamorphosis from a similar cause" (407). Likewise, when his mood changes from loving to irascible, his appearance changes with it. A few pages later, Lucy describes "his face...as bearing a close and picturesque resemblance to that of a black and sallow tiger" (411). In addition, though, Paul does not have the appearance of the handsome hero, as Graham does: Lucy is less likely to fall into an objectifying panegyric on the looks of a man whose "figure" cannot be

praised without the qualification "such as it was, I don't boast of it" (425). However, whether it is because it would be difficult to hold him up as an object of desire or because it is the result of a decided strategy on her part, Lucy does not objectify Paul in the way she does Graham.

Yet, this is not to say that she does not make it clear that she takes pleasure in looking at Paul. On the contrary, such a description as the following one conveys not only the pleasure she takes in gazing, but the ungovernable nature of her attraction, a further indicator of her desire for Paul. Thus, Lucy writes, of watching Paul's performance as administrator at a concert:

> The redundancy of his alertness was half-vexing, half-ludicrous: in my mind I both disapproved and derided most of this fuss. Yet, in the midst of prejudice and annoyance I could not...be blind to certain vigorous characteristics of his physiognomy, rendered conspicuous now by the contrast with a throng of tamer faces: the deep, intent keenness of his eye, the power of his forehead--pale, broad, and full--the mobility of his most flexible mouth. (297)

In spite of herself, Lucy cannot be blind to Paul. She pauses on his eyes and his mouth, indicating her desire through her description of these erotic zones. In particular, her rendering of his mouth--"most flexible" and positioned suggestively as the last point of contact for the eye--conveys her desire. So, although Paul is not constructed as an <u>object</u> of desire (even when describing

these features she admits his personality), he is portrayed, nevertheless, as stirring the desire of a female gazer. What emerges, perhaps, is an alternative to the male gaze, an alternative which assigns pleasure to the gaze without the necessary objectification.

Further consideration of Lucy's handling of Paul's appearance bears out the idea that she explores an alternative gaze of desire in representing him. While she challenges the conventional male gaze through her depiction of Graham as the male object of desire, here she abandons the convention of gazer-object altogether. Ironically, however, this alternative gaze becomes plain in part because of her subordinating Paul's personality to his appearance on one occasion. Earlier in the narrative, Lucy tells us that she has provoked Paul so that she can watch the effect on his features: "I liked...to see M. Emanuel jealous; it lit up his nature, and woke his spirit; it threw all sorts of queer lights and shadows over his dun face, and into his violet- azure eyes (he used to say that his black hair and blue eyes were 'une de ses beautés')" (226). Although she tacitly acknowledges Paul's inner life by goading him, Lucy clearly comes close to objectifying Paul through her exploitation of his feelings for her own visual pleasure. Yet this unequivocal testimony to the pleasure Lucy takes in Paul's looks (including her rapt description of his eyes)

prevents us from losing sight of her desire on those occasions when she regards Paul as body and soul together. Her near-objectification of Paul on this occasion allows us to see that when Lucy treats him more fully as a person, she expresses her desire as well.

For the most part, as in the case where she assigns psychological energy to his features at the concert, Lucy treats Paul in such a way as to render abstract contemplation of his physical being impossible. What this means as well for her exploration of the gaze, however, is that, just as Paul's body cannot be separated from his soul, desire cannot be separated from love. That is, Lucy's view of Paul's looks is tempered by love. One of the instances in which this is most clear is one in which Lucy addresses Paul's desirability directly. On an occasion on which objective evaluation might be appropriate, Lucy offers instead this impressionistic view of Paul's appearance, delivered in consequence of his having dressed for his fête-day: "The little man looked well, very well; there was a clearness of amity in his blue eye, and a glow of good feeling on his dark complexion, which passed perfectly in the place of beauty..." (425). Under Lucy's gaze, traits of Paul's personality cannot be separated from his features: his eye cannot be painted without its amity, his complexion without its good feeling. Thus Paul's beauty becomes

contingent on Lucy's love rather than on abstract values of appearance. Indeed, her gaze endows him with the clear eye and glowing complexion that mark beauty. Yet this temporary erasure of the distinction between inner beauty and outer beauty--and thus between love and desire--is difficult to sustain. In fact, Lucy invokes conventional standards of assessment when drawing a portrait of Paul around this pronouncement, in essence submitting there that she desires him in spite of his looks. (Her endorsement, but qualification, of his figure--to which I refer above--furnishes one such example.) Nevertheless, whether she explores the gap between conventional standards of beauty and her own desire in this instance or the transformative power of the loving gaze, Lucy works outside the conventional construction of desire when addressing Paul's attractiveness, and thus provides us with unmistakable evidence of the operation of an alternative gaze.

While Lucy's engagement of the male figures in her narrative allows her to experiment with notions of desirability, her treatment of herself does not. As part of her exploration of femininity, Lucy maps out the place of the spinster in the landscape of desire. She cannot, therefore, without unmaking her own story, represent herself in another way. This does not mean, however, that she must participate in her own devaluation or invite the reader

unaltered by her lessons on femininity to do the same. Accordingly, she supplies few details relating to her appearance, constructing no surface on which might be inscribed "unsexed."

It is, of course, difficult to point out instances of what a narrator is not doing. One way in which we might appreciate the vagueness of her self-portrait, however, is to assess it in terms of her descriptive technique in general. As we have seen, Lucy lavishes attention on the looks of those she writes about. Ginevra and Paulina are described (and compared) with a technician's eye. Likewise, the reader is given a clear indication of what Graham Bretton and Paul Emanuel look like. That Lucy's treatment of herself proves the exception to the rule supports the idea that she employs a particular strategy in concealing herself.

Lest we mistake that strategy for the inevitable restriction of the first-person narrator, moreover, we need only consult the representative practice of Brontë's other female narrator, Jane Eyre. Operating under the same constraints as Lucy, Jane provides the reader with sufficient details regarding physique and physiognomy to form a settled opinion of her. Moreover, given that she evinces some sensitivity to the politics of appearance, the difference between her practice and Lucy's is more marked.[15]

Where Lucy withholds, Jane informs, demonstrating that neither narratorship nor a degree of visual awareness is a barrier to self-exposure.

One of the conventions relied upon in the first-person narrative to provide details about the narrator's appearance is the inclusion of comments made about the narrator by another character. Both Jane and Lucy draw on this convention early in their narratives. Each recounts the substance of a reunion with her childhood nurse, a fitting occasion for observations by the nurse on the changes that have taken place in her former charge.

We learn from Bessie, in Jane's case, that Jane has "'not grown so very tall...nor so very stout,'" a rather vague delineation, no doubt, but supplemented by comparisons between Jane and her cousins (122). As well, Bessie observes, in response to Jane's fishing, "'You are genteel enough; you look like a lady, and it is as much as I expected of you: you were no beauty as a child'" (123). In spite of the fact that this description is impressionistic rather than detailed and that the overall image we form of Jane is less than clear, the meeting between Jane and her nurse produces a daguerreotype when compared with the information we receive from Lucy's. Lucy makes nothing of the opportunity presented by the meeting to offer the reader information about her appearance. In part, this can be

attributed to the fact that Lucy doesn't describe the reunion in the detail that Jane does; were it her priority to familiarize the reader with her looks, however, Lucy certainly would have made some use of this opportunity. Moreover, the presence of a former schoolmate at Lucy's meeting increases the potential for disclosure. When Lucy gives a fair indication of how this woman has changed but says of herself only, "I was changed too; though not, I fear, for the better," it becomes clear that her intention is to refuse opportunities for disclosure rather than to embrace them (105).

Another circumstance occurring in both novels and drawing on the convention whereby another character describes the narrator is the one in which the narrator must have her physiognomy read. Again in Jane Eyre, the opportunity for providing an image of the narrator is turned to account. In spite of the fact that the circumstance of the Rivers family examining the face of their strange guest occurs in the latter part of the novel, we are provided, nevertheless, with the details of their discussion regarding Jane's face. Although, as with the previous example, these details are primarily impressionistic rather than realistic, they deal directly with Jane's features. Pronounced "'peculiar'" yet "'agreeable'" (365) by the Rivers sisters, they are found to lack "'[t]he grace and harmony of beauty'"

by St John (366). Lucy's features, on the other hand, when examined by Paul in the early part of the novel, a point at which such details are particularly welcome, are the subject of no detailed description, impressionistic or otherwise; they remain veiled to the reader. The anticipation that is produced by Lucy's description of Paul's gaze--"[it] seemed to say...that a veil would be no veil for him"--meets with disappointment: in fact, these words underscore what is not shown to us below. Moreover, the personality traits themselves, the knowledge produced by physiognomy, are not forthcoming in Lucy's narrative. While St John Rivers "'trace[s] lines of force in her face'" and testifies to Jane's freedom from "'vulgarity or degradation'" (366), Paul Emanuel pronounces merely that Lucy's features tell him "'bien des choses,'" without elaborating on what those things are, if, indeed, he has discovered anything about her at all (129). Thus, a convention relied on to produce details about the appearance of the first-person narrator does just that in Jane Eyre; in Villette, however, the convention is notable for the information it doesn't produce: it acts as a marker for readers of the extent to which Lucy protects herself from our defining gaze.

Though as narrator, Lucy can guarantee that unsympathetic readers do not have the opportunity to objectify her, as a woman, she cannot. Within the world

about which she writes, Lucy is vulnerable to the edicts of the day, available to be judged "spectacle" by any passing glance. To counteract the effects of the economy in which she lives, Lucy treats her body in such a way as to minimize her visibility. Dressing in a manner calculated to deflect rather than attract attention and subsisting on a diet inimical to the accumulation of flesh, she moves through her world like the shadow she is designed to be.

An occasion like Madame Beck's fête is a fertile one for the discussion of dress and appearance. In addition to detailing for us the dress and appearance of Graham and Ginevra and the rest of the inhabitants of the pensionnat, Lucy points out that it is on these occasions, different from "the uniform routine of daily drudgery," that appearance is noticed (200). Characteristically taciturn about her actual physical appearance, Lucy does describe for us her dress. In fact, she devotes a full page to the discussion of what she is wearing to the fête, which, as well as throwing into relief her reticence about her looks, underscores the importance to her of her clothes. What we discover is that Lucy "ha[s] sought through a dozen shops till...she [has] lit upon a crape-like material of purple-gray--the colour, in short, of dun mist, lying on a moor in bloom" (200). It is no accident that Lucy chooses the image of "dun mist" to describe the shade of this material; the

effect she intends her dress to have is made clear when she describes how she feels when wearing it: "[I]n this...gown of shadow, I felt at home and at ease; an advantage I should not have enjoyed in anything more brilliant or striking" (200). Her references to the dress as "mist" and "shadow," then, reveal its utility to her as a covering that will render her less visible. A dress "more brilliant or striking," both adjectives which address the attention-getting quality of an entity, would draw too much attention to Lucy, making her ill at ease. It is only under cover of the shadow-gown that the spinster, leading a shadow-life, can feel at ease.

Further, by including Madame Beck's reaction to her dress, Lucy reminds the reader of the cause of her dis-ease. The directress "nod[s] and smile[s] [her] approbation" when she encounters Lucy in a dress suitable for "'des femmes mûres'" (200). At once defining Lucy as a mature woman, that is, a woman no longer on the market, and defining the dress appropriate for such a woman, that is, not the "'absurd'" dress "'d'une vieille coquette'" such as the husband-hunting teacher, St Pierre, Madame Beck stands before Lucy as representative of the society that dictates the conventions of desire: who has the right to look; who has the right to be looked at. As a single woman no longer on the market, Lucy is relegated to the class without

rights.

This is a point our narrator makes, too, when she describes her position at the ball. "My dun-coloured dress," she writes, "...would not suit a waltz or a quadrille" (211). Because she has gone to such trouble to indicate that she would suit only a dun-coloured dress, we know that it is Lucy who would not suit a waltz or a quadrille. The comment which follows directly on this one invites, once again, the connection between Lucy's clothes and her social position. Lucy's gown is not appropriate for a participant in the ball, but it is appropriate for a spectator. Located in the shadows at the ball, Lucy occupies the territory of those who are not accorded the right to be looked at, to be desired. "Withdrawing to a quiet nook," she writes, "whence unobserved I could observe --the ball, its splendours and its pleasures passed before me as a spectacle" (211).

Yet this "spectacle," the word resonating with the negative connotations imparted by Lucy's narrative, offers for women only the pleasure of being objectified. As Lucy makes clear in describing what she observes, the ball is a working model of the visual economy which turns women into show-pieces (see 63-65 above). Although Lucy abides in the shadows, then, her alternative is to invite the gaze and make a spectacle of herself, like Mademoiselle St Pierre.

In this light, her choice of a "gown of shadow" appears less a bowing to convention than a conscious effort to thwart it. Lucy further qualifies her position by pointing out her power as narrator. As well as directing us to the conscious level of her narrative, Lucy's remarking on her observational activities from the shadows reminds us that although her choices are limited here, as narrator, she rules the ball. That she goes on to construct of her experience a scene which exposes the ball's harm surely offers some consolation for her time in the shadows.

The uneasy junction between choice and constraint that emerges from her discussion of dress is even more apparent in her approach to flesh. When it comes to describing the habits which do or do not promote a fleshy body, Lucy adopts a moral tone unequal to the simple practice of eating. In keeping with her censure of women who appear as objects of desire, Lucy condemns a diet leading to objectification. Conversely, she makes clear that her own diet is on the side of virtue, not only because it separates her from women who allow themselves to be objectified, but because it affirms the ascendency of her soul. But in following a diet which guards her from unwanted attention, Lucy makes a dubious choice. On the one hand, she divests herself of the form by which she would have been judged. On the other, she ends in the unsexed precincts of the spinster anyway and has broken

faith with her body to get there.

Lucy's distrust of female curves, as we have seen, emerges in her representations of the women of flesh, Ginevra and the Cleopatra. She treats the flesh that renders them objects of desire as an object of derision, using its inescapable bulk to flatten any notions of fragile femininity. Part of Lucy's campaign, indeed, involves correlating each woman's girth with her voracious eating habits, a strategy which helps to undermine her status as object. Considered at closer range, however, Lucy's comments on diet (and the fat that accompanies it) reveal a sanctimoniousness which suggests as much about Lucy as the hunger she derides.

Fittingly, given the moralistic nature of her approach to diet, Lucy's censure of Ginevra's appetite is most in evidence in the ballroom scene, where our narrator bridles at materiality in general. She draws our attention, for instance, to the fact that Ginevra has a predilection for sweets. "At all ordinary diet and plain beverage," Lucy writes, "she would pout; but she fed on creams and ices like a humming-bird on honey-paste; sweet wine was her element and sweet cake her daily bread" (212). Although Lucy uses the description metaphorically to convey Ginevra's delight in ballroom life (cause for censure in itself), she also provides us with an accurate description of Ginevra's actual

diet, or, the diet she would prefer, a subject to which our narrator returns a few pages later. In this case, she shares a joke with us at Ginevra's expense, regarding both the young lady's taste in food and her taste in followers. Ginevra's pressing Lucy to join her in admiring the distasteful de Hamal elicits this response: " '[I like him] [a]s I like sweets, and jams, and comfits, and conservatory flowers'" (217). What Lucy goes on to confide to the reader is that she is having fun with Ginevra: "Ginevra admired my taste, for all these things were her adoration; she could then readily credit that they were mine too" (217). What she succeeds in doing, as well, however, is to introduce a moral component into Ginevra's diet. By placing her love of sweets in the company of the "little dandy" (216) de Hamal and "conservatory flowers," Lucy equates it with a love of refinement over substance. As conservatory flowers are showy, but lack the substance to grow untended, de Hamal is "so nicely dressed, so nicely curled, so booted and gloved and cravated" (216) that we recognize him as vacuous even before Lucy subordinates him to that true "gentleman," Dr John (218).

She makes a similar judgment later in her narrative of the food-loving Cleopatra and Rubens' "army of ... fat women" when comparing them to that storehouse of substance, Vashti. Adored for their "full-fed" beauty, these women are

exposed as featherweights in the company of Vashti. "Place now the Cleopatra, or any other slug, before her as an obstacle," Lucy writes,

> and see her cut through the pulpy mass as the scimitar of Saladin clove the down cushion. Let Paul Peter Rubens wake from the dead, let him rise out of his cerements, and bring into this presence all the army of his fat women; the magian power or prophet-virtue gifting that slight rod of Moses, could, at one waft, release and re-mingle a sea spell-parted, whelming the heavy host with the down-rush of overthrown sea-ramparts. (340)

As her rhetoric makes clear, though, Lucy is not simply intent on exposing the inner scantness of these women; she wants to despise their outer forms as well. Both elaborate and violent, the language Lucy uses to reject the fat of Cleopatra and the women of Rubens, and, by implication, the food that has made them fat, reveals the intensity of her feelings. Women like Cleopatra are not simply fat; they are slugs. Whether to be drowned or bisected, they are occurrences of which the earth would be better rid. Lucy's calling up the image of the "noble" Saladin to represent Vashti in the act of cutting down such women indicates the moral value she places on such an act.[16] Likewise, the image of the drowning of Pharaoh's army to represent the drowning of this army makes the point clear that God is not on the side of fat. Fat, then, and the sugary diet which promotes it, in being figured as immoral by Lucy, are shown to carry a significance beyond the simple biological facts.

On the other hand, Lucy's abstemious diet sets her apart from women of flesh. We know from her deriding Ginevra's taste that "sweets, and jams, and comfits" are not Lucy's "adoration," but in an earlier context she sets out plainly that both "wine and sweets" are something she "d[oes] not like" (206). Elsewhere, Lucy extols to us the virtues of "ice-cold water" (309). At the points at which she writes of having eaten with relish, the fare Lucy has enjoyed has been the kind intended to nourish rather than to gratify. For instance, she writes of having "dined on two dishes--a plain joint, and vegetables" at the inn in which she stays in London en route to Brussels. "[B]oth seemed excellent," she pronounces of what to others might have seemed a less than inspiring meal (109).

Lucy also indicates her difference by writing about the times when she does not eat. As if to showcase her detachment from food, she records the occasions on which her appetite fails her, from her sojourn with Miss Marchmont (97, 109) to her time with "the cretin" during the long vacation, for instance (229). Indeed, pointing up the arbitrary nature of her appetite, she comments of the meal eaten with relish in London, "[I]t was years since I had felt such healthy hunger" (109). At the same time, she takes great pains to evince her spiritual hunger, perhaps in an effort to demonstrate that <u>her</u> appetite is of a different

order.

The same chapter which details her devotion to water and her regular sharing of rations with Ginevra (see 213 above) includes several representations of a letter from Graham as food. A half-page "eulog[y]" on the "manna" Lucy feeds on while merely waiting for it (318)[17] is succeeded by the recollection of the letter's "taste" as "a sweet bubble --of real honey-dew" (324). (That Lucy exalts a fondness for sweets here when she derides it in Ginevra points up the rarefied nature of her appetite.) Her anticipation for the meal to come upon receiving Graham's letter, however, testifies most forcefully to her spiritual appetite. Figuring it as "the wild savoury mess of the hunter," Lucy elaborates not only on the letter's "nourishing" potential but also on how she "consume[s]" it, only "feast[ing] [her] eyes" on the envelope and touching the seal "to [her] lips" at first (318-19). Imbuing her inner life with a sensuality she despises in a figure like the Cleopatra, Lucy endows herself with the substance women of flesh lack.

Ultimately, this championing of soul is Lucy's only route to moral outrage. Without insisting on a religious framework for diet, she risks seeming spiteful about fat. Her outline of an objectifying system can account for her distrust of flesh, and indeed her own habit of abstinence, since she avoids objectification by eating sparely.[18] It

cannot, however, explain the intensity of her feelings. By situating a devotion to food within a battle for body or soul, Lucy justifies her vehemence. Thus, the girls at the pensionnat not only are brought up to be "robust in body, feeble in soul," as we learn above (44), but forfeit their souls in the "bargain." Lucy's ominous reference to the "terms" of "Lucifer" makes it clear that they attend to their bodies at the peril of their souls (196). On the other hand, Lucy's spiritual hunger is linked directly to the dealings of God. In the context of defending her "appetite for unfeminine knowledge," Lucy declares, "Whatever my powers--feminine or the contrary--God had given them, and I felt resolute to be ashamed of no faculty of His bestowal" (440).[19] Having linked her "hunger" and "thirst" to righteousness and the hunger of the body to sin, Lucy creates a world in which one stands or falls by food (440). On one side recline the Ginevras, stuffing sweets in their mouths and "fighting the battle of life by proxy" (577); on the other stands Lucy, braced by her glass of water and her simple diet, crusading for the hungry spirit, the hungry emotions, but not the hungry body.

Perhaps more than anything, it is this self-righteousness that gives Lucy away. Although the moral framework bolsters her case against flesh, in demonizing a basic human need, Lucy gives us pause. Indeed, the grandeur

of her intimations, not only here but in the case of the Cleoptara, puts us in mind of the fact that she speaks, after all, only of food. Her own habits, in turn, take on a new light. If Lucy's abstinence is simply a denial of her desire to eat, she might have fallen victim to the system rather than defying it. Perhaps shamed by the mortifying construction of the spinster's body, Lucy has denied this desire of her own flesh. In turn, her pique at the indulgent habits of those under a different sign might stem not from her concern as a righteous advocate but from the pinching envy of one who would eat.

That Lucy, unashamed of the mental "powers...God ha[s] given" her, cannot muster the same respect for her physical attributes comes to light, despite her containment, near the end of her narrative. Fittingly, her anxiety surfaces at the moment when her relationship with Paul is emerging as a bond between lovers rather than friends. In the last pages of her extended opposition to the gaze, Lucy blurts out to Paul, "'Ah, I am not pleasant to look at -- ?'" (583). "I could not help saying this; the words came unbidden...," she confides to us, a comment suggestive of the rupture her words cause in her narrative. She goes on, immediately after, to comment, more revealingly than she has done at any other point, on her appearance, leaving no doubt as to the compromised state of her physical self-respect. "...I never

remember the time when I had not a haunting dread of what might be the degree of my outward deficiency," Lucy advises us; "this dread pressed me at the moment with special force" (583). Where her earlier comments--such as the one above (62), "I was changed too; though not, I fear for the better" --hint at this anxiety, Lucy's unbidden confession makes it clear. Thus, an undercurrent of self-doubt, for the most part managed by Lucy, surges up when her desirability is at issue.

What becomes plain, then, is that Lucy steps outside and judges herself in spite of the fact that she will not afford the reader the opportunity to do so. This revealing comment about her appearance affords no image of her body or features, maintaining her indistinctness till the end; yet it communicates her distress at the image she believes she presents to the world, making clear that Lucy objectifies herself. An earlier instance before a mirror captures most strikingly this tension between Lucy's resistance to the gaze and her poignant bowing before its marketplace dictates. On the one hand, the situation provides Lucy with an unparalleled opportunity to reject objectification. Catching a glimpse of herself in a mirror before recognizing where she looks, Lucy tells us, "...I enjoyed the 'giftie' of seeing myself as others see me" (286). But she refuses to share the information with the reader, rejecting both the

chance as first-person narrator to offer a full description of herself and the more pointed chance of describing herself in purely objective terms. On the other hand, Lucy does inform us that what she sees "br[ings] a jar of discord, a pang of regret." "[I]t was not flattering," she goes on to say of her reflection, "yet, after all, I ought to be thankful: it might have been worse" (286). In other words, standing before this mirror, Lucy engages in a practice for which she has been prepared as a woman: she assesses her appeal as an aesthetic object, pleasing or not to a speculative male eye.

That Lucy not only embraces this chance to view herself from the outside, but also evaluates her standing in a field of imaginary others indicates the extent to which she remains trapped in the system. Both impulses can be traced to woman's position as commodity in patriarchal society, as we learned in our discussion of Irigaray in chapter one (61-62).[20] Yet this view, opened up to us by Lucy's laxity near the end of the narrative, exposes only part of her secret. Just as she discloses the full extent of her fear about her appearance following her outburst to Paul, she reveals the depth of her objectifying impulse while entreating him. Lucy's query to Paul about her looks speaks of the one desire cultivated in women by a system representing them as objects. According to Irigaray, in such an "imaginary,"

women have only the pleasure of gratifying men to look to, having been cut off from any authentic pleasure of their own (This Sex 25). Lucy's need to be "'pleasant to look at'" betrays this desire, suggesting not only that she cannot keep from objectifying herself, but that she wants Paul to objectify her too.

What Lucy stands to gain from being objectified by Paul is the perspective she cannot bring to herself. Her spinster's body has restricted Lucy from envisioning herself as an object of desire, yet she discovers for the reader (for herself?) her need to be objectified in this way. The irony, of course, is that the desire has been implanted in Lucy by the system that denies its availability to her. But by seizing the chance to be desired for her body Lucy stands to convert her position. Paul's approval will bring sanctioned proof that she too is desirable, allowing her to take her place among the Ginevras and the Cleopatras, as bound to her appearance as any object on display.

For the narrator who has made it her business to detect this wrong-headed desire in others; indeed, for the narrator who exposes to ridicule in the art gallery the notion that objectification can bring pleasure to women (see 181-82 above); this confession of object-lust clearly constitutes a crisis. In fact, Lucy goes on to compound her sin by reporting to us her second appeal for Paul's evaluation.

"Do I displease your eyes much?", she inveigles. Her admission to us that "the point had vital import" serves to deepen our sense of narrative malaise (583). But Lucy's utter unburdening after Paul capitulates to her request suggests that a battle-weary Lucy may have abandoned the struggle at last. "Was it weak to lay so much stress on an opinion about appearance?", she asks, preparing us for the outburst to come. "I fear it might be--I fear it was; but in that case I must vow no light share of weakness. I must own a great fear of displeasing--a strong wish moderately to please M. Paul," she confesses (583). Not only her indisposition to keep from us her personal infirmity, but also her intimation that the urge to be an object of pleasure is overpowering confronts us with a Lucy whose politics are unfamiliar. Her narrative attack on objectification appears to have come undone.

At the same time, Lucy's uncharacteristic openness furnishes us with the insight to understand the event which presages her surrender. As we noted at the outset of the chapter, Lucy takes pains to distinguish two aspects of her experience in the scene in the park with the nun. Following the resolution of her spiritual crisis, in which the ghostly nun she expects does not appear, Lucy draws our attention to another crisis, this time relating to a fleshly nun. Although she gestures to the object context in which the

crisis takes place, Lucy does not--perhaps cannot--indicate the ways in which she is tried in this meeting. Her exposure of her most intimate feelings about appearance following the meeting, however, along with the indications that these feelings cause Lucy distress direct us to the probable cause of her inability to see the fleshly nun clearly.

Lucy not only makes us aware that she is full of anxiety over her appearance but also that her need for objectification is a source of anxiety in itself. By apologizing for her first outburst and directing us to her "fear" about the second, Lucy acquaints us with the high level of anxiety that has been inspired in her by her impossible position. Although the second wave of distress offers some indication of the narrator we have known, primarily it returns us to the scene in which Lucy clearly is not herself. Suffering from such turmoil over her own flesh, it seems, Lucy cannot accommodate the vision that appears in the flesh beside Paul.

Expecting a figure similar to herself, that is, a woman allied not to body, but to spirit, Lucy confronts a figure similar to the one whom she has built her case against. Lucy's own description of Justine Marie reads like a catalogue portrayal of the woman of flesh. "She is very comely, with the beauty indigenous to this country," Lucy

begins;

> she looks well-nourished, fair, and fat of flesh. Her cheeks are round, her eyes good; her hair is abundant. She is handsomely dressed. (563)

Another Ginevra, another Cleopatra, this beautiful object emerges with the man whom Lucy believes to be gone. Given her anxiety over her own value as an object and her desire to be the valued object of this man (which causes Lucy further anxiety), we cannot be surprised when Lucy misperceives what she sees. In fact, the vision Lucy creates of Justine Marie not only betrays her anxiety, but also reveals her participating fully in the system she has been struggling against.

That Lucy determines Justine Marie to be the object of Paul's desire, the position she herself covets, reveals to us her fear about her own ability to engender his desire. But it also implicates Lucy in a view of women which is based on their status as objects. Lucy clearly comes to the conclusion that Paul has chosen Justine Marie because of her looks. Listing off her attributes like a horse on the block, Lucy pronounces Justine Marie "at all points, the bourgeoise belle" (563). Without further proof of her fitness for Paul, Lucy concludes that he will marry her. Moreover, when apprising us of this conviction, she characterizes Justine Marie as a commodity. Paul will receive his "young bride" in return for services rendered,

Lucy imagines (565). Unlike Lucy, who has been abandoned without ceremony (546), Justine Marie is a "treasure" to be "guard[ed]" (565).

Lucy's adoption of this market mentality, not only with respect to Justine Marie but with respect to herself, suggests that her anxieties reach a critical level when Justine Marie appears. As we discussed at the beginning of the chapter, Lucy herself emphasizes the weakness of her vision in grappling with Justine Marie (165). But that it manifests itself in this way, that is, in a patriarchal response to the young woman's presence, suggests that Lucy succumbs at this point in the narrative. She exhibits here the distorted vision produced in women by the patriarchal system.[21]

But Lucy is made vulnerable to the system by more than her anxieties over objectification. As Irigaray explains in "This Sex," the woman who experiences her <u>own</u> desire within the patriarchal economy will do so "only ... with anxiety and guilt" (30). Although Lucy does not testify directly to feeling such desire for Paul, she does, by juxtaposing her love for him to "[t]he love, born of beauty," suggest that a desire unrelated to concerns of appearance is there (567). In addition, she prepares us for the distinction by referring to the involvement of her "nature" in her feelings over Justine Marie (566). While her desire to be Paul's

object is evident in the scene, and we can see how it affects her perception, Lucy herself does not admit to it. Indeed, it is only in retrospect that we recognize the role it plays in her misperception of the fleshly nun. The explanation Lucy does submit foregrounds her own desire, not only confirming Irigaray's contention, but also distancing Lucy from this other realm. Offering only the evidence of her genuine love for Paul to account for any agitation over Justine Marie (567), Lucy encourages us to interpret her delusional episode as the product of innate desire. In doing so, she turns our attention away from her more superficial concerns, which become apparent only once she has relaxed her narrative control. In other words, we might think of her suggestion that Justine Marie threatens her true love only, as Lucy's last narrative stand.

Once Lucy allows us to see the full nature of her trouble, we can see too that her victory over the second nun is a questionable one. When <u>this</u> nun is laid to rest we apprehend not Lucy's escape from oppression but her acquiescence to it. Although Paul's asking Lucy to "'[b]e my ... first on earth'" means that her genuine desire for him has been satisfied, it also means that her desire to be his object has been satisfied (591). In that sense, Lucy wins a doubtful victory, because part of what she has won belongs to the object realm. In fact, of the two moments of

triumph following Lucy's encounter with the nun--the one in which Paul proposes and the earlier one in which he affirms her desirability--, it is the moment which pertains to her desirability alone that bears the sense of transformation. This exchange between Paul and Lucy centres on, as Lucy says herself, a "point ... [of] vital import," while the later exchange, though dramatic, seems to confirm a victory already won. Thus, although the later exchange features the actual discussion of Justine Marie between Paul and Lucy, it seems not to clear away any obstacle between them. While Paul's "short, strong answer" to Lucy about her looks, "an answer which ... profoundly satisfie[s]," seems to signify that now, the nun is laid to rest (583).

That Lucy finds confirmation of her status as an object in her relationship with Paul, on the one hand raises questions about the nature of Paul's desire. On the other, it serves notice of the kind of validation Lucy finds with Paul. In spite of any intimations of genuine desire in this late scene with the nun, Lucy has spent the greater part of her narrative denying the importance of her body. Paul's recognition of her physical value, however, will allow Lucy to embrace her body, because it will mean that she no longer need fear being devalued as an object. Although her return to the flesh will mean instead that Lucy must contend with the divided flesh of the object of desire, she cannot but be

charmed by the bargain. Having relinquished her appetites in an effort to retreat from the body, Lucy hardly will care whether she experiences inscribed desires, or her own. What matters in an immediate sense is that Lucy allows herself to experience her body at all.

Once we appreciate that this is the reward of objectification for Lucy, we will not have trouble seeing, despite her narrative campaign against it, how Paul's intent gaze has been stirring Lucy all along. For, as the vigour of her desires in the scene with the nun now attests, Lucy has begun responding to his regard well before she admits to it. Indeed, while a late "lecture" (420) from Paul on "a change he had noticed in [her] dress" testifies to Lucy's growing interest in her body, her commentary itself on that lecture offers up his regard as the reason for the change (419). Although Lucy does not make the connection herself (nor would we expect her to given her repudiation of the desire to be seen), her pointing out the difference between Paul's attitude and that of everyone else, especially given her commentary's gratuitous nature, evinces the importance Lucy attaches to his notice. As well, her revisiting of one of Graham's "epithets" for her in particular, deplored by Lucy only the chapter before (403), registers her pique at being deemed "'inoffensive as a shadow'"(421).[22] Betraying her feelings about being noticed following Paul's

confirmation of a change, then, Lucy generates a case for his regard's restorative effect. In turn, her final comment on his gaze accrues an added layer of meaning. That is, it becomes not only about Paul's awareness of Lucy, but also about Lucy's awareness of herself. "You are well habituated to be passed by as a shadow in Life's sunshine," Lucy determines: "it is a new thing to see one testily lifting his hand to screen his eyes, because you tease him with an obtrusive ray" (421). Lucy clearly has found in Paul a man who reflects back to her her own sexual light.

And indeed, it is not only Paul's gaze that restores Lucy to a sense of corporeal self, but his entire attitude of attentiveness. In fact in this context, even his attempts at dominating Lucy appear as expressions of desire, especially given the extent to which she sends them up, yet is not repelled by them. That "[t]his idea of 'keeping down' never left M. Paul's head" and that "the most habitual subjugation would, in...[her] case, have failed to relieve him of it" speaks more, in this narrative of attention and desire, of Lucy's presentness to Paul than his attempts to wield power over her (452). When she sits and gazes openly on the Cleopatra, object of desire, in the art gallery, it is Paul who notices and responds. When she begins to wear clothing which might attract the slightest notice to her as a woman, it is Paul who notices and responds. When she

tells him she is hungry, Paul "guesse[s] that...[she] should like a petit pâté à la crême..."(206). Significantly, he guesses she should like a delicacy, thus anticipating a taste in Lucy which her diet in general, as well as her image to others, would deny. Displaying an awareness, then, not only of Lucy's physical presence, but also of her hidden desires, Paul sets himself apart from other men. In a world in which Lucy goes unnoticed, Paul notices her, and in a world in which Lucy goes hungry, Paul feeds her; he feeds not only the hungers of Lucy's spirit, but the hungers of her body: to be fed, to be recognized, to be desired. It is perhaps only in a novel such as Villette that the appellation "'[P]etite gourmande'" could be read as a phrase of seduction (444).

Notes

[1] The shifting nature of the nun from one realm to the other throughout the story provides the context for this particular incident. Thus, in addition, when Lucy engages observational complexity here, she foregrounds it too at this other level.

[2] See 54-55 and 65-67 in particular. The quotations in this section belong to Richard Carlile.

[3] See chapter one 52-53.

[4] As Janet Gezari points out, constructions of Villette's nun are as various as critical approaches to the novel (188 n15). However, of the two studies which examine the spinster in Villette, Foster's does not mention the figure and O'Reilly Herrera's treats the nun as a complex metaphor for Lucy's experience of sexuality, overlooking her role in the symbology of the body in Villette.

[5] As I suggest below, Lucy's indirect approach to the womanly nature of the nun testifies to our narrator's discomfort regarding flesh denied (191-92). To a certain extent, though, it also simply reflects the nun's involvement in the plot. The merely representative nature of the other figures affords Lucy an analytic freedom she cannot exercise with respect to the nun, who is both symbol and participant (see 168 above).

[6] The consequence of the patriarchal appropriation of the female body to the spinster in particular appears on 60. As a reminder of how the Victorian stereotype formalized her undesirability, however, it is useful to recall Carlile's description of the women whose "forms" had "degenerate[d]" and whose "features" had "s[u]nk" (see 166 above). On top of this, they employed the stereotype retroactively. After assigning the spinster such "characteristics" as being "sour, ugly and aging," Kathryn Hughes points out, the Victorians "invoked [them] to explain why she has been left on the shelf" (The Victorian Governess 118). In other words, this woman's "value," both past and present, was emptied by the Victorians' description of her.

[7] Although I refer here to the dividing of women from their bodies, as we saw in chapter one (and as the exclusion of the spinster indicates), this first incursion results in the dividing of women from each other (61-62).

[8] Irigaray's use of mirror imagery, including its place in her overall approach to vision, is discussed on 62-63 and 65, ch. 1.

[9] Irigaray's representation here of man "invest[ing]" the mirror foregrounds his appetite for gazing on himself. But her representation in "Women on the Market" of women as mirrors captures the narcissistic aspect of even his gazing at women. Although that chapter does not concern itself with the politics of vision, the image of women as mirrors provides an arresting illustration of the fact that men are really looking at themselves when they gaze at objectified women. For a contextualized discussion of women as mirrors, see chapter one 62-63.

[10] The Victorian interest in guarding young women from sexual stimulation does not accord with their formal belief that these women are strangers to desire, as Kathryn Hughes, for example, points out in The Victorian Governess (134-35). Perhaps in formalizing into theory what objectification accomplishes already, the Victorians set themselves up for an excess of anxiety. In any case, Paul's representative pronouncement reminds us of the narcissism involved in objectification.

[11] In addition to this subtext, which forms a part of Paul and Lucy's genuine engagement of the politics surrounding the Cleopatra, there is a current of sexual tension running through their exchange. That Paul sparks it off by treating Lucy as a young single woman rather than a sexless spinster is evident in her immediate response to his admonishments. "Beginning now to perceive his drift," she confesses, "I had a certain pleasure in...working him up" (277). The pleasure of registering with Paul as a woman is one which, politics notwithstanding, Lucy will soon not be able to forego.

[12] By this point, Lucy's account of her own burial has revealed the extent to which the nun (who has been "buried alive") (172) realizes Lucy's own suffering.

[13] What can be reckoned on is that our narrator must characterize the nun in such a way as to anticipate her eventual settling in to the realm of flesh. But the shifting nature of the figure throughout the narrative, itself intends her link to a second order of meaning. See n1 and 163-65 above.

[14] Lucy also juxtaposes Ginevra's "material charms" to Paulina's inner-lit beauty in describing their appearances at the dinner in "The Hotel Crecy" (397-98).

[15] There is evidence that in Jane Eyre, Brontë already has begun exploring the possibilities of challenging the visual economy using a female narrator. Jane's initial description of Rochester, for example, reveals Brontë experimenting with a female gaze of desire. We find Jane peering at the "considerable breadth of chest" beneath Rochester's riding cloak, for instance, a detail neither conventional nor sexually neutral in the cataloguing of masculine form (145). At the same time, Brontë permits her female narrator a certain degree of latitude in describing herself. When Jane assesses herself in the mirror the morning after Rochester has declared his love, for example, she attends to details of inner beauty rather than creating the object-image a visual economy demands (286). This latter example serves not only as an instance of Brontë's subverting the visual economy, but also as a marker of Jane's sensitivity to its politics. Still, when we consider Jane's resistance to objectifying herself in the context of Lucy's (as we will see below), her references even to aspect and eyes present too detailed a surface. The self-representation of Lucy alone betrays the fixed determination to hide.

[16] As Mark Lilly points out in his notes to the Penguin Edition of Villette, Saladin is "a noble adversary" in Sir Walter Scott's The Talisman (1825) (340n7).

[17] The actual passage appears on 308; this is Lucy's later reference to what has come before.

[18] Although the theories of Irigaray provide adequate support for the idea of avoiding objectification by avoiding food, two thematic works on women and diet account for the notion more fully. In tandem, Joan Jacobs Brumberg's Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa and Susie Orbach's Fat is a Feminist Issue offer a compelling case for Lucy's eating sparely to ameliorate her position. Brumberg's history establishes a link between the Victorian marriage market and disturbed eating habits in those affected by it (135-36), while Orbach's book looks specifically at how extreme diets allow women to escape "feminization"(169). Referring to "a conscious desire not to be noticed" in such women, Orbach explains how their shapeless fat or thinness serves a purpose in patriarchal society (173). That Lucy would restrict her diet to avoid

the negative attention accorded her on the market, then, seems all the more likely in light of diet theory.

Recent literary studies of Lucy's relationship to food in contexts other than that of the mid-nineteenth century single woman include Diane Long Hoeveler's "'A Draught of Sweet Poison'" (see introd. 13n8) and Francis Fennell and Monica Fennell's "'Ladies--Loaf Givers'" (1995).

[19] In fact, Lucy attributes the girls' abandonment to their bodies to the interference of the Church. Likewise, we see her attributing her own soul-resolution to her direct relation to God here. In other words, the juxtaposition engendered at the panoptic level of the narrative between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism finds expression too in this treatment of the body, a fact which further codifies Lucy's indictment of the Church. See chapter two 124-26 in particular for discussion of the primary juxtaposition.

[20] See also chapter three 176-77 and note 7.

[21] Women's relationship to vision within patriarchy is discussed in broad terms in chapter one 63-65 and in more specific terms above, 170-71.

[22] This is not the only occasion on which Lucy returns to Graham's offending description of her (see chapter two 158n13 for instance). It is, however, the occasion on which its particular offence to her sense of herself as a woman is most clear. Because Lucy adverts to the comment in the context of Paul's appreciation of her body, we recognize that Graham's description reduces her to a creature without sex. On the other occasion, as well as when Graham first characterizes her in this way, Lucy's response suggests instead a concern for her identity in general, as I argue in chapter two. (See 152 and 158, including n13.)

CONCLUSION

As surely as Paul returns Lucy to the domain of her flesh, Brontë must dispense with the lover so that we can see her protagonist's story whole. By this point in the narrative, that is, the point at which Paul and Lucy emerge as a couple, she has provided us with the portrait of a woman who has struggled both with a panoptic network operating to control her and a construction of femininity adapted to make such control possible. Not only this, but she has shown us how such a woman stands materially in a world constructed to disown her. Now, as new truths emerge resulting from Lucy's pairing with Paul, Brontë reveals that Lucy has been engaged in a battle with her flesh as well; it is only Paul's validation of Lucy's looks that delivers her from the self-loathing inculcated in the Victorian spinster. Yet, although Brontë constructs Lucy's narrative to reflect all the ways in which the single woman of the mid-nineteenth century is constrained, she makes the portrait conspicuous only by confronting us with the final image of an unmarried Lucy. In order to punctuate the tale that we have been told, then, Brontë removes Paul from Lucy's story, affixing to her romance an ending not at all in concert with the conventions of the day.[1]

At the same time, this romance with Paul has played an essential part in the elaboration of Lucy's spinsterhood. Without the vehicle of an attentive Paul, Brontë would not have been able to make visible to us the sensuality that Lucy's degraded self-image causes the narrator to hide. In the same way, she foregrounds Lucy's spiritual vitality through her protagonist's contest with the disciplines, mapping out with each battle with disciplinary power the basic resilience of her heroine's soul. Through the particular tale of the spinster that Brontë tells, then, the conventional portrait is redrawn. In place of the impotent shadow constructed by the Victorians, we encounter a woman alive in her body and her soul. In turn, the very ending which establishes Lucy's experience as the experience of the spinster is transformed. Lucy's separation from Paul becomes less about her position in the Victorian marriage market than about the human experience of loss in light of her revealed humanity. Through her representation of a flesh-and-blood spinster, then, Brontë remakes the spinster's story. She transforms a tale which inscribes the aberrance of the spinster into a simple story of human loss. She affirms, in other words, that the spinster's story is every person's story.[2]

That Brontë has come to this humanized vision of spinsterhood by her writing of Villette is made immediately

apparent when one considers comparable passages in Villette and Shirley addressing the theme. Although Villette, engaging as it does the spinster's situation on every page, eschews the speech-making of Shirley, there is a passage appearing at a crucial juncture in Lucy's story in which she addresses directly the condition of being single. Yet any similarity between Lucy's approach to spinsterhood and the approach taken by Caroline Helstone in the Shirley passage ends with each heroine's having adopted a personal theme. When Caroline Helstone confronts a future without marriage at the end of Shirley's volume two, it is with an impassioned address on the injustices attending spinsterhood (see 98-101, 104-5; ch. 2 above). She pleads a case for the women society pushes aside, for the "poor girls ...degenerating to sour old maids...because life is a desert to them" (392). Lucy Snowe, on the other hand, contemplates her future with an eye to all those for whom life is a desert. Not concentrating on the lot of single women alone, she announces her kinship with the "huge mass of [her] fellow creatures...[who] hold their span of life on conditions of denial and privation" (451).[3] Indeed, Lucy numbers this expanded group as the majority, pushing to the margin "the few favoured" (451). And yet her recasting of spinsterhood goes beyond this democratization of want. Lucy recasts the notion of want itself. Rather than predicating

a world in which joy accrues only to those whose lives follow an ideal pattern, she affirms her "belie[f] in some blending of hope and sunshine sweetening the worst lots" (451). In other words, Lucy humanizes the condition of want. Offering a view in which most people lead lives shaped by lack, then, but in which that condition is both normal and human, Lucy creates a new space for the spinster. She envisions for herself a future much different from the life of segregation envisioned by Shirley's Caroline.

This transformed view of what it means to live without a partner, of course, presupposes an altered view of partnership itself. Marriage must be about the soul and not status for spinsterhood to be about connection. Thus when Lucy addresses marriage in "settl[ing]" her "life-accounts," it is as an undertaking of the spirit rather than a social enterprise (451). Indeed her construction of marriage in masculine terms divorces the event from its social context for women altogether. Portraying marriage not only as secondary to the establishing of one's career, but also as a matter of spiritual fulfilment, Lucy fashions a view more in keeping with that of the Victorian gentleman than the Victorian lady (450). At the same time, she emphasizes the soulful nature of partnership. By characterizing marriage as an issue of contentment rather than legitimization, then, Lucy alters the landscape of her discussion. Her regret

that "the orb of [her] life is not to be so rounded," that is, that she will likely not marry, clearly revolves around a yearning for love, not the need to establish her place in the world (451).

Although Lucy represents this desire in human terms, the distinction between wanting love and wanting a husband can be easily lost. It is no surprise, then, to discover Brontë supplementing the testimony of her single heroine with a discussion which foregrounds the heroine's unconventional approach to marriage. In fact, taking place as it does between Paulina de Bassompierre and Lucy, the discussion stands as a review of the two possibilities for approaching marriage. On the one hand, we encounter the domestic heroine's conventional view, a view which takes for granted the inadequacy of the single woman. And, on the other, Lucy's alternative one, which builds on the wholeness of the spinster, and becomes more plain by its association with the opposing view--and indeed, by the patent incomprehension of the domestic heroine herself.

From the moment Paulina declares to Lucy at the end of their exchange, "'Lucy, I wonder if anybody will ever comprehend you altogether,'" we are alerted to the fact that the two have been engaged in entirely different discussions. It is not only that their visions of the best course for Lucy's future differ, it is that they possess entirely

different concepts of the destiny of woman itself. But we do not have to wait for Paulina's cue to become aware of this ideological gulf at the heart of their interchange: Lucy herself draws our attention to it when she points out to Paulina that the two "'understand sharing'" in different ways (520). That is, she prepares us for her distinct view of marriage by underscoring the distance between Paulina's view of relationship and her own.

The impetus for Lucy's comment has been Paulina's prescription that the single woman "'shall share'" her and Graham's "'beautiful life'" once they marry. On the surface, her enjoinder--and indeed the ensuing discussion--appears to revolve around Lucy's somewhat isolated state. But Lucy's pointed response on the nature of sharing calls upon us to consider the political content of Paulina's offer. In the first place, the domestic heroine has disregarded Lucy's claim to personhood in making the offer. Immediately before Paulina's declaration, Lucy has impressed upon her friend the inherent value of her own, single, life. "'I have my sort of life apart from yours,'" she has told her soon-to-be-married friend. But in addition to discounting Lucy's experience as a single woman in this way, Paulina discounts it through her representation of marriage itself. Not only designating <u>marriage</u> as "'beautiful,'" but also "'solitude'" as "'sadness,'" she creates a picture in

which all lustre accrues to the woman who marries (520). In other words, she confronts Lucy with an offer which not only reinforces the worth of marriage, but also establishes the worthlessness of single life. She makes clear to her that any chance of recognition the spinster has lies with her attachment to the more fortunate couple.

In contrast, Lucy brings before the conventionally minded heroine a vision of self which alters the parameters of marriage. Responding to her dismissive offer not only by interrogating Paulina's notion of sharing, but also by laying out a picture in which she stands, undiminished, alone, Lucy engenders a view of marriage which foregrounds personal gain rather than personal validation. Indeed, her development of this view begins with the reassessment of sharing itself. Lucy's actual comment to Paulina involves not only an underscoring of the disparity of their views, but also an indication by Lucy that she intends to be governed by her own. "'I shall share no man's or woman's life in this world, as you understand sharing,'" she has told Paulina. Her subsequent comment about "'liv[ing] solitary'" "'till [she can be] sure'" of the trustworthiness of a friend underlines the commitment to self inherent in her critique of Paulina's view. Indeed, when Lucy goes on to juxtapose the sadness Paulina has equated with single life to the "'heartbreak'" which must result from an

indiscriminate sharing of self,[4] we form a true picture of her commitment to self first (520). That Paulina fails to recognize the possibility that such a belief in self might exist, of course, merely serves to underscore the difference between the two. To the woman for whom solitude itself represents desolation, there could be no worse fate than being alone.

When Brontë draws our attention to Lucy's construction of marriage in particular, then--both by contrasting it with the conventional approach and indicating Paulina's defeat by it--, she highlights her heroine's unconventional reading of single life. By establishing the single woman's attachment to self here, Brontë reinforces the fact that, for Lucy, partnership represents an enhancement of existence only. In other words, she emphasizes that any regret expressed on Lucy's part about an unmarried future has to do with the desire for companionship alone. That these passages representing Lucy's humanistic approach to spinsterhood appear at the point in the narrative at which they do, moreover, helps to foreground Brontë's transformed reading of the spinster's story. Forwarding her heroine's concept of a legitimate single woman first when Lucy reveals her interest in Paul[5] and then before Paul and Lucy become lovers, the author establishes an apolitical framework for her protagonist's romance. The romance unfolds, then,

within the parameters of love and companionship rather than marriage and status. In turn, when we discover that Lucy is to lose Paul, we apprehend the loss as the departure of a treasured lover rather than a potential bridegroom. In other words, with the help of these representations, we are able to view Lucy as something other than a bride-in-waiting and to greet Paul's departure as the human tragedy Brontë ultimately constructs it to be.

A letter written by the author during the creation of Villette testifies to this transcendence on her part of the social categories which would make of her an "inoffensive shadow." In fact, as Winifred Gérin points out, we might think of the letter detailing Brontë's response to spinsterhood as embodying her approach to Villette (508).[6] In it, Brontë distinguishes clearly between her position from a social perspective and her own experience of being unmarried, indicating that the pain she feels regarding her position has to do simply with being alone. (That she underscores the opposing terms serves to emphasize her distinction.) Writing to Ellen Nussey in August 1852, she affirms:

> The evils that now and then wring a groan from my heart, lie in position, not that I am a single woman and likely to remain a single woman, but because I am a lonely woman and likely to be lonely. (qtd. in Gérin 508)

That Brontë not only has made a distinction between the

social construction of spinsterhood and the actual experience of living alone, but also has taken home the pain arising from her condition reminds us that her reclamation of spinsterhood in Villette goes beyond the transformation of the offending shadow into a human being. Instead, in representing Lucy Snowe, Brontë lays hold of the very terms used to define her. Not content to create a heroine who escapes the stigma of being in want of love, Brontë creates a heroine who emerges as fully human only because of it.

Notes

[1] That Brontë insists on eliminating Paul over the objections of her publisher, George Smith, indicates the extent to which this turn of events is, in Brontë's words regarding the direction of the third volume in general, "compulsory upon the writer" ("To George Smith" 6 Dec. 1852, qtd. in Gérin 510). For an account of the dispute over the ending, see Gérin 510-11 and 520.

[2] In an interesting variation of this theme, Marit Fimland argues in "On the Margins of the Acceptable: Charlotte Brontë's Villette," that Brontë uses allusions to the Bible and, in particular, allusions to Christ's life to accord "'universal' validity" to the experience of her single heroine, Lucy Snowe (157).

[3] Although Caroline does draw a parallel betwen the lot of single women and the lot of "the houseless and unemployed poor" at one point (see 99; Ch. 2 above), it is in order to emphasize their status as a disenfranchised group rather than to affirm the common suffering of much of humanity.

[4] Lucy refers to "heartbreak" alone when bringing up this "'[d]eeper'" form of suffering, but her comment immediately before about ascertaining the intentions of a friend indicates to us that spiritual destruction is the condition Lucy fears (520). That Lucy has developed a hard-won sense of self by this point in the narrative, as outlined in chapter two, makes this meaning even clearer.

[5] In fact, Brontë has reintroduced Lucy's renouncing of her attachment to Graham in order to punctuate this turn towards Paul. She creates a final disavowal for the "musin[g]" heroine before pairing her spoken "'Good-night'" to the doctor with the "quite close" answer of Lucy's true love interest (452). Thus, the author has informed Lucy's friendship with Paul with her dismissal of disciplinary power, providing support for the idea that she approaches the relationship as a means of comfort rather than validation.

[6] Given that Gérin's interest is a biographical one, she does not, of course, engage the theoretical distinction Brontë makes between spinsterhood and loneliness. Rather, her point is to affirm that the author's sadness over her future gives rise to the realism that she sees as shaping Villette. Interestingly, this more general approach leads Gérin also to contend that Brontë comes to see her fate as a

human one (508-9). Additionally, the biographer avers that Brontë needed to confront "her particular destiny" in order to complete Villette, an assertion which supports a humanistic reading of the novel's ending (508).

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