

Subjection at home and abroad,  
Representations of the 'other' in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*

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A Thesis presented to  
The Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages  
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Master of Arts degree  
Fall Term 2007

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First I would like to thank my supervisor Rebecca Scherr for all her constructive and positive guidance and inspiration. Also thanks to the professors and teachers that has led me down this path, especially Sean Purchase who opened the door for me into Charlotte Brontë's colonial world. I would like to express my gratitude to the staff at The Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth and especially Ann Dinsdale for giving me the opportunity to look at Charlotte Brontë's original manuscripts and personal books, it was truly an honour and inspiration. Special thanks to Thea, Silje and Ragnhild, I could not have made it without you. I would also like to thank the persons who unknowingly inspire me to aspire, you are forever in my heart. Last but not least, my family and friends for believing in me.

## INTRODUCTION

The reason for choosing *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, apart from the fact that Charlotte Brontë's work utterly fascinates and speaks to me, is the fact that I am very interested in the intersection between post-colonial and feminist literary theories and the partnering intersection in literary works between the subjection of the female 'other' and the racial 'other'. These theories deal with two kinds of subjection: that of women, and that of foreign and colonized people. Therefore I feel that it is valid to compare one novel set in middle class England with another novel set in Belgium, a foreign country, because I feel that these national spaces will shed some light on Brontë's treatment of the two aforesaid issues. My passion for the works of Brontë was first sparked through the introductory course on English Literature at the University. As so many other women who call themselves feminists, my introduction to feminism came through the words of Simone de Beauvoir. In her book *The Second Sex* she states how "Society being codified by man, decrees that woman is inferior."<sup>1</sup> What I wished to examine was how living in a society that condemns women as inferior shaped Brontë's works. My passion for her works in a post-colonial context first came into being when I attended a course named "Charlotte Brontë and Fictions of Empire" at Cardiff University during my stay there as an Erasmus student in 2005.

*Jane Eyre* has always been considered one of the great feminist classics and some would perhaps say that every aspect and part of this work has already been covered twice or ten times. I would say that *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* are always current, in the way that its significance and meaning changes as the readers and times change. I have always had a liking for literature written by women; perhaps it is self evident, but I feel that women speak to other women in a

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<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Trans. and Ed. by H. M. Parshley, (London: Four Square Books Limited, 1961) p. 404

way that a man never can. *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* are both very subjective, and, in a way, private books, which is why they capture female experience. While *Jane Eyre* seemingly has a happy ending for her female heroine, *Villette* reads like a study of a female mind that is in opposition to her own body as well as to the society she lives in, a fact that deserves study.

Perhaps the most important question I will ask in this thesis is: What does the situation of the female protagonist mean for the novels treatment of the racial and cultural other? Connected to that, I will investigate how the subjection of women and the supposed female traits of nature are manifest in the two works by Charlotte Brontë. Then I want to do the same concerning the problems of 19<sup>th</sup> century imperialist thought and culture, and compare how, in both novels, these two pillars of patriarchal society are manifested both within the same work and in comparison to each other. I also wish to investigate and problematize how the reception and interpretations of the two works have changed. In what ways has the focus changed from feminism to post-colonialism, and what is actually different and what is the same? My main argument will be that patriarchy and imperialism are very much the same thing, it is impossible to completely separate the two issues, just as it is to separate feminist theory and post-colonial theory, although that is what some literary critics desperately try to do. The subjection of women and the subjection of foreigners are intricately connected through the ‘othering’ of human beings and human traits. In the novels this is supported by the importance of the master and slave relationship; almost every relationship is defined by the superiority of one of the involved, even on an inner, psychological level.

I wanted to bring together two kinds of literary approaches, the feminist and the colonial, because I was struck by the absurdity of the two being opposed when it came to Charlotte Brontë’s works. Feminist literary criticism is for me about giving importance to voices that have been stifled for hundreds of years. Post-colonialism is about the same. A strong tendency in Brontë criticism is the focus on the biographical aspects of her works, a fact which

owes much to the mystification of her talent and life as described in Mrs Gaskell's book, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. The only biographical aspect I will draw in is this: Marina Lewycka once talked about how foreigners make great writers because they are outsiders to society and therefore inclined to do a lot of watching and observing in order to fit in. Charlotte Brontë, like her heroines Jane and Lucy, is like a foreigner, and her talent for writing came as a result of being outside of society, and having nothing else to do than to watch it from the outside. Observing, fantasizing and suffering. Seeing as the modern novel came into being in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and considering that many of the greatest novelists at that time were women, it is not ludicrous to assume that women's position as outsiders was part of the deciding factor for the emergence and characteristics of the form. Observing but seldom participating was the fate of many women at that time, especially those who aspired for more. All that looking and observing amounted to a lot of fabric for story making and novel writing. Why I bring this into the discussion is because the same can be said of both Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe who, as Gilbert and Gubar observe about the latter, "instead of participating in the life of the Brettons, Lucy watches it."<sup>2</sup> I will argue that it is precisely this situation as outsider and as suppressed "others" to society that influences the heroine's visions about themselves and other women.

Brontë's texts have from the earliest been inspired and infiltrated by empire. Her juvenilia works *The Angrian Writings* are filled with exotic cultures, fantasies of war and foreign desires. It is a general tendency in all of her works to have a presence of the un-English, either in the form of Belgians, the French, the Irish or natives from "exotic" colonies. It seems that the main protagonists' identities are created by holding up examples of what they are not. A foil is necessary because as women they are themselves defined as what another group of people is not, namely men. Denied their own true identity, Jane and Lucy try to create one the only way they know how: by putting other people beneath them.

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<sup>2</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Gilbert Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic, The Woman Writer and The Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd edition (New Haven & London: Yale Nota Bene, Yale University Press, 2000) p. 403

Through close reading the texts I will try to get away from the autobiographical tendency in critical assessment of the Brontë works in general. I intend to use mainly feminist theory and imperialist/post-colonial theory. Although of course my argument will be informed by the period the novels were written in and the sex of the author, I will not draw on any personal events from Brontë's life into my interpretation. My feminist stance in relation to these works is my first priority and I will attempt to work the colonial theories and interpretations into the feminist fabric, trying to find a system in the use of colonial and foreign references that relates to the general critique of patriarchy in the two novels. I am also inspired by Edward Said's book *Culture and Imperialism* has really inspired me through its advertisement of reading against the grain, contrapuntal reading.

Seeing as the amount of critical work done on *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* is enormous, I have decided to narrow my field of interaction to the literary critics I find most important in relation to my topic. When it comes to the purely feminist point of view, Gilbert and Gubar's feminist classic *The Madwoman in the Attic* argues that most of the women Jane encounter serve as negative role models and that they represent problems which she must overcome. Their interpretation of *Villette* seems to be more similar to my own thesis, that Lucy is a woman outside and without society. They also link the other female characters in the two novels to the fact that they are torn between the two sides of their inner selves, but in a different fashion. For Gilbert and Gubar the other female characters represent different sides of the heroine, while I focus more on the heroine's judgement of other women and what sets them apart. Although not specifically about the novels of Brontë, Beauvoir's observation on how women come to view their own passive role in society is quite similar to what Brontë's two works assert:

“this is how woman is being brought up, without ever being impressed with the necessity of taking charge of her own existence. So she readily lets herself come to count on the protection, love, assistance, and supervision of others, she lets herself be fascinated with the hope of self-realization without *doing* anything.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 407

Brontë's Lucy and Jane represent the opposite of this feminine way of self-realization. Their stories show a denunciation for a society which encourages women to take no action, to remain passive and to act as an appendix to men. Elaine Showalter argues in her book *A Literature of Their Own* that there is a definite lack in female solidarity amongst the women in *Jane Eyre*. In fact, it is the women in *Jane Eyre* who make sure other women act according to society's strictures, in other words, who effectively police each other on behalf of patriarchal tyranny.<sup>4</sup> She also defines the inner conflict in Jane as between passion and reason, embodied by Bertha and Helen Burns.

The technique of comparing the suppression of females with the suppression of slaves and other colonial subjects was widely used by people who were critical of patriarchy all the way back to Charlotte Brontë's time. John Stuart Mill, for example, wrote in his essay "The Subjection of Women" that, "There remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house."<sup>5</sup> Taking this into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I must say that much of my theoretical inspiration in the field of colonial study in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* has come from Carl Plasa's book *Critical Issues: Charlotte Brontë*. His book is a comprehensive study of the colonial aspect of all of Brontë's literary works and has really opened my eyes to the slave metaphors and rhetoric which pervade *Jane Eyre*. Another critic with a colonial focus is Suvendrini Perera, who calls the fourth chapter of her book 'The Discourse of Oriental Misogyny in Jane Eyre'. Perera sees the eastern allusions which feature in *Jane Eyre* as the only way to represent the sexual risks that single Englishwomen face.<sup>6</sup> She also discards the possibility for a shared sense of oppression because of the representation of the colonized or oriental woman. She then comes in opposition to Susan Meyer, whose assessment of Brontë's use of the slave metaphor is that it creates a bond of shared

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<sup>4</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own, British Woman Novelists From Brontë To Lessing*, Expanded Edition (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1999) p. 117

<sup>5</sup> Mill, John Stuart, *The Subjection of Women*, Edited, with Introduction, by Susan Moller Okin, (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988) p. 86

<sup>6</sup> Suvendrini Perera, *Reaches of Empire, The English Novel from Edgeworth to Dickens*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) p. 81



oppression between women and the black races. She also reads the story of Bertha as an implicit critique of British slavery and imperialism, because even though unsympathetic to Bertha as a human being, the novel does make an accusation against British colonialism, and that the empire's wealth is seriously stained. It is not possible to talk about the colonial context in Brontë's work without mentioning Spivak's "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." Erin O'Connors assessment of its impact is quite interesting: "First published in a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* and since reprinted many times, the essay has had a distinctly worldly career, setting the agenda for much subsequent postcolonial work by offering what has become the definitive postcolonial reading of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. (1847) Since then, every subsequent piece on Jane Eyre and race has paid homage to it, alternately developing, refining, and deferring to Spivak's claims."<sup>7</sup> The specifics of the essay will be discussed in detail in later chapters. A more recent investigation of *Jane Eyre* comes from Joyce Sonana, who explains the connection and association between feminist and orientalist discourse through its effect of displacing the source of patriarchal oppression from home in England to far away, "exotic" places. The effect becomes that British readers can discuss problems latent in British society without compromising their own identity as Westerners.<sup>8</sup>

My own tentative answer to these questions is that there is a connection between the foreignisation of feminine qualities and the self division experienced by the two heroines of the novels, that the resistance to the patriarchal system and what looks like the sustainment of imperial and colonizing values in fact do not oppose each other and that there is a relationship between the two. What this points to, is the fact that Jane and Lucy reaction to living in a patriarchal society is deeply ingrained in the fact that this society was an imperialistic one as well.

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<sup>7</sup> Erin O'Connor, "Preface for a post-postcolonial criticism" *Victorian Studies*. Vol. 45, Iss. 2 (Winter 2003.) p. 217

<sup>8</sup> Zonana, Joyce, 'The Sultan and The Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the structure of Jane Eyre,' *Signs*, 18, 3 (Spring 1993) p. 593

My first and second chapters are the most traditionally feminist part of my thesis. Here I try to find out how patriarchal strictures and condemnations have shaped and influenced Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe's relationships to other women. I also show how their complicated relationship to other women reflects the complicated relationship they have with their inner selves. They are split between reason and emotion, the woman they wish to be and the women they are, the woman who they wish to be perceived as and the woman people around them see, also between the person who thinks about herself first, one who is passionate, and the protective cold persona who has everything under control.

The first chapter deals with representations of women in both novels. This chapter begins with some background information about women's situation in England at that time. What are the female roles available, how are these roles problematized, both through Jane and Lucy and society? How do the roles available influence Jane and Lucy's behaviour? How do they contrast to other women? How does society's pressure influence their behaviour and how is this problematized? How are all these women/roles subjects of patriarchal oppression? How has their limitations shaped their lives both practically and internally on a psychological level?

The second chapter deals with the same problems as the first, only in *Villette* specifically. Lucy's story is defined more or less by other women, from Mrs Bretton and Miss Marchmont back home in England, to Madame Beck and Madame Walravens on the continent. Lucy's dislike for her fellow women is an indirect dislike for patriarchal society and the roles men have created for women. I will investigate how other women are judged by Lucy and how compliance to the feminine role comes in direct relation to the level of "inferiority" Lucy judges them to be. Her rejection of the feminine role becomes her rejection of society, something her position as a woman in a foreign country reflects.

In the second part of my thesis, my focus changes from a purely feminist point of view to a post-colonial and "feminism through post-colonial eyes" approach. I will show how the use

of imperialistic language becomes a tool for the feminist case. How does the idea of colonizing and the colonial space enter into the text? How is English imperial thoughts and ideologies part of these novels? How is the issue of subjection of women and the treatment of what is culturally and racially other connected? Is their treatment different, and does it paint a consistent picture ideologically? Is the subjection of women problematized at the expense of foreign and colonized people? Is the relationship between these two issues different in the two works?

Chapter three will begin with how the critical focus has changed in relation to *Jane*. I will contextualize the shift and examine what has actually changed. The novel's treatment of Bertha is of course central here and I will argue Bertha's blackness indicates the level of repression which she suffers. Metaphors of race become a tool for Brontë through which she can show her uneasiness about aspects of female roles. The affiliation that is created between the oppressed female and the racially oppressed is arguably a positive one. The final chapter deals with how this language of empire, this devaluing of difference is continued in *Villette*. I will investigate how cultural otherness becomes a scale by which Lucy judges her fellow women's level of oppression, that the split between herself and other women becomes a dramatization of the split Lucy feels within herself as a result of her personal rejection of the patriarchal, feminine role.

PART I: HOME

## CHAPTER I: THE DIVIDED SELF - JANE

“Who can for ever crush the heart,  
 Restrain its throbbing, curb its life?  
 Dissemble truth with ceaseless art,  
 With outward calm mask inward strife?”<sup>9</sup>

In 1837, ten years before she wrote *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë articulated in a letter what would become one of the central subjects of her books: “I have endeavoured not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don’t always succeed, for sometimes when I’m teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself.”<sup>10</sup> Though her own words, they could just as easily have been the words of one of her heroines. The split between duty and self-fulfilment is a central theme in her two novels *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, and I judge it to be one of the primary sources of female subjection on an individual level. The reason for this split, something which the main characters of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* fall victim to, is society’s view that women are essentially different from men and that they have a certain role to fill that is subordinate to man. Of course this does not come natural to women but as Elizabeth Janeway<sup>11</sup> argues, an individual who agrees that she is a subordinate and barred from the highest ambitions of the society in which she lives will communicate this feeling of less worth into the roles she plays and that it will become part of her

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<sup>9</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Frances*, in *The Shakespeare Head Brontë, The Poems of Charlotte Brontë & Patrick Branwell Brontë*, ed. by Thomas James Wise (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press) p. 22

<sup>10</sup> *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, Ed. by Margareth Smith, Volume 1 (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1995) Letter to Robert Southey from Charlotte Bronte, 16 March, 1837 p. 168

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Janeway, *Man’s World, Woman’s Place – A study in Social Mythology* (New York: William Morrow And Company, Inc., 1971) p. 108

internal life. These individuals become what society tells them they are. Therefore this otherness and feeling of less self worth that women feel is a result of their alienation from power in society, and not only in relation to men, but in relation to themselves and their fellow women. Brontë's female protagonists' interaction with the world around them and the world within them exemplifies this point to an extent that the issue cannot be denied in any reading of these novels.

The roles that women have to play are shaped in the image of women as Others, not women as women, therefore their own roles can become alien to them. "Others" in this context refers to a person who is supposed to inhabit the physical or psychological features that are deemed not part of the ruling group's features, and who are judged as evil or unworthy. Men, as the naming subject of society, have over time come to define the female as everything opposite of what he perceives to be the superior traits of the male white race. The roles women are supposed to fill are not essentially feminine, as men would have them believe, but characteristic of any subjected group. In fact Janeway has found out that "Those who have accepted subordination for whatever reason display attitudes and conduct which are typically and traditionally ascribed as feminine,"<sup>12</sup> something which explains the resistance women may feel to ascribing to it. It necessitates the acceptance of her self as subordinate. It necessitates the acceptance of not being completely free. The problems the main protagonists Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe have with fitting into the traditionally ascribed female roles are in fact their rejection of looking at themselves as abnormal and powerless. In fact, the typical feminine role contains everything the ruling subject, the male, is not. Therefore to reject the feminine means becoming more male and therefore not wholly a woman and not having a clear identity, a thought which must have frightened women who dared to think in this way.

Jane's story is the story of a woman who wants to step out of that role, and who actually steps out with society's reaction and her own inner and outer struggle with this fact as a central

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<sup>12</sup> Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place*, p. 108

conflict. To actually achieve the confidence to try and step out of the role must have been really hard as:

“isolation from the ideals of a society and from its norms of behaviour not only makes the individual less likely to act within that society, it turns these ideals against him. However subliminally, he must ask himself, Why am I excluded from them, and even forbidden to aspire to them? To the extent that he accepts these ideals as worthy – and it is very difficult to live in a society without accepting some of its ideals – he must conclude that he is unworthy, perhaps even evil.”<sup>13</sup>

So being a woman in patriarchal society was like being caught in an evil circle. Being repressed as a woman actually resulted in feeling that you deserved to be repressed so for Jane and Lucy to actually get to the point where they felt that they deserved something better was astonishing.

Lucy’s lamentation on her own feelings exemplifies this point:

“What I felt that night, and what I did, I no more expected to feel and do, than to be lifted in a trance to the seventh heaven. Cold, reluctant, apprehensive, I had accepted a part to please another: ere long, warming, becoming interested, taking courage, I acted to please myself. Yet the next day, when I thought it over, I quite disapproved of these amateur performances; and though glad that I had obliged M. Paul, and tried my own strength for once, I took a firm resolution never to be drawn into a similar affair.”<sup>14</sup>

It sounds like she feels bad for doing something she actually likes: acting out another part other than that of the submissive woman was reprehensible. And this is the heart of the self division and alienation towards other women, the split between the acceptance of suppression and the rebellion against it. Women at that time were faced with a no win situation where if they complied to the feminine and subordinate role, that meant that they were an other to the naming subject, that they deserved less and that was natural. But if women rejected the role given them they were even less worthy, they were unnatural. So even though Jane and especially Lucy feel the personal wrongness of being constricted by such roles and rules, on one level they accept some of it in the way that they comply with living the life of obscurity. They accept that what was natural to them was unnatural in other’s eyes. Lucy Snowe accepts it when Miss Fawnshawe

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<sup>13</sup> Janeway, *Man’s World, Woman’s Place*, p. 101

<sup>14</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, Ed. by Mark Lilly (London: Penguin Books, 1985) p. 211

tells her that she would not "be you for a kingdom"<sup>15</sup> and that "nobody but you cares for cleverness."<sup>16</sup> They can escape the patriarchal role but they cannot escape patriarchal society. Being labelled unnatural and sometimes even monstrous was what awaited the "woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her."<sup>17</sup> That is society's way of checking women, that is, making the option of not complying to those rules a terrifying one.

## THE INNER STRUGGLE

Jane chooses the road less travelled and that has implications for both her relationship to other women as well as for her own mind and body. As with many other aspects in Brontë's work, outer actions reflect the inner workings of the female protagonist. These will show themselves to be almost the same thing as I move on with my argument. Brontë herself once said in a letter: "But when one does not complain, and when one wants to master oneself with a tyrants grip – one's faculties' rise in revolt – and one pays for outward calm by an almost unbearable inner struggle."<sup>18</sup> I feel this line describes Jane Eyre's situation as far as revealing the thoughts behind the acts of acquiesce that Jane performs when faced with injustice and suppression from others, that actually appearing normal and feminine can often result in great inner torment. As shown in the childhood scenes back at Gateshead and the early days of Lowood, Jane has an unfeminine temper but learns to constrict it, but at a heavy price of self division. This inner struggle is there because Jane is like a prisoner in her own life, she wants to break free, but cannot get past the bars of patriarchal society. The referral to the tyrant evokes memories of the first chapter of the book where John Reed is called a tyrant, which hardly makes a favourable comparison to Jane's own controlling sense of reason. Just like the reader is on

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<sup>15</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 215

<sup>16</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 216

<sup>17</sup> Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics, Feminist Literary Theory*, 2nd Edition, (London And New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2002) p. 57

<sup>18</sup> *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, Ed. by Margareth Smith, Volume 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) Letter to Constantin Heger, January 8, 1845 p.

Jane's side in the scene where John is described as a tyrant, the reader takes the side of her faculties and feelings when it comes to her inner battle. When there is apparently peace between the two sides, meaning that women act as they are supposed to, that is often in fact only an outer change of behaviour bought at the prize of psychological self division.

Jane's self division results in a sort of master and slave relationship between her two parts, a sort of internal patriarchy where reason is the master and passion is the slave. But passion sometimes rebels: "Being scarcely cognisant of my movements, and solicitous only to appear calm; and above all, to control the working muscles of my face – which I feel rebel insolently against my will, and struggle to express what I had resolved to conceal. But I have a veil – it is down: I make shift yet to behave with decent composure."<sup>19</sup> This quote reveals that the choice to behave as society deems proper is taken consciously and intentionally; Jane is fully aware that this behaviour is not natural, but a conscious decision to appear in a certain way. The word rebel again evokes associations to the early scenes of Jane's childhood where the rebel comes to mean a person wronged and misjudged, underlining the wrongness of having to behave and restrict oneself in such a way. By admitting that it is a conscious decision of behaviour, she is making a critique of it by pointing out the illogicality of it. She is saying that the people around her may think she bought the fact that she is inferior, but really she is fully aware of the wrongness of it, and she is only protecting her true identity and feelings.

Although conscious of the image she herself portrays in society, Jane still steps out of the feminine role and so represents an unusual choice. Jane therefore exemplifies the estrangement women suffer who choose not to submit to one of the inhibiting roles patriarchal society has ascribed to them. "I looked, and had an acute pleasure in looking,--a precious yet poignant pleasure,"<sup>20</sup> Jane exclaims of one of her seemingly favourite pastimes. By separating herself from the party at Thornfield, and observing instead of taking part, she is separating herself from the

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<sup>19</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 244

<sup>20</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 174



people who comply with society's patriarchal rules, judging that kind of behaviour as beneath her. Jane as a child clearly locates a large part of the hostility she is met with in the fact that she was not a "romping child". Bessie affirms this by telling her that "it is your place to be humble, and to try to make yourself agreeable to them."<sup>21</sup> Had she been less of herself and more of a proper girl, submissive and eager to please others, she would not have met that much animosity in the Reed household. Her position as a governess positioned her on the outside of life at Thornfield. She is clearly not part of the family, nor of the servants. "At last coffee is brought in, and the gentlemen are summoned. I sit in the shade – if any shade there be in this brilliantly lit apartment; the window-curtain half hides me."<sup>22</sup> She assumes the same place physically as she assumes socially, not part of the crowd, almost unseen. She is always observing instead of participating and Rochester's guests talk of her as if she was not present. She is invited by Rochester, but not accepted as part of the group nonetheless, which she in a way seems to agree with. She is more than one time resistant to taking part in the social activities and freely chooses to sit in the shade. She is divided from the group like she is divided in her self. Participating in that kind of social event would necessitate playing a role that Jane is not prepared to do.

As Jane grows up and becomes an adult, her self control is strengthened and the "master" of her mind becomes more dominant. By the end of Jane's stay at Lowood she states she has gained "more harmonious thought: what seemed better regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind. I had given in allegiance to duty and order. I appeared a disciplined and subdued character."<sup>23</sup> The word *seemed* is crucial to understanding this utterance. She is the same rebellious and passionate person, but she has learned to follow the rules and get into the role of woman. The tragedy of a forced and fake existence as somebody one is not is very clear to us now, although not in Victorian times. The rebelliousness of Jane's inner, true self comes to the

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<sup>21</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 13

<sup>22</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 173

<sup>23</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 84

surface many times in the story, as when she is trying to decide whether or not to stay with Mr Rochester:

“But, then, a voice within me averred that I could do it; and foretold that I should do it. I wrestled with my own resolution: I wanted to be weak that I might avoid the awful passage of further suffering I saw laid out for me; and conscience, turned tyrant, held passion by the throat, told her, tauntingly, she had yet but dipped her dainty foot in the slough, and swore that with that arm of iron, he would thrust her down to unsounded depths of agony.”<sup>24</sup>

It is extremely interesting that she calls the tyrannical and controlling reason a he, as if, somehow, the logic behind the two concepts adhered to the same principle. It is as if she is playing on the old assumption that men were ruled by reason and women ruled by feelings, showing in a sense how wrong this assumption deemed “natural” is by making it her ruling side. Jane always does the rational thing, and when she makes a rational decision, she sticks to it and succeeds without letting her emotions get the better of her, because, as Terry Eagleton<sup>25</sup> also has noted, to let yourself be ruled by emotions is very unwise in a patriarchal society. It results in being locked into the red room, it is to be punished by Mr Brocklehurst and to practically starve for 8 years, and that is something one wishes to avoid. Jane has internalized the hierarchy she suffers by making the qualities that men rank the highest, and ironically those they profess to be lacking in women, her ruling quality too. In her childhood Jane learned that it is better to master oneself and one’s emotions, than to let others be master of her. Therefore it gave her a certain personal satisfaction to be in control of something, to feel that one was master over one’s own actions and body. Carl Plasa talks about “how something as apparently personal and localized as the self’s relations to its own body is typically to be rendered, throughout *Jane Eyre*, in terms of a shifting rhetoric of colonial struggle: the body threatens to make the self the ‘slave’ to a ‘rising hysteria’ and must be ‘mastered.’”<sup>26</sup> By mastering oneself, even the most repressed woman

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<sup>24</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 297

<sup>25</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power – A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p. 17

<sup>26</sup> Carl Plasa, “Silent Revolt”, *The Discourse of Slavery – Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison*, ed by Carl Plasa and Betty J Ring, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) p. 74

could feel superiority over something. Woman becomes a slave when she lets herself go to her emotions, when she is not under the control of the tyrannical, male associated reason. The logic then becomes that when woman does not adhere to the male rule she becomes even a lesser person than simply a woman, she becomes a slave.

By mastering herself Jane gains confidence in herself and also confidence in relation to other women. This confidence allows Jane to judge certain other women as beneath her for obvious and not so obvious reasons. Jane no doubt feels superior to Bertha because Bertha is seemingly ruled by feeling and instincts, which mirrors how the rational side of Jane feels superior to her emotional and passionate side. Although the rational side is in control most of the time it sometimes becomes a conflict, just like it is a struggle to keep Bertha locked up in the attic room, Jane is continually struggling with controlling certain sides of herself, which she does not enjoy: “For a moment I am beyond my own mastery. What does it mean? I did not think I should tremble in this way when I saw him – or lose my voice or the power of motion in his presence.”<sup>27</sup> Why should Jane continually try to subdue her passion and romantic feelings, what is so bad about letting her feelings affect her actions? To understand this more clearly it is necessary to look at the period in which this was written. What defined the Victorian period was the suppression of everything that had to do with the body, sexuality, and everything that could be considered “the Other”. The ironic thing about this is that Jane suffers under female oppression and sees the injustice of it, but she does not recognise, that the underlying principle in patriarchy is the same principle she is subjecting her own inner life to.

Like the world is split between man and woman, Jane is split between “patriarchal” reason and “feminine” passion. The only time Jane finds happiness is when the separation between reason and passion, or internal desire and cultural identity, is dissolved, when the two parts are working in the same direction. She could not be with Rochester as long as her passion

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<sup>27</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 244

and desire for him was not consistent with what her reason was telling her. Their reuniting is partly a result of the subduing of her sexual desire for Rochester, the part of her that wants to submit herself totally to him, to be locked to him and to have his world become hers. The other part also has to be subdued, the strict part of her, her cold reason. She has to learn that a life led under the strict and unyielding control of reason is not a happy one. She realizes this towards the end of the book by watching St. John, who has indeed removed passion and feeling from his life, and so seeing how unhappy a life like that is. She is also confronted with that life when St. John asks her to give up everything, to give up a life with love and passion. St. John coldly tells her:

“God and nature intended you for a missionary’s wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary’s wife you must-shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you- not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign’s service.”<sup>28</sup>

In other interpretations of the ending of *Jane Eyre* the emphasis lies on the surrender of the passionate side, that there is some form of victory of reason over passion but I feel that is wrong. The two sides are brought together; there is not simply a victory by one part over the other. When Jane is supposedly finally happy, it relates to a coming together of the internal life and the social life of Jane. She has learned to follow social roles to every extent as the situation with St John represents, yet even though society may claim that women should be obedient to men and do as they say, she goes against that. And even though she perhaps wished to live a life as Rochester’s mistress, she comprehends the wrongness of that too. That is why Jane has to run away from Rochester, because she realizes that she is becoming a person that is too different from the person she judges herself to be. Representative of this is the scene on her wedding day when she does not think that she looks like herself when she looks in the mirror: “I saw a robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger.”<sup>29</sup> The two Janes in this scene represent the two Janes that inhabit her soul, the person that is ruled by her passionate

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<sup>28</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 402

<sup>29</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre* p. 286

heart and the one who is ruled by her clear reason and by cultural expectation. This split has seemingly always been there, since she has a similar experience with a mirror when she is locked in the Red Room at Gateshead: “All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it was like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp.”<sup>30</sup> This serves as a reminder to Jane when her passionate side is taking over: see this is not the true you, this is only part of you, and this part must be subjected to control or you will lose yourself.

#### JANE’S RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER WOMEN

Bertha occupies a unique space in *Jane Eyre* by being both a representative for Jane’s inward battle with her own feelings as well as physically manifesting all things women ought not to be in patriarchal society. Bertha symbolizes unrestrained passion and sexuality; she is a woman who is ruled by bodily emotions, as Mrs Poole observes: “One never knows what she has, sir: she is so cunning: it is not in mortal discretion to fathom her craft.”<sup>31</sup> She is not controllable and that is her scariest aspect. Women were supposed to be controlled and show control over their own behaviour. Bertha shows sexual appetite and she reacts violently to being restrained and controlled. “Patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for ‘femininity’ are *natural*. Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labelled both *unfeminine* and *unnatural*.”<sup>32</sup> A result of this oppression was that women had to repress something that was in them naturally, but that could not be let out. Women have the same range of feelings and desires, wants, and needs, dreams and aspirations as men, so in order to live in nineteenth century England, in order to not go crazy, they had to repress and forget certain

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<sup>30</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 14

<sup>31</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 293

<sup>32</sup> Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p.65

aspects of themselves. If they had let loose those feelings, that would mean that they weren't what they considered themselves to be: women. Rather than living with the pain of being repressed and being denied things, they repressed the sides of themselves that were at odds with the rules of society and proper behaviour for women. This is why Jane Eyre is so tormented by her own thoughts and feelings and also so judgemental towards other women. The little arguments she has with herself reveal a discontentment of the female role and are conceptualized in her negative judgement of other women, especially Bertha.

One of the most famous feminist interpretations of *Jane Eyre* and the figure of Bertha is found in Gilbert and Gubar's book *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Their interpretation is something Plasa, in his article "'Silent revolt' Slavery and the politics of metaphor in Jane Eyre,' does not agree with, and he says that Gilbert and Gubar "resolutely denies Bertha's *literal* presence as a character within Brontë's novel, favouring instead a psychofeminist emphasis on her role as the *metaphorical* expression of Jane's own unconscious desires and discontents."<sup>33</sup> Although I do agree that it is questionable to exclude Bertha as a character in her own, I will focus on Bertha from a feminist standpoint, leaving her importance as a foreign person from a colonized country to the second chapter.

Gilbert and Gubar's feminist interpretation of Bertha is as Jane's "dark double," and their own definition is that "Of course, by projecting their rebellious impulses not into their heroines but into mad or monstrous women (who are suitably punished in the course of the novel or poem), female authors dramatize their own self-division, their desire both to accept the structures of patriarchal society and to reject them."<sup>34</sup> This is in essence what the dark double is, according to Gilbert and Gubar. It shows how women were forced to suppress sides of themselves that were not under the category of acceptable feminine behaviour. Bertha is everything Jane cannot be; she is passionate, wild, and angry. And she does what Jane cannot do; she tears the wedding veil,

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<sup>33</sup> *The Discourse of slavery*, ed. by Plasa & Ring, p.65

<sup>34</sup> Gilbert & Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 78

she subdues Rochester and is his match physically at least. She expresses the rage and fears that Jane is only able to express through dreams and paintings, and the rage that Charlotte Brontë only shows through metaphors.

The links between Bertha and Jane are many, but the first time the connection becomes apparent in the story is after Jane's first visit to the roof of Thornfield:

“When I turned from it and repassed the trap-door, I could scarcely see my way down the ladder: the attic seemed black as a vault compared with that arch of blue air to which I had been looking up, and to that sunlit scene of grove, pasture and green hill of which the hall was the centre, and over which I had been gazing with delight. (...)While I paced softly on, the last sound I expected to hear in so still a region, a laugh, struck my ear. It was a curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless. I stopped: the sound ceased, only for an instant; it began again, louder: for at first, though distinct, it was very low.”<sup>35</sup>

Looking at the view from the top of Thornfield Hall as everything the world has to offer, Jane's comment seems to have another meaning than just that. The female sphere in that time was the house, either as the place where women performed their profession or as the designated place of the mother, wife or daughter. The woman's sphere is a black vault compared to man's sphere. To go from that thought to musings about women's situation in society and their imposed limitations makes the interpretation even more powerful. Then add the laughter by a woman, who is imprisoned in a house and a marriage, bereft of freedom. Together these three aspects make a powerful statement and link Bertha intractably to the issue of female subjection throughout the book.

The other incident where the link between Jane and Bertha is shown the most clearly is when Bertha enters Jane's room in the middle of the night and tears up her wedding veil. Jane does not want to be in an unequal relationship where Rochester does all the giving and she does nothing but receive. Therefore when Rochester tells Jane that “I will cover the head I love best with a priceless veil,”<sup>36</sup> Jane retorts that “then you won't know me, sir; and I shall not be your

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<sup>35</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 107

<sup>36</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 259

Jane Eyre any longer.”<sup>37</sup> When Bertha tears the veil, it means that Jane does not have to. In the scene we have the future Mrs. Rochester meeting the real Mrs. Rochester; Bertha is wearing the expensive veil and looking in the mirror in a way that seems to be saying: this is what you will become when you marry Rochester, so just watch out. “Bertha (...) serves as a distorted mirror image of Jane’s own dangerous propensities toward ‘passion’, Brontë’s frequent euphemism for sexuality. Bertha embodies the moral example which is the core of Brontë’s novel – in a society which itself exhibits a form of psychosis in its oppression of women, the price paid for love and sexual commitment is insanity and death, the loss of self.”<sup>38</sup> Of course Jane will not become what she fears, but that is what society has made her feel. For example Miss Fairfax is very sceptical of Jane and Rochester’s relationship and is only pleased with Jane after Jane has acted hard towards Rochester, holding back his passion as well as suppressing her own. Jane has been taught to feel shame when it comes to physical love, to feel shame about her own body, because if she did not feel like that, it would mean she would end up like Bertha, insane and wild.

On the morning of her wedding day, Jane takes one last look at herself in her wedding dress and her reaction is this: “I saw a robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger.”<sup>39</sup> Thus when the future Mrs Rochester is looking at herself and not recognizing what she sees, it is perhaps because she sees the imprisoned Jane, the married Jane, and that does not feel right. She sees the girl she is about to become, the married girl, the sexual girl and that is something she cannot identify with. The mirror reflection objectifies the other side of Jane, the passionate Jane, and the sexual Mrs. Rochester, but also somebody who is in some way locked up, imprisoned. The scene also evokes the memory of another mirror scene, that in the Red Room. Her reaction then is similar as she exclaims that: “All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure

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<sup>37</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre* p. 259

<sup>38</sup> Barbara Hill Rigney, *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel, Studies in Brontë, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood*, (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978) p. 16

<sup>39</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre* p. 286



there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it was like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp.”<sup>40</sup> Jane looking at herself in the looking glass in the Red room links the childhood Jane, the very passionate girl who has just been punished for her passionate outbursts, to the Jane that is about to enter marriage, which is in a way also a result of her passionate side. The third mirror scene must also be taken into account, something which adds to the complexity of meaning of the other two. It occurs on the eve of the wedding day as Bertha enters Jane’s bedroom and puts on Jane’s wedding veil before she “turned to the mirror. At that moment I saw the reflection of the visage and features quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass.”<sup>41</sup> The similarities can easily be drawn: all three, childhood Jane, adult Jane and Bertha are in specific situations because they have let themselves be ruled by their emotions and therefore laid themselves bare to the punishment of patriarchy. Bertha is in a way also a passionate girl who has been punished, who has been locked up in the “red room” of Thornfield. Similarly, Jane is about to enter a marriage where she is not an equal and therefore could end up in a sort of red room, trapped and at the mercy of another human being. It is interesting that Jane first sees Bertha in the looking glass, which supports the ghostliness and non reality of her at that point in the narrative. Jane has to this point never actually seen her, she has only heard her. But when she finally sees her with her own eyes, that moment marks a turning point in the story. If we go along with the argument of Bertha being Jane’s double, then the meeting between these two women represents Jane’s realisation of her own “dark” and suppressed side. It is also interesting that Jane, on the day when she is to become Mrs. Rochester, does not seem to recognise herself in the mirror, as if she were a different person. It is even more interesting that this happens in front of the same mirror as Bertha looked at herself, as somehow saying that once Jane takes on that veil her destiny will become the same as that of Bertha.

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<sup>40</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 14

<sup>41</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 283

Bertha becomes the representative for one kind of female behaviour, but the different models of female behaviour held up to Jane throughout the course of the story can be organized into two categories: those who comply with the female role and those who do not. Bertha is the only woman featured who steps out of the male approved role of woman, therefore the logic becomes that if you do not comply, you are a monster. This is something Gilbert and Gubar touch upon when arguing that, "It is debilitating to be *any* woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels, they must be monsters."<sup>42</sup> Jane fears that she will become like Bertha when she becomes Mrs Rochester, as the one who wears the veil. She fears her own and Rochester's sexuality and passion, fearing she will become a beast without morals like the creature she sees in the night, therefore she is always restraining her own passion, looking upon it as something which must be locked away like Bertha.

The reader is introduced to Bertha first through her laughter making the signification of laughter an important point of interest. Laughter is primarily viewed as a sign of happiness, of joy and freedom, as Rochester uses the word when he interrogates Jane and asks:

"Do you never laugh, Miss Jane? Don't trouble yourself to answer---I see, you laugh rarely; but you can laugh very merrily: believe me, you are not naturally austere, any more than I am naturally vicious. The Lowood constraint still clings to you somewhat; controlling your features, muffling your voice, and restricting your limbs; and you fear in the presence of a man and a brother---or father, or master, or what you will---to smile too gaily, speak too freely, or move too quickly."<sup>43</sup>

The ability to laugh is here associated with freedom, which is ironic since Bertha is locked up in the attic. The first occasion Jane hears Bertha's laughter is when she is pondering how

"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; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. When thus alone, I not unfrequently heard Grace Poole's laugh: the same peal, the same low, slow

<sup>42</sup> Gilbert & Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.53

<sup>43</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 138

ha! ha! which, when first heard, had thrilled me: I heard, too, her eccentric murmurs; stranger than her laugh.”<sup>44</sup>

It is when ideas of freedom come into her mind and she feels restricted that the laughter can be heard. There must be some reason for why Brontë chooses this exact moment to put the laughter into the text. Jane’s inner rage at her situation as a woman is not revealed by Jane herself, but by Bertha’s laughter. Virginia Woolf talks about the laughter as “an awkward break”<sup>45</sup> in the text, and that these breaks reveal a rage. It is therefore plausible to associate the laugh, and indeed Bertha, with the suppressed rage and discontent of both Charlotte Brontë and Jane Eyre.

Used as the epitome of female oppression, Bertha’s physical imprisonment becomes a haunting image of the male subjection of women. Fearful as she is described, Bertha is a perfect example of how humans, in order to demonize their fears, incarnate it in something monstrous:

”In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.”<sup>46</sup>

I think that even though the portrait painted of Bertha is far from flattering, it can be justified to claim that Brontë did want the reader to feel some pity for her, for she too, like Jane, was stigmatized by her refusal to obey any man’s law. She embodies a lot of the qualities Jane finds important: she is refusing to simply let herself be degraded, and she breaks free and tries to do something about it. She escapes in the night and actually manages to penalize Mr Rochester by destroying his mansion and physically reducing him, a victory Brontë never would have given a woman with whom she had no sympathy with.

In the same way as Jane rejects the person society expects her to be, Jane rejects her competitor for Mr Rochester’s attention, Blanche Ingram. Like Bertha in her younger years,

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<sup>44</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 109

<sup>45</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) p. 70

<sup>46</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 293

Blanche is someone who plays on her looks, but in a more socially respectable way. Mrs Fairfax's description of her resembles the early descriptions of Bertha: "She was greatly admired, of course?" "Yes, indeed: and not only for her beauty, but for her accomplishments."<sup>47</sup> Blanche too is described mainly by her physical features, with her dark complexion and dark hair emphasised: "Tall, fine bust, sloping shoulders; long, graceful neck: olive complexion, dark and clear; noble features; eyes rather like Mr. Rochester's: large and black, and as brilliant as her jewels. And then she had such a fine head of hair; raven black."<sup>48</sup> The link between the two is not incidental; it links the two women together as well as with Jane. Just like the interest in Dr John links Madame Beck, Ginevra Fawnshawe and Lucy Snowe, the interest in Mr Rochester links Bertha, Miss Ingram and Jane together. Blanche knows what to do to get attention, she is happiest when she is the centre of attention, opposed to Jane she likes to be looked at rather than to look: "She appeared to be on her high horse to-night; both her words and her air seemed intended to excite not only the admiration, but the amazement of her auditors: she was evidently bent on striking them as something very dashing and daring indeed."<sup>49</sup> Jane rather looks on her the opposite way:

"Miss Ingram was a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling. Pardon the seeming paradox: I mean what I say. She was very showy, but she was not genuine: she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil."<sup>50</sup>

This underlines the importance of being one's own person and making one's own life, not just living it for others. Most of Blanche's actions seemed fuelled by the need for attention and the need to please men. Jane condemns the calculating woman, who acts in a certain way to get what she wants; therefore Blanche as a role model is rejected completely by Jane.

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<sup>47</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 159

<sup>48</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 159

<sup>49</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 179

<sup>50</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 185

As this chapter suggests, the relationship between Jane and her fellow female characters mirrors the internal conflicts she suffers. Caught in a society that favours and expects compliance to custom, especially amongst women, she struggles with finding the balance of being true to her self while still receiving some respect amongst her fellow human beings. Unable to directly place the blame for this predicament on men, she focuses all of her critique on other women who, thus making an indirect critique of patriarchal society. Not willing to comply with society's standards of femininity, Jane is caught between two choices: either she can totally ignore society and let her feelings rule her, or she can abandon her own sense of self and become what patriarchal society holds up as the ideal woman. The first choice is exemplified by Bertha, who, unable and unwilling to restrain herself, is laid bare for the cruel punishment patriarchy has for unruly women. The second choice is becoming another Miss Ingram, restricting herself to a life that centres around finding a man, and effectively making a mere subject out of herself. *Jane Eyre's* ending suggests that she does not need to become either, that the split inside can be healed and she can find happiness in being herself, both passionate and reasonable. Written several years later, *Villette* offers no such happy ending, suggesting that the reality of the situation is that patriarchal society does not endorse or accept too much deviation from the female role.

## CHAPTER II: THE DIVIDED SELF - LUCY

“Nature and hostile Destiny  
Stir in my heart a conflict wild;  
And long and fierce the war will be  
Ere Duty both has reconciled”<sup>51</sup>

While Jane’s inner turmoil and passion are given an outlet through the figure of Bertha, Lucy Snowe in *Villette* harbours it all inside. Lucy’s inner turmoil concerning her own thoughts about who she is and her own identity is made visible to the audience through the stories of other female characters. Lucy’s judgement of them, and also their judgement of her, often becomes a reflection of her own self judgement. So for the reader to understand Lucy is just as dependent on understanding other characters and their connection to her, similar to how in Jane Jane’s case it is necessary to understand Bertha and her connection to Jane. This does not mean that a study of Lucy’s psychological self is not fruitful; the division and problematic relationship she has with characters outside herself is a direct reflection of the division and alienation she feels within her divided self.

## LUCY’S INNER CONFLICT

The mirror is a powerful literary device that hints at a division within a character. *Jane Eyre* contains several scenes with this symbol and Lucy in *Villette* has an unfamiliar encounter with the mirror. On an excursion with Dr John and Mrs Bretton at the concert hall, Lucy suddenly faces an unfamiliar trio:

“I noted them all – the third person as well as the other two – and for the fraction of a moment, I believed them all strangers, thus receiving an impartial impression of their appearance. But the impression was hardly felt and not fixed, before the consciousness that

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<sup>51</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *The Missionary*, in *The Shakespeare Head Brontë, The Poems of Charlotte Brontë & Patrick Branwell Brontë*, ed. by Thomas James Wise (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press) p. 65

I faced a great mirror, filling a compartment between two pillars, dispelled it: the party was our own party. Thus for the first, and perhaps only time in my life, I enjoyed the 'giftie' of seeing myself as others see me. No need to dwell on the result. It brought a jar of discord, a pang of regret; it was not flattering, yet, after all, I ought to be thankful: it might have been worse."<sup>52</sup>

It is an important fact that Lucy here equates an apparently strange woman whom she does not recognise with the woman others see her as. She is not the woman she perceives herself to be, meaning that the dress and the social scenery she is in do not correspond with her inner sense of self. She is aware of this and has accepted that what she truly is cannot be shown to the public. It feels to me that she has come to the conclusion that she is a monster and an obscure thing because she does not fit into the stereotypical mould of woman. The problem then becomes why she judges women who do fit in, who are thus opposite of her, so harshly? It should have been the opposite; if she has accepted that she is different and strange, should not she admire and look up to the people who succeed? She does not approve of women who fit in too much because that for her means that they succumb to the feminine role and therefore accept submission too readily. The answer may lie in the fact that she views the Lucy Snowe people see as a stranger to herself, as somebody she does not like. The girl in the mirror becomes the girl who submits to society's conventions, not the true Lucy. The same way as she does not approve of her own public persona, she does not approve of the public persona of other women.

This problematic relationship is reflected in what characterizes the parts in the book where Lucy is actually the focus. They are in truth written as conversations or discussions between two seemingly different persons. Everything that is pleasurable seems to be not allowed, uttered in a penitent, remorseful tone. This particular example reads like the second part of a dialogue:

"A keen relish for dramatic expression had revealed itself as part of my nature; to cherish and exercise this new-found faculty might gift me with a world of delight, but it would not do for a mere looker-on at life: the strength and longing must be put by; and I put them by,

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<sup>52</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 286

and fastened them in with the lock of resolution which neither Time nor Temptation has since picked.”<sup>53</sup>

When something wonderful that is part of one’s “nature”, something that has the ability to grant one a “world of delight” is repressed and denied, then that tells me that Lucy is severely repressed herself. The same pattern repeats itself when she sees herself in the mirror at the concert hall; she immediately rejects the person she sees in the mirror, a person who is dressed up and about to let herself be entertained by worldly pleasures. Kate Millett, in her book *Sexual Politics*, has also picked up on this discussion-like form in the book, something she calls “another debate between the opposed mentalities of Ruskin and Mill. Lucy is forever alternating between hankering after the sugared hopes of chivalric rescue, and the strenuous realism of Mill’s analysis.”<sup>54</sup> The chivalric rescue is in *Villette* first objectified in Dr John, but later becomes Mr Paul and represents the easy way of living your life in a patriarchal society, namely succumbing to the role of the male companion, something which the following quote exemplifies: “I did long, achingly, then and for four-and-twenty hours afterwards, for something to fetch me out of my present existence, and lead me upwards and onwards. This longing, and all of similar kind, it was necessary to knock on the head.”<sup>55</sup> The easy way to live in patriarchal society is to surrender to the laws of man, meaning one must play the “feminine” role, and it is this feeling that Lucy resents in her self and in other women.

This resentment for parts of herself becomes clear through the frequent discussions between reason and passion. While Jane Jane’s strict reason is termed a “he,” Lucy’s reason is simply a she, as if to show how patriarchy is inside women as part of their person, not only as an outside force. It could also be a critique of the assumed fact that men are ruled by reason and women by their feelings, showing how it is reason that is the ruling part of her psyche. In a particularly violent disagreement, Lucy describes it like a physical fight: “the doors of my heart

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<sup>53</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 211

<sup>54</sup> Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Abacus published by Sphere Books Ltd, 1972) p. 145

<sup>55</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 176



would shake, bolt and bar would yield, Reason would leap in, vigorous and revengeful, snatch the full sheets, read, sneer, erase, tear up, re-write, fold, seal, direct, and send a terse, curt missive of a page. She did right.”<sup>56</sup> While Jane seems to be in control of reason, with reason being more connected to herself, Lucy’s reason is much more hard, much more mean and controlling. In the passages where she describes reason, it almost seems like she hates it and that she does not really mean it when she concludes with reason being right. It seems to be depriving her of happiness at a very early phase of possibly positive experiences.

### LUCY AND OTHER WOMEN

Lucy’s self division materializes mostly through her descriptions of other women, mainly the three other women who at one point or another in the novel have a particular liking for Mr John, namely Madame Beck, Ginevra Fawnshawe and Miss Paulina Home. Lucy’s description of them can be seen as a direct comment on some part of herself. So while Jane Jane’s story is mostly her own, Lucy Snowe is very reluctant to put the main focus on herself, and *Villette* therefore, at times, seems as a story about other women’s stories. This focus on her fellow women cannot be overlooked, as it bears significance to Lucy’s own destiny. They represent choices that Lucy did not take; they represent roles that were deemed inadequate by the heroine. But at the same time these roles, in the form of the female characters, are inescapable because they make up the patriarchal definition of women. Therefore when Lucy does not accept them that means that she is putting herself outside the place of woman in this world, outside existence and outside the real world, free to criticise and observe the insanity of the “feminine” role as defined by men. In a way she lives in a separate world, a world where integrity and the intellectual play a large part and opinions of others are not deemed that important. She chooses this role but it is society’s reaction that underlines how much of an unusual and unacceptable choice it is.

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<sup>56</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 335

One thing amongst others that defines an acceptable feminine role is a pre-occupation with outer looks. Neither Jane nor Lucy belongs to the category of women who are overly interested in their looks; in fact, they are highly critical of their appearance. Historically, the things that would make women good “mates” were revealed in their physical traits, which handily are the same traits that are defined as beautiful. Therefore a woman’s good looks have always been a key element in attracting men. In that way, those who want to be looked at are the women whose main interest is catching a man. But Lucy’s criticism of this kind of behaviour can be shown to be more a critique of the system and culture that breeds this kind of vanity than it is of her female counterparts. Lucy makes a very strong critique of the kind of vain, “feminine” behaviour as displayed by Rosine and Ginevra Fawnshawe. Lucy’s description of these women reveal her feeling of superiority towards them and features one of the telling signs by which Lucy deems someone inferior, which is the excessive descriptions of physical features<sup>57</sup>:

“This Parisienne was always in dept; her salary being anticipated, not only in dress, but in perfumes, cosmetics, confectionary, and condiments. What a cold, callous epicure she was in all things! I see her now. Thin face and figure, sallow in complexion, regular in features, with perfect teeth, lips like a thread, a large, prominent chin, a well-opened, but frozen eye, of light at once craving and ingrate. She mortally hated work, and loved what she called pleasure; being an insipid, heartless, brainless dissipation of time.”<sup>58</sup>

Her description reveals a dislike for the physical, the material, in fact the very things she seems to deprive herself of. Lucy’s condemnation of the Parisienne is a condemnation of what was typically attributed to women as their main interest, trivial things that only added to one’s own pleasure, never to the improvement of one’s own or society’s situation. Then of course someone would perhaps make the comment that judging the feminine interest as trivial and meaningless is falling into the trap of the patriarchal brainwashing technique that has categorized everything women are fond of as trivial and of less worth. I want to dismiss that claim by stating that

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<sup>57</sup> A technique also used in *Jane Eyre*, for example in the early descriptions of Blanche Ingram.

<sup>58</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 195

fighting for one's freedom of choice, the right to education and self realization will always be in my eyes more important than caring about how one looks.

It is patriarchal society's fault that women feel that their worth is somehow connected to how they look, which is a thing more connected to luck in genes and one's family than anything else, while a man's worth is often judged by how much work he does and his degree of self realization, which are things that are only up to each man's own will, not their luck in genes. The problem of the patriarchal society with its defined female roles was that every woman who dared or happened to think outside of the box, who tried to get upwards and onwards with her life without a husband, instantly created a barrier between herself and the rest of the female population, and without the support of her fellow sisters she really could not get anywhere. Lucy is this kind of woman, the woman whom other women did not look at as a representative of their sex. So she is left in an ironical "no mans land."

At first look, Madame Beck is held up as a suitable role model for Lucy Snowe, at least in some parts of the story. She too is a single career woman, although she does have children, and she has succeeded in creating and managing a boarding school. She makes her own money and is the mistress of the establishment, but the way she interferes in other peoples' lives, going behind their backs and trespassing into their private sphere makes her not respectable at large. This distrust of everyone makes her seem cold, which she in fact is:

"Madame Beck was a most consistent character; forbearing with all the world, and tender to no part of it. Her own children drew her into no deviation from the even tenor of her stoic calm. She was solicitous about her family, vigilant for their interests, and physical well-being; but she never seemed to know the wish to take her little children upon her lap, to press their rosy lips with her own, to gather them in a genial embrace, to shower on them softly the benignant caress, the loving word."<sup>59</sup>

She appears selfish and manipulating, a trait that is looked down upon by Lucy. Lucy may also appear cold, as her last name implies, but she is always true and puts others' happiness in front of

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<sup>59</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 157

hers. As with Jane in *Jane Eyre* it is simply not enough to only satisfy one part of her being, she wants to have both love and passion in her life. Madame Beck in a way signals how that is impossible for women to have both, that the personal traits that are necessary to make it career-wise as a woman makes her somewhat emotionally amputated, as demonstrated by her lack of genuine personal love for her children. In her interference with the relationship between Mr Paul and Lucy she exhibits a high degree of selfishness and insensitivity. Lucy is then finally able to see her cold heart: “I knew she secretly wanted him. She called him ‘insupportable;’ she railed at him for a ‘dévot;’ she did not love, but she wanted to marry, that she might bind him to her interest.”<sup>60</sup> In her road towards control and independence Madame Beck seemed to lose herself. She serves a warning to Lucy to how she will end up if she pursues her independence and self control too far: “For Madame Beck is a symbol of repression, the projection and embodiment of Lucy’s commitment to self control.”<sup>61</sup>

At the other end of the scale of female role models is the great actress Vasthi. Lucy’s experience as an actor and the performance of the Vashti makes an interesting foil to the constant acting out of the female role. It is as if in her world, the stage is the only place where she can be free, which is why she identifies and admires the great Vashti. This is an interesting fact since the life the Vashti exhibits on stage is the total opposite of the life Lucy leads, although they share the same aspect of grief and hurt in their lives. Lucy comments:

“I have said that she does not *resent* her grief. No; the weakness of that word would make it a lie. To her, what hurts becomes immediately embodied: she looks on it as a thing that can be attacked, worried down, torn in shreds. Scarcely a substance herself, she grapples to conflict with abstractions. Before calamity she is a tigress; she rends her woes, shivers them in convulsed abhorrence. Pain, for her, has no result in good; tears water no harvest of wisdom: on sickness, on death itself, she looks with the eye of the rebel. Wicked, perhaps, she is, but also she is strong; and her strength has conquered Beauty, has overcome Grace, and bound both at her side, captives peerlessly fair, and docile as fair.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 544

<sup>61</sup> Gilbert, & Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.408

<sup>62</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 340

Vashti is a woman of action, a woman who acts out how she feels without censoring it to what patriarchal society deemed appropriate behaviour. She fights injustice with action and lives life by her own rules. She represents the woman that cannot be, the woman that has no place in the society. Her destiny is death, and she is described as bad by the general public. The comment by Lucy that Graham “judged her as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgement,”<sup>63</sup> makes the statement that women can only be women; all other roads are blocked for her. Society will only allow her to take the role of woman, condemning her if she dares to take another.

The split between the main protagonist and her fellow women represent the split that Lucy feels within herself, her divided self. I assume that it is in relation to this that Gilbert and Gubar think that by “Carrying on two secret love affairs right under Madame’s nose, it is Ginevra who best embodies Lucy’s attraction to self indulgence and freedom.”<sup>64</sup> On the surface it may look like the two characters have nothing in common, but Lucy as we know it is not as she appears, she is a master of repressing sides of herself she for one reason or another does not deem fit to show. The things that link Ginevra and Lucy together is that she, like Lucy, escapes from the Pensionat in the night and arrives at a turning point. Lucy finds out Madame Beck’s secret and Ginevra gets to marry her Count. They are also both from England, and arrive on the same boat as well as having a particular interest in Graham Bretton. But in spite of their connection, Lucy cannot take her falseness, for example when it comes to Graham Bretton, how Ginevra plays with his feelings: “‘But if he loves you as much as you say, and yet it will come to nothing in the end, he will be made miserable.’ ‘Of course he will break his heart. I should be shocked and disappointed if he didn’t,’” Ginevra exclaims to Lucy’s negative surprise. Ginevra embodies everything that is the opposite of Lucy; while Lucy is careful to not harm to other people, Ginevra does as she pleases without thinking about the consequences, as when she runs off and marries Hamal or plays with Dr John’s emotions. Lucy thinks nothing of her looks while Ginevra

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<sup>63</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 342

<sup>64</sup> Gilbert & Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.409

thinks highly of her own, as shown in the mirror scene: “She turned me and herself round; she viewed us both on all sides; she smiled, she waved her curls, she retouched her sash, she spread her dress, and finally, letting go of my arm, and curtsying with mock respect, she said: ‘I would not be you for a kingdom.’”<sup>65</sup> Ginevra exhibits a degree of self love which Lucy cannot stand. This scene exemplifies their difference when seen in relation to the mirror scene mentioned earlier. Lucy cannot stand looking at herself, seeing no relation between what she looks like and who she really is, while Ginevra defines herself by how she looks to others. The outer image of Ginevra is consistent with her inner, while for Lucy they are divided just as she is divided from other women.

Being divided from other women, Lucy’s female interaction is limited to her judgement of them. The principle that seems to bind together Lucy’s and Jane’s judgements of their fellow women is that of sincerity and truthfulness. Ginevra Fawnshawe is constantly ridiculed because of her self love and her love of pleasurable things, but what is her gravest flaw is her deceit of people who care for her. She knows Graham Bretton loves her and that she herself does not love him, but she keeps flirting with him to obtain gifts and to feel loved, caring nothing for his feelings. Lucy knows well the impediments that face women in that society, but she has no sympathy for women who use their only asset to get ahead. Playing by the rules of society and actually acting in a way that proves men’s preconceptions and prejudgements right, even if it is done intentionally to get ahead, is the same as saying that patriarchy and female subjection is natural and right. And that goes against both heroines’ convictions. The women who gain their way of living this way never have a happy ending; Brontë makes her point clear on this by one way or another punishing them. Ginevra gets her Count but we afterwards learn that her life is not so perfect because she married a gambler.

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<sup>65</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 215

Lucy's differentiation from other women, such as Ginevra and Miss Home, is epitomized in her independence and aptitude in the fire scene at the theatre. The ideal woman of the Victorian period is epitomized in *Villette* by Miss Paulina Home. Every time she makes an appearance in the story her actions are always fuelled by her absorption in men. Like in the chapter called "The First Letter" she is trying her best to write to Graham Bretton in the fashion she thinks would please him the most: "I almost trembled for fear of making the answer too cordial: Graham's tastes are so fastidious."<sup>66</sup> It is a pretty significant hint about what kind of female role she inhabits. Although receiving a fair amount of space in the story, the chief goal of her actions is always to make the man in her life happy, be it either her father or Graham, and in fact her behaviour towards the two is quite similar. She is very often described as a sort of annex to her father, often "quietly and steadily clinging to a gentleman"<sup>67</sup>, or that "her natural place seemed to be at his side; her eyes and her ears were dedicated to him"<sup>68</sup>. She seems not to have anything against belonging to men, as if she was a thing. She does not seem bothered when Graham tells her father that he "did truly regard you as the possessor of the most valuable thing the world owns for me. I wished for it; I tried for it. Sir, I ask for it now."<sup>69</sup> Her dependency on men is exemplified in the scene at the opera, where she would have been crushed if it hadn't been for the two men in her life who saved her. This is also the scene where the contrast between Lucy and Paulina is most visible, where Lucy shows her rejection of the role of the weak and helpless woman. The circumstances surrounding Paulina and Dr John's first meeting as adults both defines their future relationship and serves as a metaphor for her life and role in the patriarchal world. Graham's purpose and his profession in life are saving women when they are weak. That is what gives him his status and power in life, the fact that mainly women need his help and

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<sup>66</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 466

<sup>67</sup> Brontë, *Villette* p. 343

<sup>68</sup> Brontë, *Villette* p. 366

<sup>69</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 530

expertise. That is why he falls for Polly, because she needs his help and that makes him feel like her superior.

Men wanted women to make them feel needed and admired, so they must feel the difference between themselves and their partners. In the scene at the opera Polly is “suddenly struck from her protector’s arms by a big, butcherly intruder, and hurled under the feet of the crowd”<sup>70</sup> and in desperate need of male assistance, while Lucy is resourceful and capable without the help of a man. When Lucy and Graham are separated she becomes “Resolute, however, to join him, I penetrated the living barrier, creeping under, where I could not get between or over.”<sup>71</sup> Women are supposed to fall and men penetrate. Describing Lucy’s actions in such intrinsically masculine words emphasises her situation as a woman who does not fit into the contemporary category of femininity. Her “penetration” in contrast to Polly’s falling is significant. This is why Lucy could never do for Graham as she herself rightly realizes:

“‘Could I manage to make you forever grateful?’ said I. ‘No, *I could not.*’ And I felt my fingers work and my hands interlock: I felt, too, an inward courage, warm and resistant. In this matter I was not disposed to gratify Dr John: not at all. With now welcome force, I realized his entire misapprehension of my character and nature. He wanted always to give me a rôle not mine. Nature and I opposed him.”<sup>72</sup>

Lucy is thus claiming nature on her side and nature on all women’s side, and thus rejects the idea of being forced into a role. Jane Eyre also has nature on her side: “Nature seemed to me benign and good: I thought she loved me, outcast as I was; and I, who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, insult, clung to her with filial fondness.”<sup>73</sup> Although positive in her judgement of Polly, their difference implies that Lucy could never be Polly: “While Polly nestles under her father’s cloak or Graham’s arms for protection, Lucy sneers at the girl who must ‘live, move and have her being in another.’”<sup>74</sup> Polly is the perfect woman, childlike and forever dependent on a

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<sup>70</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 343

<sup>71</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 343

<sup>72</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 403-404

<sup>73</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 323

<sup>74</sup> Gilbert, & Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.404



man to make her life right. Her happiness depends on the existence of someone she can dote on in an often self annihilating way.

#### LUCY'S DIFFERENCE AND NON-EXISTENCE

Like Jane Eyre, Lucy also has to come to terms with a female “ghost” that haunts the place where she lives as well as the interior of her mind. Although significantly different in the fact that Bertha is an actual woman living in the attic while the black and white nun is simply somebody dressing up to resemble a ghost, they are both initially perceived as something they are not, to later reveal themselves as somebody totally different. For Carl Plasa and as “numerous critics have noted, the mysterious ‘legend’ attached to this striking Gothic revenant makes her the perfect double for Lucy, who is forced constantly to repress the very desires of which the nun’s returns are the fearful symbolic expression.”<sup>75</sup> This interpretation puts the nun’s significance in that she is there to serve as a reminder of what happens to women who go against the established rules of society. Lucy has not broken out of the mould of the Victorian female completely, she only exists on the border, in the unfrequented garden that the Nun haunts. In a way the Nun’s existence resembles Lucy’s, because in a metaphorical way Lucy is also buried alive. She walks the earth but she has generally little effect on the people around her; in the main part of the book she has no close friends, and her participation in the social world of Villetta is only temporary, as she is easily forgotten by Dr John and Louisa Bretton when Miss and Mr Home come into the picture. This punishment of her non-life comes to her as a result of refusing to fit into one of the female roles, the “vow” she sins against is the insistence on keeping her own identity and being herself instead of assuming one of the depressing roles patriarchal society had to offer her.

In the end this ghost of a nun is revealed to be fake, something that makes its significance slightly different. For Beth Torgerson, the tearing up of the nun represents the tearing up of

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<sup>75</sup> Carl Plasa, “A Thing Double-Existent, Foreigners and Slaves in *Villette*,” *Critical Issues, Charlotte Brontë*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) p. 136

cultural restraints that women were forced to live by.<sup>76</sup> Taking this idea further, I feel that the fact that the nun was really Count de Hamal in disguise serves the point that the cultural constraints imposed on women are really lies constructed by man. The nun's destruction happens the same night that Lucy brought home "the two stalwart companions" that she calls "Freedom and Renovation", a sign of a change in Lucy for the better as their names imply. But the change is not a lasting one, sadly, as a day later, "Freedom excused himself, as for the present, impoverished and disabled to assist; and Renovation never spoke; he had died in the night suddenly"<sup>77</sup>. For Lucy to become completely free and to accomplish her dream she needs the assistance of man, here in the form of Mr Paul. The limitations to what Lucy can achieve in the real world are mirrored by her inability to achieve change in her inner world, to actually feel herself worthy of the best life has to offer.

In *Villette* there is talk of the female gaze, the gaze that oversees and analyses; this gaze separates the gazer from the people looked at by lack of participation in the action. Traditionally the gaze is associated with power, the power to look, oversee and control. In *Villette* the meaning of the gaze comes to mean both these things, but the most significant for me is that it signifies Lucy's position in society. Being the gazer means being on the outside, being obscure, inactive, excluded – just like women have been from everything but their narrowly designated sphere: "Jane embraces her obscurity and makes it not only a virtue, but a deliberate strategy. She plays it up. Lucy, too, generally cooperates with what she perceives as a natural fact, namely that her "exterior" is not "striking," does not catch the eye. But unlike Jane or Austen's Fanny Price, for much of the novel Lucy experiences her inconspicuousness as a liability, even an imposition(...)

Strategic inconspicuousness may suit Jane Eyre, but Lucy chafes against its effects on her

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<sup>76</sup> Beth Torgerson, *Reading the Brontë Body – Disease, Desire, and the Constraints of Culture*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p. 85

<sup>77</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 578

experience of self, even though she seems to choose it.”<sup>78</sup> The only place for women who refuse to conform is at the very outskirts of social life. By choosing to take control over her own life, Lucy is forced to live a lonely life. The part of the garden that she visits seems to serve as a metaphor of her own life:

“From the first I was tempted to make an exception to this rule of avoidance: the seclusion, the very gloom of the walk attracted me. For a long time the fear of seeming singular scared me away; but by degrees, as people became accustomed to me and my habits, and to such shades of peculiarity as were ingrained in my nature – shades, certainly not striking enough to interest, and perhaps not prominent enough to offend, but born in and with me, and no more to be parted with than my identity – by slow degrees I became a frequenter of this straight and narrow path. I made myself gardener of some tintless flowers that grew between its closely-ranked shrubs; I cleared away the relics of past autumns, choking up a rustic seat at the far end.”<sup>79</sup>

She has accepted her own nature and personality as different from other women, therefore she is happy in her way of life in that sense, but the lack of social interaction and friendship it brings is what makes her miserable. In her reply to Mr Paul she acutely pinpoints the benefits of being different and on the outside of society:

“How dare you, a young person, sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a garcon, and look at *that* picture? ‘It is a very ugly picture, but I cannot at all see why I should not look at it.’ ‘Bon! bon! Speak no more of it. But you ought not to be here alone.’ ‘If, however, I have no society – no *party*, as you say? And then, what does it signify whether I am alone, or unaccompanied? nobody meddles with me.’”<sup>80</sup>

She is free to do whatever she wants, to be as different as she likes, but with the bitter prize of loneliness, which is every woman’s destiny who dares to be free: “Indeed the movement of the novels suggests that escape becomes increasingly difficult as women internalize the destructive structures of patriarchy. Locked into herself, defeated from the start, Lucy Snowe is tormented by the realization that she has bought survival at the prize of never fully existing, escaped pain by retreating behind a dull, grave camouflage. Haunted by the persons she might have been, she has

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<sup>78</sup> Beth Newman, *Subjects on Display – Psychoanalysis, Social Expectation, and Victorian Femininity*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004) p. 25

<sup>79</sup> Brontë, Charlotte, *Villette*, p. 174

<sup>80</sup> Brontë, Charlotte, *Villette*, p. 277

been dispossessed not only of meanings and goals, but also of her own identity and power.”<sup>81</sup> Her whole life is one big non-existence and exclusion. It is as if Lucy accepts and agrees with her position and treatment in life. Instead of demanding more, or speaking up, she treasures the little love and affection she gets like she accepts that that is all she is ever going to get and that is acceptable. If exclusion from life and power is all one knows, then one ends up thinking that this is the way things are meant to be. Though seemingly not apparent for Lucy, 21<sup>st</sup> century readers, we clearly see the tragedy of calling something that makes one physically and mentally ill *normal*.

A woman, who does not conform to the established norm of femininity and normalcy, can in the patriarchal system be labelled unnatural and unfeminine. This is what happens to Lucy. Her singularity as a woman is pointed out by both men and women, young and old. Her descriptions tend to be of the unnatural and often supernatural kind, something that is emphasized by her link with the ghost of the nun. Except the one incident with Mr Paul, the Nun only shows herself to Lucy; a fact that seems to suggest that they are linked and alike. When women like the nun and Lucy choose to go against what the patriarchal fathers have appointed their role to be, the only way of existing is to become a non-living thing, a ghost, a thing not entitled to be a part of this world, their destiny is to roam the shadows on the outskirts of this world. As Linda Hunt writes about in her book<sup>82</sup>, it seems that Lucy was made as a particularly lonely character in order to show what kind of extreme effect patriarchal oppression has on women. Since she is denied a social role because of her obscurity, all that is left is her own personal self. By thus showing how much difference there is between a woman who is simply being herself and women who are part of society and therefore in a role, Brontë is making a powerful statement about the unnaturalness of the *feminine* role. This fact is emphasized by

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<sup>81</sup> Gilbert & Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 400

<sup>82</sup> Linda Hunt, “*Villette*: The Inward and the Outward Life,” *The Brontë Sisters Critical Assessments: vol.3*, Ed. by Eleanor McNeese, (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1996) p. 689

Lucy's harsh and negative judgement of her fellow women, or more correctly by the roles they play.

In *Villette* Brontë continues the theme of alienation from society and alienation from oneself by making the number of true female friend down from a few, like in *Jane Eyre*, to none at all. Lucy's rejection and judgement of other women reflect her judgement of different sides of herself. Fulfilling the feminine role created by man means giving up her independence and true self, and Lucy is not willing to do that. But through her constant battles with her own inner self, she shows how truly difficult it is to hold on to her independence and to not take the easy way out. As a result of her rejection of the feminine role she is denied a real existence, and her destiny becomes that of the Nun. This is because patriarchal society does not allow woman to be both independent and to have passion and be accepted in society; women must choose. Lucy's rejection of the last category is demonstrated through her rejection of the women who chose that path. Lucy's judgement of other women is often focused on their obsession with outer and material qualities, something which signifies her rejection of the idea that a woman's value lays in her outer façade. This is something Lucy has in common with Jane, and the ways in which that point is made clear is by borrowing the politics of another system of oppression, namely that of imperialism.

PART II: ABROAD

CHAPTER III: POST-COLONIAL JANE

“I could not – dared not stay for thee!  
I heard afar, in bonds complain  
The savage from beyond the main;  
And that wild sound rose o’er the cry”<sup>83</sup>

In recent years there has been a shift in critical focus towards Charlotte Brontë’s two works *Villette* and *Jane Eyre* from a traditional feminist one to a more post colonial strategy. One reason for this shift is the emergence of a new critical genre that deals with the ways in which the white imperialistic endeavour has impacted culture and literature both in the countries that were colonized and in the country of the colonizer. This trend owes much to the works of Edward Said, both *Culture and Imperialism* and *Orientalism*. This work opened up the massive amount of references, characters and metaphors that were connected to the imperialist endeavour, often in a derogatory fashion. Everything could be seen in a different light, and that light made major changes to the “meaning” of, for example, *Jane Eyre*.

Traditionally seen as a rebellious feminist text, especially after Gilbert and Gubar’s highly influential interpretation in 1979, *Jane Eyre* suffered a set back six years later when Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak criticised the text in a way that took away some of its feminist force. Her main point of critique centres on the figure of Bertha and the unjust treatment she receives as a representative of the colonized world. By pointing out that the text excludes the native woman from the general mission of female empowerment and independence, Bertha’s character weakens

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<sup>83</sup> Brontë, *The Missionary*, p. 66

the feminist force of the book. Spivak also attacks feminist literary criticism, accusing Gilbert and Gubar of racism, because they reduce Bertha to a psychological dark double to Jane instead of interpreting her as a character in herself. I think Spivak's argument is interesting, but I dislike her aggressiveness. The move from the feministic approach of Gilbert and Gubar to a feminist approach that achieves its goal without compromising any other underprivileged group is seemingly a difficult one. By focusing on one aspect of *Jane Eyre*, the critic is deemed to ignore other ones. This applies to post-colonial theory also, because in a way Spivak is committing the crime that she accuses her fellow critics of. By stressing the importance of race and the oppression of the colonized, she is devaluing the importance of the gender oppression. But I want to find a way to actually make these interpretations seem less at odds with each other. I will contextualize the different interpretations in order to find out if there really is such a big difference.

Gabriele Griffin, in her essay "Whiteness and the European Situatedness," locates the second critical phase in feminist scholarship in the emergence of the concept of difference. Before that feminism had been all about the shared oppression that all women experienced, in a way taking it for granted that "sex" was the most defining trait. Feminist scholars wanted to show how the female experience was different than that of men, how living in an oppressive patriarchal society affected women and the books written by women, as for example *Jane Eyre*. This generalization of the female experience, together with the fact that many of the things written were by white middle class women, eventually caused black feminists to protest. They felt that the models of female oppression offered did not resonate with their personal experiences as women of colour. This opened up for theories that focused on skin colour and nationality in relation to gender, often inspired by the individual interpreter's personal background as with Spivak.

Spivak, coming from India, a nation that has in their latest history been highly exploited and that has been subject to foreign rule and degradation by the British, her critical stance is obviously influenced and shaped by this fact. She therefore becomes an advocate for the people who have been oppressed and devalued by the white colonial powers during the colonial era. She wants people to realise the devastation it has caused and how oppression and racism pervaded the whole culture of the oppressor, that it was not just about business, that there lay a moral and existential belief behind their actions that excused the horror they caused. Her standpoint is how this ideology of white male superiority pervaded every part of English culture, including Charlotte Brontë's novel. I think the appeal of using *Jane Eyre* to prove this point lays somewhat in its fame as a feminist text; therefore using it to show how it is full of racist oppression will necessarily create a shock in feminist literary circles. A book that is known for speaking up against oppression, a book which goes against the established rules of society and was called rebellious, is now deemed as "reproducing the axioms of imperialism", one of the most terrible oppressions that the world has seen.

Spivak is undoubtedly part of the deconstructionist school, something her involvement in the works of Jacques Derrida proves, and it is easy to see how deconstruction is an excellent tool for both feminist literary theory and post colonialism, because it goes against the hierarchical values that have pervaded both literary theory and the general patriarchal and imperial mode of society. There is not one superior, stable meaning; what is deconstructed is the "claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another."<sup>84</sup> The result of this is that a text can say many things that are subversive and at odds with what general criticism has established to be its meaning. This theory is more a reaction to earlier criticism than the work itself. In addition to the shock value of using *Jane Eyre*, the fact that it actually features a woman from one of the former British colonies makes it a good choice for Spivak. Spivak's point

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<sup>84</sup> *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Term and Literary Theory*, 4th Edition, J. A. Cuddon, (London: Penguin Books, 1999) p. 210



is that the narrative movement of the story is created through the use of the axiomatic of imperialism, that it is the imperialistic ideology which enables Jane to enter the family-in-law, in short, what enables the happy ending. This directly challenges the general feminist interpretation of the book, an interpretation which focuses on how Jane as an oppressed and obscure woman manages to challenge the patriarchal limits imposed on women in order to achieve what she wants. Spivak is saying this is only possible because she is part of and using the axiomatic of imperialism.

When Bertha is described as animalistic, Spivak interprets this as something that is linked with the fact that she is from the colonies, and thus a “native” woman. That makes me think that the animalistic factor can as easily be linked to the fact that she is a woman, and that the same argument can be made exchanging the words axioms of imperialism with the words axioms of patriarchy. The case then becomes a matter of how woman is not completely human, not completely like the man. Woman, and in this case Bertha, becomes even less of a human when behaving in an undesirable fashion, and Brontë exploits this notion in *Jane Eyre*. Even though this theory explains directly how and why the colonial space, meaning where Bertha comes from, is shown in a very negative light by Rochester, it is nonetheless valid. The ways in which Bertha are described are mostly the descriptions of a madwoman, not necessarily a native woman, something Spivak does not take into consideration. The terms Jane uses to describe Bertha are characteristic of how mad people were described in medical journals at the time. This shows how the same textual passages can mean totally different things to different readers, indicating that it is the context that each reader or critic brings to the text that determines what significance different parts of it will have.

The context in which *Jane Eyre* is often read nowadays is often as a companion piece with *Wide Sargasso Sea*. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is perhaps responsible for the biggest contribution to the post colonial critical reception when it comes to *Jane Eyre*, which also opens up the possibility of

taking a similar critical stance when it comes to *Villette*. Jean Rhys' comments about why she wanted to write *Wide Sargasso Sea* are exemplary for the opinions of people who read *Jane Eyre* in a post-colonial way. She says: "The mad first wife in *Jane Eyre* has always interested me. I was convinced Charlotte Brontë must have had something against the West Indies and I was angry about it. Otherwise why did she take a West Indian for that horrible lunatic, for that really dreadful creature?"<sup>85</sup> What *Wide Sargasso Sea* did was the epitome of what post colonial theory is about. It gave a voice to the repressed, to the ignored colonial other, and offered the other side of the story. While *Jane Eyre* reputedly uses Bertha's foreignness and otherness as the basis for her being killed off and enabling Jane and Mr Rochester to marry and be happy, Jean Rhys offers another explanation. And that explanation is based on trailing the events in Bertha's life that led her to madness and the state she was in when she encounters Jane at Thornfield. In addition to giving the reader an alternative life story for Bertha, the novel also opens up for a sympathetic reading of Bertha, for imagining that Brontë actually had a story for Bertha. *Jane Eyre* opens up with the following lines:

"THERE was no possibility of taking a walk that day (....) I was glad of it: I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed."<sup>86</sup>

*Wide Sargasso Sea* opens up in a similar way as *Jane Eyre*; the opening scene is "a scene of the marginalization and privatization of the protagonist,"<sup>87</sup> as Spivak has pointed out. The very first line is: "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks."<sup>88</sup> This similarity between the two books helps create a continuity and a kind of

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<sup>85</sup> Cited in Hannah Carter, 'Fated to be Sad', *Guardian*, 8 August 1968, p. 5

<sup>86</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 7

<sup>87</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (1) (1985) 243-261, p. 246

<sup>88</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, ed. by Angela Smith, (London: Penguin Books, 2000) p. 5

intermixing of the two texts, which is why people who have read *Wide Sargasso Sea* interpret Bertha as Antoinette Mason, and therefore carry her story into the story of *Jane Eyre*.

#### THE COLONIAL PRESENCE

In *Jane Eyre*, the colonial endeavour is a very present factor. As a matter of fact the colonial space seems to have a positive effect on the main character. It is the place from which Jane gets her money so that she can achieve full equality with Mr Rochester, but first it is the place from which the man who necessitates her escape from an unequal marriage comes from, meaning Richard Mason. He is the one who sends solicitor Briggs to stop the wedding, which results in Jane finding out the truth about Bertha. So the symbolic value of the colonial space for the story is enormous, but at the same time it has no other value or significance than those two incidents. We are not given any real knowledge about Jane's uncle, or what he did or how he died, thus his value and significance is only through the effect he has on Jane.

That is also the destiny of the second link to the colonial world which is Bertha and the connecting link of Rochester's history from the Caribbean Island from where she came. Although her race is only alluded to when Rochester tells that "Her mother, the Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard,"<sup>89</sup> Bertha's descriptions are filled with stereotypical features attributed to the black woman during the colonial period. Again, Bertha's actions and Rochester's dealings with her at the colony are only significant in the way that those incidents shape Rochester's personality. The story is there as a motive, an explanation to his personality and actions, not because it matters in itself. Said talks about this when he claims that, "The idea is that (following the general principles of free trade) outlying territories are available for use, at will, at the novelist's discretion, usually for relative simple purposes such as immigration, fortune, or exile."<sup>90</sup> It becomes an exotic source of secrets; it is there simply to provide

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<sup>89</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 292

<sup>90</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993) p. 88

something for the sake of the narrative, not as an actual source of interest in itself, which is exactly what Spivak suggests in her essay ‘Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism.’ She claims that the only function Bertha has in the narrative is “to render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal and thereby to weaken her entitlement under the spirit if not the letter of the law,”<sup>91</sup> making it possible for Jane and Rochester to marry. That is a statement I do not agree with because it labels all of Bertha’s actions as animalistic without considering the implications and further action her actions inspired.

Bertha actions are portrayed as animalistic and it is her own craziness that causes her destruction, but she is also the one that creates situations where Jane and Rochester come very close. The night when Bertha sets fire to Rochester’s bed is an important step in the advancing relationship between Jane and Rochester because they now share a secret and their bond is strengthened. The same goes for the Richard Mason episode when he is bitten by Bertha. Bertha has no value or interest in herself, she is only there to serve the narrative.

Our first introduction to Bertha is through her laughter, as mentioned in Chapter I, which is described as mirthless. That is interesting because laughter represents something happy and positive while mirthless means the total opposite, making it odd and perhaps even a bit strange, but not necessarily animalistic. Jane even says that the sound of the laughter had thrilled her, that it was almost a positive experience. Then later the laughter is described as goblin like and demonic, something which supports Spivak’s stand. Bertha can be seen as an actual person from a colony, apparently seen through Jane as the personification of all the fears English people had about people of other places and races. Animalistic, sexual, unrestrainable and aggressive, she is also everything a woman ought not to be. And so to show how unacceptable this is, to remove herself even further away from this woman, Jane wraps her in this animalistic cloak, and refuses to describe her in any recognisable human terms.

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<sup>91</sup> Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts,” p. 249

The fact that Bertha is throughout the text linked to Jane in numerous ways creates an interesting viewpoint to the interpretation. Is Jane's way of depicting Bertha fuelled by a fear of being compared or linked to her? Are Bertha's negative traits emphasized, are her foreignness and blackness emphasized to create a gulf between them so big that their common traits will not be seen? Or is it for herself, is it a way of repressing any thoughts that Jane herself could end up like her? Does the blackness become a cover behind which to hide the diversity and the casualties that are a result of patriarchal oppression? This means that blackness and cultural difference are only frames of reference in which to express the problems that Jane has with female roles and the devastation they cause. Although explained by Mr Rochester as a Creole, a fact that means she was actually white, in all of Jane's encounters with her she is depicted as black. Could it be that her assigned blackness and animalistic features are a manifestation of the psychological and emotional difference between her and Bertha? Or could it be that Bertha's blackness, like so many other female characters in Brontë's world, is a way of showing how repressed she was? Could the enormous focus on the stereotypical features attributed to foreign and exotic women such as sexual forwardness, dark skin colour, little education and so on be proportionate to the level of repression and subjection Bertha has been victim of? Because no one can argue against the fact that, in Brontë's fiction, no woman is represented as more savage than Bertha, and no woman is more repressed than her. Removed from her house, home and family, married to a man who hates her and locks her in an attic, Bertha is the one who has a life that is truly hell.

The way that Brontë makes Bertha's repressed state clear is by describing and referring to Bertha in purely physical terms; there is never any word about her feelings, her thoughts or her vulnerability. She becomes all body, and that fact links her to the black races, because, as Radhika Mohanram argues: "The white man transcends and transforms the body into will and

rationale, a perception and a perspective, whereas the black man embodies the body.”<sup>92</sup> Susan Meyer<sup>93</sup> talks about how Bertha is in fact termed a Creole and that means she is not necessarily black, in fact, she must be white or at least passing for white since Rochester’s aristocratic British family agreed to the marriage in the first place. But when her character actually emerges in the narrative she comes across as dark skinned. But what is the reason for making Bertha blacker, is it simply a result of the lies told about exotic women? Or is it an example of how patriarchal society has alienated women from each other by brainwashing them to immediately see what divides them instead of feeling a female bond? By devaluing female behaviour and female societies, women to a much less degree than now saw other women as somebody they had something in common with, somebody they could learn from. Patriarchal and imperialistic society depended on the doctrine that difference, when it came to human beings, was something negative. Women were less worth because they were different from men, people with another skin colour were worth less, people with other habits and cultures were less worthy simply because they were different from the English white man. Bertha is all things different, she is a woman, she is from another country and culture, and these factors act as a physical barrier for Jane to ever see what the two actually have in common. But even so, the structure of the text seems to emphasize a connection between them.

This fact is exploited because what it enables Brontë to do is to show female repression at its cruellest without criticizing the patriarchal society which she is part of. The degree of emphasis on blackness and foreignness in Jane Jane’s descriptions become linked to the degree of repression that women suffer and also explains the distance Jane feels towards that person. Bertha is trapped in a loveless marriage, locked away in the attic, and serves as an example of how marriage can be for some women. Another example is Miss Ingram, who although

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<sup>92</sup> Radhika, Mohanram, *Black Body – Woman, Colonialism, and Space*, Public Worlds Volume 6, (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) p. 27

<sup>93</sup> Susan Meyer, *Imperialism at Home, Race And Victorian Women’s Fiction*, (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1996) p. 67

completely English and white, in Jane's description the allusions of blackness are clear. Not only is her olive skin and her dark, curly hair mentioned, but her introduction is simply a description of her physical features, as if that was the determining factor about her. Therefore any excessive attention towards the physical aspect of a person becomes an allusion to their inferiority and therefore links them to other, "lesser" people like people of colour.

By emphasizing the physical traits that are similar to people of other races, Jane is making it clear that this woman is beneath her morally and intellectually, but also that she is repressed by men. Miss Ingram has means available but the only way she employs them is in order to get a husband. All her actions in *Jane Eyre* seem to be fuelled by the desire to obtain Rochester as a husband, because that was what young women were expected to do. But another result of this frame of reference, and using allusions to blackness when describing "inferior" women, is the association between blackness and femininity. Proclaiming the rights for women from the roof-top, Jane clearly sees the injustice of female oppression, so can we therefore draw the conclusion that she sees the injustice of race oppression? Very early in the book the association between herself and the black oppressed races are established, most notably when Jane has just arrived at Lowood and is being unjustly punished:

"There I was, then, mounted aloft: I, who had said I could not bear the shame of standing on my natural feet in the middle of the room, was now exposed to general view on a pedestal of infamy. What my sensations were, no language can describe; but just as they all rose, stifling my breath and constricting my throat, a girl came up and passed me: in passing, she lifted her eyes. What a strange light inspired them! What an extraordinary sensation that ray sent through me! How the new feeling bore me up! It was as if a martyr, a hero, had passed a slave or victim, and imparted strength in the transit. I mastered the rising hysteria, lifted up my head, and took a firm stand on the stool."<sup>94</sup>

In fact there are several places where she associates herself with the oppressed races, a fact that could symbolize how she was oppressed and subjected under the stern glance of patriarchy, but she learns as she grows how she can be independent. Then later in the novel when she alludes to

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<sup>94</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 67

the oppressed and foreign races when talking about fellow women, that means that they are dependent and oppressed by man. Susan Meyer feels that way as she writes:

“*Jane Eyre* was written in an ideological context in which white women were frequently compared to people of non-white races, especially blacks, in order to emphasize the inferiority of both to white men. But as Brontë constructs the trope in *Jane Eyre*, the yoking between the two terms of the metaphor turns not on shared inferiority but on shared oppression. Although this figurative strategy does not preclude racism, it inevitably produces the suggestion that people of these ‘other’ races are also oppressed.”<sup>95</sup>

Therefore alluding to their foreignness and blackness not only says that the women are oppressed, but also that “the others” are repressed too. It creates a space where it is acceptable to criticise certain facets of female behaviour, and indirectly the system that necessitates that behaviour.

*Jane Eyre* reveals the imperial context in which it was written in other ways than just its narrative involvement with colonial business and people from the colonies. It also reveals it through its attitude towards everybody and everything that is not English per se. Said claims that, “For the British writer, ‘abroad’ was felt vaguely and ineptly to be out there, or exotic and strange, or in some way or other ‘ours’ to control, trade in ‘freely,’ or suppress”<sup>96</sup>. Everybody or everything that comes from abroad becomes generalized into one agglomeration characterized by their inadequacy to the English, and this is what happens in *Jane Eyre*. It is as though throughout the book Jane is acting the part of the white superior man. She is a governess over little French Adèle, which means she has power over her just like the English imperialists had over the natives. She tries to make Adèle as English as possible and whenever she is exhibiting typical French manners or sentiment, they are looked down upon as inferior to the healthy English ones. Mr Rochester’s comment about how he “took the poor thing out of the slime and mud of Paris,

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<sup>95</sup> Susan Meyer, “Colonialism and the figurative strategy of *Jane Eyre*,” *Jane Eyre*, New Casebooks, Ed. by Heather Glen, (London: Macmillan Press, 1997) p. 97

<sup>96</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 74



and transplanted it here, to grow up clean in the wholesome soil of an English country garden”<sup>97</sup> exemplifies the negative association attached to abroad.

## MASTER AND SLAVE

In her relationship to Rochester, it is often Jane who seems to be the master, especially in their engagement period. She refuses to eat with him, or spend any more time with him and is generally the one in charge. She plays the role of savior and hero when she saves Rochester from the burning bed, a role that is typically reserved for the man. She is always gazing at people and especially at Rochester, which is a metaphor for control in the Victorian period. The one who gazes is in control, like a master or a slave owner who watches over his subjects so that he is sure that they are obeying his orders. She is also very good at reading faces, remembering them and drawing them, which is also a form of control, just like the English drew maps over the world and their conquered land, as if putting things to paper meticulously would somehow make it theirs. Perhaps this seems contradictory to my earlier argument that Jane being on the outside and being designated the role of the gazer means being on the outside of the action, but it simply reflects how she is uncertain about Rochester. He represents the sexual side of her self and therefore he becomes a temptation that needs to be controlled. She fears him and the feelings he brings up in her and therefore she needs to repress and control him, because she judges those feelings inferior or at least she fears them.

Another way in which Jane is master is over her own body. She always does the rational thing and even though her feelings sometimes rebel against her better judgement, they never win. Being a woman who refuses to conform to the social stereotype of woman, she is left with the question: who am I? Living in a patriarchal and imperial country, she has come to learn that what defines the individual is what the other is not and who you are superior to. The ruling group of

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<sup>97</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 144

has, have defined her by her lack, therefore to assert herself and her identity she needs to find people who are found lacking in relation to herself.

The whole narrative structure in *Jane Eyre* with its very present narrator, Jane herself, reinforces the need for women to “master” something. Throughout the book she exerts her narrative authority by choosing what parts of her life we are gained admittance to and through little guiding comments that seem to say, in case you forgot, this is my story and I am in control. The politics of the slave and master relationship are not only exemplified by Rochester being the master of the house and Jane continually referring to him as her master. This relationship mirrors the inner relationship between Jane’s reason and Jane’s emotions. In the real world Jane is not the master, a fact which creates an ironic foil to her inner world. The text continually connects certain values, feelings, races and also a certain sexuality to the role of the slave, to a being who “needs” to be mastered. We have Rochester, the man as the master of the house, the one whom all the women of the house call master, who exerts his power over women and servants. He is in several ways the master of Jane, and when they have decided to marry he seems to want to possess her even more than when she was the governess and employed by him. When Rochester buys Jane nice things on their journey to Millcote, her feelings are “that the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation.”<sup>98</sup> Her way of showing her annoyance and discontent is by making references to eastern and exotic customs, like when she tells him if this is how he likes it then he should go and buy a slave. Rochester’s way of describing how he wants to buy her jewellery and put it on her certainly sounds a bit conspicuous:

“I will myself put the diamond chain round your neck, and the circlet on your forehead, - which it will become: for nature, at least, has stamped her patent of nobility on this brow, Jane; and I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 268

<sup>99</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 259

The insinuations about wanting to bind her physically to him, taking complete possession of her, sounds dangerously similar to taking a slave. Jane conveys her uneasiness about this through the slave trope.

But then suddenly the relationship seems to change and it is Jane who is the one in control, because even though man may hold a superior position to woman, so too does rationality and the power of the mind hold a superior position to the feelings of the flesh and passion. Rochester obviously wants Jane physically, but she is not capable of letting herself go. She then represents the power of the mind and restriction, while he is more ruled by passion; so to show that the mind needs to be in control of the passion of the body, Jane is shown as the master, the one who decides how things are done, and Rochester as the inferior one. The text seems to say that in the relationship between man and woman there needs to be one master, as there also needs to be one in the relationship between body and mind. This importance is also shown through the way the mind of Jane seems to be in control of her body. When feelings of the heart and also of the body, which Jane refers to as passion, seem to grow too strong, the cool rationale of the mind steps in and masters them. The principle of control and mastering things was in fact the ruling one of both Victorian England and also imperialistic England. The satisfaction and the desire of the subordination of whole lands and cultures and peoples was what drove the English so far in the imperialistic game. The text has now shown that passion and woman are the subordinates of the text, and through Bertha that category is extended to the foreign and to the people of colour. Of course she must be shut up and mastered; she is a woman, a foreigner and a passionate woman.

The master and slave relationship between reason and emotion is also clear in *Jane Eyre*: “The vehemence of emotion, stirred by grief and love within me, was claiming mastery, and struggling for full sway; and asserting a right to predominate: to overcome, to live, rise, and reign

at last; yes, - and to speak.”<sup>100</sup> These are Jane’s thoughts right before she proclaims her love of Thornfield, and therefore also to Rochester. It is interesting to note that once emotion and the heart are allowed to speak, when the slave is allowed to speak, what then comes out is beautiful and important, not something that should be repressed. I feel that this says something about the ideology of the book in general, that what is repressed is actually beautiful, be it a human being or a feeling.

#### WOMEN AS “PRIMITIVE RACES”

As most other texts written in Victorian England, desire is seemingly the number one threat to the highly prized Englishness. Therefore as a manner of dealing with this threat, desire gets projected onto the female or onto the foreign or both, as Brontë’s text so readily exemplifies. Either as a precaution to ensure the public acceptance of her work or as simply a reflection on the general norm of the time, no one knows. What I wish is to show how this is manifested in the text and what kind of conclusions or questions we can draw from it. Here I will for the sake of the argument take it as a fact that “desire” in the Victorian period was presented as an evil to society. But the fact is that desire and everything adjacent to it is very much present in society, so in order to express desire without losing their outward identity, the Victorians projected it onto women and people of colour. This is clearly seen in both novels and we can see how it affects the inner lives of women and their relationships to each other. Women have to worry about what they are supposed to be in addition to battling the fear of what they can become if they do not follow their ascribed roles and repress their feelings and desires. It is almost like women are faced with the predicament of either complying with the repressed female role, or rejecting it, and therefore becoming like an other or foreign person. Women at that time were either complying, and praised for it, or, if they did not comply then they were judged as something

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<sup>100</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 252

terrible and abnormal. Women were judged to be more under the control of the body and therefore more lightly to erupt into insanity. To be defined by body instead of reason therefore associated them with the “primitive races.” This actually puts Brontë’s technique in an interesting light because while men associated women that stepped out of their roles as closer to the ‘primitive’ races, in *Villette* and *Jane Eyre* women who suffer too much under the control of patriarchy are the ones associated with the ‘primitive’ races. It is as if a male concept is used subversively in order to convey a meaning that is controversial.

This is obviously not Spivak’s interpretation, whose critique of *Jane Eyre* focuses on the fact that the native female (Bertha) is not included in the self assertive new female identity which the book advocates. Although certainly true in one sense, I still think it is important to look at the environment and time in which the novel was written, and also to remember to not judge one good piece of fiction for everything it is not. It is important to note that Brontë in some sense failed to express the wrongness of female oppression without referring and alluding to the stereotypical and racist representation of the racial Other, but that does not mean that *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* should not be praised as important feminist texts that inspired change. What has been seen by numerous critics before me as the narrative linking of Bertha to Jane can in fact also be seen as scenes of separation, by what I mean that their similarities underline what their actual differences are. They both live at Thornfield and they are both linked romantically to Mr Rochester. They are also women who have a longing to go beyond the strictures and borders of their lives, physically and mentally. With these similarities established, it becomes clearer for the reader to see what trait actually divides them, what traits Bertha has that make her “deserving” of the life she is forced to live. What is it about her that enables Jane to block out that she is a fellow woman, a fellow victim who is being held prisoner? Why is not sympathy one of the things Jane feels towards Bertha when she is confronted both with her story and her actual person? The answer to these questions is that Bertha is from the Caribbean Islands, therefore not of the same

culture as Jane, and also her sexuality is too aggressive, two reasons that seem to go hand in hand. Rochester stresses the fact that Bertha's insanity seems to be inherited from her mother and that there is a history of insanity in her family. But instead of feeling some pity for her bad luck in genes, Bertha is treated as if she chose to be the way she is, that she is simply evil. It is as though her sexuality, her sense of freedom is the factor in the equation that trumps anything else. Being different, in the Victorian period, especially as a woman and a foreigner, was a sin that could not be forgiven.

Instead of seeing the figure of Bertha as a racist insult to people of colour or a different culture, we can accept that blackness, exoticism, foreignness, sexuality, desire, animalism, and promiscuity as labels and categories all seemed to blend during that time. They functioned as a scale by which to measure a person's level of morality and rightness, a pool of references which every reader understood, where the more one focused on aspects that were related to the categories above, the lower down on the scale this person was. Carl Plasa talks of this in his book when he states that "slavery provides an easy lexicon with which to organize and articulate other fields of experience, and the rights and wrongs of its deployment for such purposes are even, at various junctures in the novel, openly the source of reflection and debate."<sup>101</sup> Throughout both books that scale is used, and in that light, since Bertha was the woman who represented an obstacle between Jane and her happiness with Mr Rochester, it was only natural for her to be represented in a dark, animalistic and sexual way. But this pool of references also comes to mean something different on a more hidden level; the same scale can be used to interpret how oppressed a character was. The more the character was associated with colonial oppression, the more oppressed they were under patriarchy.

This connection is also alluded to in H  l  ne Cixou's influential essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa,' where women are compared to a dark continent waiting to be discovered and

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<sup>101</sup>Plasa, "A Thing Double-Existent," p. 126

explored. In the book *Laughing with Medusa*,<sup>102</sup> this idea is explored and historicized. Woman as the Dark Continent is very interesting in the context of my thesis because it joins together the two main focus points, namely the subjection of women and the subjection of people of other races under colonialism. In the texts these two forms of oppression represent the same idea, because every woman who is oppressed is by casual references or allusions connected to foreigners or oppressed races and groups.

In that context the question then becomes: Is Bertha an example of the demonization men put women through who did not follow the rules? Jane's view of her as an animal is testament to the pressure put on women to be something they are not, to fear the slightest association with anything out of the ordinary, the repression of freedom and of difference. It is the perfect example of how women are dark continents to men. Once they act outside their designated range of action and feeling, at once they are what they are, they become dark things that "need" to be conquered. This is only because women are connected to men, because of how they reflect on them, because women are mirrors, as Virginia Woolf puts it: "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size."<sup>103</sup> Rochester's disgust for Bertha lay not simply in her actions; his deep revolt was for the fact that she was associated to him, because

"Still, society associated my name and person with her; I yet saw her and heard her daily: something of her breath (faugh!) mixed with the air I breathed; and, besides, I remembered I had once been her husband – that recollection was then, and is now, inexpressibly odious to me: moreover, I knew that while she lived I could never be the husband of another and better wife."<sup>104</sup>

Instead of reflecting all the positive things about himself and encouraging him to be his best, Bertha had the nerve to be crazy, if indeed that was what she was. It is interesting to note that before they married she was not mad, only free and flirtatious, signifying that perhaps marriage

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<sup>102</sup> *Laughing With Medusa – Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, ed. by Vanda Zajko & Miriam Leonard, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) Ch. 8

<sup>103</sup> Woolf, *A Room of One's own*, p. 37

<sup>104</sup> Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre*, p.307

changed her for the worse. Bertha becomes a representative for the colonies; she was possessed for material gain and general pleasure, then when failing to be exactly like the possessor or what the possessor expects she is, disposed, devalued, subjected and oppressed. Then she became the hidden atrocity – debased, debauched and degraded in order to minimize Bertha’s claim for justice and compensation. Jane needed to believe and fall for Rochester’s way of explaining his actions because if she did not, that would mean the end of her happiness. She only took part in the denial that all of England was part of in order to live with herself.

This denial is what reveals *Jane Eyre* as a book written in imperial England. This is what Spivak also claims when she insists that “it should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England’s social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English.”<sup>105</sup> Imperialism and the resulting cultural pedestal England put itself on was hugely effective in creating homogeneity amongst the English people that was based on their shared feeling of superiority. The effect this had on female lives, as I see both in *Villette* and *Jane Eyre*, is ensuring that women felt divided from foreign women as well as their fellow English ones. It taught them that nationality came first, then gender. It made women look at native and foreign women as more primitive, that they had nothing in common. The fear of being associated with them ensured that no positive comparison was drawn. It also resulted in the traits that were associated with native women was repressed, or in other words, that traits that was deemed inappropriate for females in patriarchal society was projected into foreign women. Difference from the feminine norm meant being un-English, and in the age of imperialism that was something very undesirable. Therefore all the women who felt “abnormal,” according to patriarchal standards that is, repressed that side of themselves in fear of judgement. That can be

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<sup>105</sup> Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts,” p. 243



seen as the reason for why repressed women are made foreign in *Jane Eyre*, because Brontë judged patriarchy as an inferior side to English culture.

In *Jane Eyre* the foreign woman represents the woman of yesterday, the woman that lets herself be repressed by man. The foreign woman is the woman who burns herself on a sati, the ultimate expression of devotion to one's husband, an idea Jane vehemently resists. When Rochester serenades her all she can think of is that "he had talked of his future wife dying with him. What did he mean by such a pagan idea? I had no intention of dying with him – he might depend on that."<sup>106</sup> She later explicitly mentions the idea of Sutte and how that tradition appals her, linking the idea of self sacrifice to men as an eastern and exotic tradition. The foreign woman is the woman who does not mind "being dressed like a doll by Mr Rochester, or sitting like a second Danae with the golden shower falling daily round me."<sup>107</sup> Her alignment of exotic and foreign women with repressed and subjected women becomes particularly clear in her and Rochester's conversation in the coach on the way to town. At one point Rochester compares her to a seraglio, to which she retorts: "'I'll not stand you an inch in the stead of a seraglio,' I said; 'so don't consider me an equivalent for one; if you have a fancy for anything in that line, away with you, sir, to the bazaars of Stamboul without delay; and lay out in extensive slave-purchases some of that spare cash you seem at a loss to spend satisfactory here.'"<sup>108</sup> Jane is proclaiming that she will never give up her self respect or her independence, qualities she apparently judges women of the so called lower races to lack.

By employing the use of imperial language, Brontë is able to label roles and customs found in patriarchal England as inferior without criticising English culture directly. The racially and culturally other becomes a frame of reference in which to show Jane's anxieties about the female role. Brontë is taking advantage of the fact that in imperial England difference is negative, a result of the necessity of demonization of cultural or physical difference in order to justify their

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<sup>106</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 273

<sup>107</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 268

<sup>108</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p. 269

claim of superiority. The more emphasis put on foreign traits and the more references to exotic or eastern practices, the more repressed the woman in question is deemed to be. In *Villette* the foreign concept is taken further by locating the origin of the foreign culture and practices referred to, in a country closer to home.

## CHAPTER IV: THE IMPERIAL LANGUAGE OF LUCY

“PLOUGH, vessel, plough the British main  
 Seek the free ocean’s wider plain;  
 Leave English scenes and English skies,  
 Unbind, dissever English ties”<sup>109</sup>

The post-colonial way of reading a canonical text such as *Villette* becomes reading “with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented in such works,”<sup>110</sup> as Said puts it. What is interesting or perhaps even problematic about such a technique lays in the words *what is silent or marginally present*, because once we go into the realm of what is not in the text, then the field of possible interpretations becomes much wider. Every meeting between a text and a reader is different because every text has holes, there is no text that says everything, and there is no text that has only one interpretation. And what we fill into those holes is a matter of personal history and thoughts; therefore, an interpretation based specifically on the holes in a text becomes personal. That is why it is very interesting when these different interpretations coincide with each other, giving rise to the idea that how we interpret these holes is a reflection of our times and culture, making it plausible to interpret the interpretation instead of the text itself. The focus then becomes different interpretive communities, or more exactly, representatives of different interpretive communities. This idea was of course first coined by Stanley Fish in his *Interpreting the Variorum*, and it rests on the idea that groups of people employ the same interpretive strategy which leads to similar interpretations.

Kate Millett dedicated seven pages to *Villette* in her 1971 book *Sexual Politics*. In the chapter dealing with literature within the first phase of the sexual revolution (1830-1930), *Villette*

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<sup>109</sup> Brontë, *The Missionary*, p. 65

<sup>110</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 66

and specifically Lucy Snowe become examples of “what effects Lucy’s life in a male-supremacist society has upon the psyche of a woman.”<sup>111</sup> *Sexual Politics* is mainly concerned with reading ‘against the grain’<sup>112</sup> of books written by men in order to show how men employ their sexual politics in order to suppress women. In that context the pages dedicated to *Villette* are there to underline the aforesaid point by showing how female characters created by female writers differ from the women characters created by men. Lucy’s difference from the norm is emphasized at every turn, starting with her introduction: “Lucy Snowe, the heroine of Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*, a book too subversive to be popular, is another matter,”<sup>113</sup> and Millett continues to emphasize this by calling Brontë’s work as the “great exception”. Millett then is using *Villette* as the exception that proves the point, while I focus on the book itself.

The *language of empire* is everywhere in *Villette* and *Jane Eyre*. And it takes different shapes, as if to denote the author’s and the narrator’s uneasiness about it. At one level its significance is straightforward; it indicates inferiority. For example, in *Villette* Lucy Snowe herself is a stranger in a foreign country, a fact that has significance for her own psychological state. Nobody around Lucy is like her, therefore her alienation between who she feels she should be and who she really is becomes even more severe. Her increasing inner turmoil and self alienation reflects the alienation she feels in relation to the women around her. Her way of showing this alienation is by constantly emphasizing their foreignness, their different way of life, of dress and social customs. This kind of language, this technique of using cultural and physical difference as a way of stating a subject’s inferiority to the superior I, is what I call the language of empire. The same happens in *Jane Eyre* where difference, meaning un-Englishness, equals inferior.

Julia Kristeva once wrote: “Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity

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<sup>111</sup> Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, (London: Abacus published by Sphere Books Ltd, 1972) p. 140

<sup>112</sup> Moi, *Textual/Sexual Politics*, p.

<sup>113</sup> Millett, *Sexual Politics*, p. 140

founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself.”<sup>114</sup> I feel that this is a very enlightening statement when trying to understand Lucy Snowe and also Jane Eyre’s lack of meaningful female relationships. In an environment and culture that is partly founded on the logic of imperialism and colonialism, something the constant overseas references confirm, it is almost impossible to have a neutral view on strangers and foreigners, seeing that part of English identity was based on their assumption that they were superior to other people. Anything typically foreign was therefore viewed as inferior and as a consequence repressed, either in a physical way and just as importantly, in a mental and psychological way if discovered in a person’s self. What I mean by that phrase is that certain personality traits, certain ways of thinking were for people of that time unacceptable. This could lead to, especially in women who already suffered under an additional set of mental strictures, a split in their inner self between the socially acceptable parts of their inner selves and the parts that were associated with the “inferior” races. In *Villette*, a story that on the outside looks like a story mainly concerned about the stories of others, when the narrator actually turns the focus inwardly what we mostly see is a tormented soul, a split personality. The language in these passages is filled with a kind of master and slave rhetoric, a sense of war, of how the inferior will never come to achieve peace with the ruling part. In addition to this, the association with the inferior and undesirable feelings towards inferior and colonized races becomes explicit, as in the chapter “The Long Vacation” where a reference to “the Indian summer” comes after a passage in which Lucy’s ruling self asks, “I really believe my nerves are getting overstretched: my mind has suffered somewhat too much; a malady is growing upon it – what shall I do? How shall I keep well?”<sup>115</sup> She has just finished lamenting on how lucky Ginevra is in love and making a sort of heroine of her in her mind, fantasizing about Ginevra’s happiness. Love and the perfect feminine, embodied by Ginevra, is instantly associated with malady and the hot Indian summer. This language is all over *Villette*

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<sup>114</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Stranger to ourselves*, trans. by Leon S Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) p.

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<sup>115</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 231

and it is used in such a way where it becomes a pre-judgement rather than an informed judgement.

The language of empire also entails the use of references to customs, cultures, and people from exotic and far away places as a way of devaluing the action or person in question. This can be used simply to express a degree of dislike for a particular action or sentiment expressed by a person who is normally not disagreeable to Lucy, like Dr John when he is discussing his romantic attachment to Miss Fawnshawe: “On all points but one you are a man, frank, healthful, right-thinking, clear-sighted: on this exceptional point you are but a slave. I declare, where Miss Fawnshawe is concerned, you merit no respect; nor have you mine.”<sup>116</sup> The reference to slavery is definitely a negative one; the declaration comes as an opposing one to the previous one stating he is a man. This comes through not only because of the direct meaning of the word slave, but because of the cultural significance the word had in that period of time. It does not just mean that Lucy thinks that Dr John is without will when it comes to Miss Fawnshawe, that he will do anything she wants him to do, it also associates him to people of so called “lower” races.

In addition to moving English people and customs into colonial space, Lucy Snowe also uses the imperial language in order to move the already foreign person into a realm that is even further away from England, as if the geographical distance to the realm with which she associates the mentioned sentiment or action is in direct relation to the moral distance between herself and the person in question. For example, when it comes to Madame Swiny, Lucy obviously looks down on the woman, therefore a certain reference to one of her favourite pieces of clothing becomes a sort of metaphor for her social situation:

“the chief item in the inventory, the spell by which she struck a certain awe through the household, quelling the otherwise scornfully disposed teachers and servants, and, so long as her broad shoulders *wore* the folds of that majestic drapery, even influencing madame

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<sup>116</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 263-264

herself- a real Indian shawl – ‘un véritable Cachmere,’ as madame Beck said, with mixed reverence and amaze.”<sup>117</sup>

Madame Swiny becomes like the country from which the shawl is from; outstanding from the rest of her group; the jewel in the crown, but still just a colony who never can reach the level of the English. She will never be like Polly because Polly is English and in possession of everything a woman should be, which in this book is equalled with being English: “Beautiful she looked: so young, so fresh, and with a delicacy of skin and flexibility of shape altogether English.”<sup>118</sup> In the description of Polly, outer perfection is equalled with Englishness, but it is still only an *outer* perfection, hinting that female English perfection lays in the outer qualities. Polly has perfected the English female role, and is therefore forever dependent on the men in her life, because dependency equals femininity.

In *Villette*, Lucy comes into contact with both English women and women from the continent, and strangely she seems as much estranged on an inner level from the foreigners as from the English. This fact proves that the common factor that keeps Lucy from having any real female friends in *Villette* is not based on their nationality but on their sex. Following that logic, any negative opinions she has about foreign women’s roles is really about them as females, not foreigners. Because Lucy is in a foreign country she is able to critique other women without betraying her innate English identity. Therefore her estrangement, her differentiation from other women is something that comes from within, something that she brought with her from England. In Kristeva’s words, it is a case of recognizing that “one becomes a foreigner in another country because one is already a foreigner from within.”<sup>119</sup> It also says something about how this estrangement comes from something within Lucy, not necessarily from her situation of being in a foreign country. It seems to me that what makes her different from the foreign girls is that they are all very feminine, but for Lucy, this is in the bad sense of the word. They exhibit the negative

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<sup>117</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 133

<sup>118</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 152

<sup>119</sup> Kristeva, *Stranger to ourselves*, p. 14

traits that come as a result of the expectations that society puts on women, but Lucy describes them as if they are the result of being from a foreign culture. The women are described as vain, extremely interested in winning the affections of men, pleasure seeking and lazy, in fact a natural thing to be when society judges women on their looks and their ability to get a man. But their flaws are blamed on the country they live in, their foreign culture, like when discussing the flaws of Miss Fawnshawe who is originally English, but “Tossed about all her life from one foreign school to another, she may justly proffer the plea of ignorance in extenuation of most of her faults.”<sup>120</sup> Her contact with a foreign culture is offered as the reason for some of her lesser qualities, which for Lucy is qualities that are the most feminine. Here, the “foreign” as a label and category has some of the same values and meanings as the “exotic” and “oriental” label have. The devaluing of foreign traits is a logical extension of the devaluing of human traits and customs originating from the colonies. Anything different from English is seemingly devalued.

#### FEMININE TURNS INTO FOREIGN – LUCY AND OTHER WOMEN

For Lucy, Who looks down on the traditional feminine role, feminine characteristics become foreign characteristics in order to justify for herself why she is not feminine in the cultural sense of the word. By associating femininity with the foreign, with the other, with somebody that for her is apparently morally beneath her, she is separating herself from both the foreign and the feminine, and essentially as well as ironically, making a foreigner out of herself. Lucy’s description of the Parisienne is a good example: “The second was a Parisienne, externally refined – at heart, corrupt – without a creed, without a principle, without an affection.”<sup>121</sup> Seemingly judging her on the basis of her nationality, if we look deeper it is apparent that her flaw is a *feminine* one. What separates Lucy from her fellow Englishwomen is also femininity, or what in those times was deemed perfect feminine behaviour as displayed by Miss Paulina Home. Miss

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<sup>120</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 301

<sup>121</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 194



Home exhibits the kind of self effacing, all obeying behaviour to men that they find the most charming in women, but Lucy's judgment is quite different, especially in her behaviour towards John Bretton in their days at Bretton: "he could not be sufficiently well waited on, nor carefully enough looked after; he was more than the Grand Turk in her estimation."<sup>122</sup> The exotic reference stings severely and makes it clear that Lucy does not approve of such behaviour. It also associates Paulina's behaviour with that of the eastern woman. In another moment the exotic allusion refers to her directly: "I found her seated, like a little Odalisque, on a couch, half shaded by the drooping draperies of the window near."<sup>123</sup> An Odalisque refers to a concubine, and is often used about a woman belonging to the Grand Turk's harem, and so Lucy's dislike for Miss Home's behaviour cannot be missed. Again, Miss Home's behaviour is compared to an eastern woman, a comparison which is a disguised way of saying that Paulina acts the role of a subjected and repressed woman.

This proves that the Oriental references are not just reserved for women from other countries, it is a pool of references used on any woman who falls beneath Lucy's standard of being a woman. It also becomes an indirect criticism of the kind of societal strictures that lie behind that kind of behaviour. When Brontë criticises the result then she also criticizes the maker, meaning men and the patriarchal system. The description of Miss Home is reminiscent of a scene in *Villette* when Madame Beck's daughter is supposedly sick in bed: "Désirée ate like a raven, gambolled day and night in her bed, pitched tents with the sheets and blankets, lounged like a Turk amidst pillows and bolsters, diverted herself with throwing her shoes at her bonnet and grimacing at her sisters."<sup>124</sup> The association between Miss Home being an Odalisque and Désirée's behaviour in the sick bed arrives because of the allusions to The Grand Turk and also because they both seem to be in a situation of personal pleasure. While Désirée gets pleasure from having her own way and having people wait on her, Polly finds pleasure in waiting on

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<sup>122</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 82

<sup>123</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 87

<sup>124</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 162

people, especially men. This explains the connection between female figures that Lucy does not fully approve of, their dependency on other people for their personal happiness, and the idea of being somebody's slave or having other people slave for you, the idea that in every relationship there is one master and one slave. By making the oriental reference Lucy pushes the origin of this kind of behaviour far outside England and Europe, and at the same time psychologically alienates herself from that female role. Lucy has an English identity, with the feeling of superiority that comes with it, but at the same time she does not identify with any female role, so in order to hold on to some identity, the female role is associated with the foreign and therefore separated from that of the English. Lucy is in a way saying that I may not fit into the female role but that does not make me less English because the female role is anyway based on the foreign and lesser qualities of character.

At the same time as the storyteller of *Villette* is trapped in the world of the imperial unconscious and its politics, she also points at the workings behind such a world view. Monsieur Paul tells Lucy that she “is as coquettish as ten Parisian women ... Was there ever an equal to this Englishwoman. Just look at her hat, her gloves, and her boots!”<sup>125</sup> For Paul, Lucy is the stranger and therefore she is the representative of everything that Lucy herself thinks his countrywomen are guilty of. Vanity and immorality are traits ascribed to foreigners in any country, not just foreigners to the English: “You alluring little coquette! ... You seem sad, submissive, dreamy, but you aren't really: It is I that says this to you: Savage! with a blazing soul and light in your eyes! Yes I have a blazing soul, and the right to have one!”<sup>126</sup> This signifies that the specifics addressed in the language of Empire have everything to do with the person employing it and really nothing to do with the person who is judged. Lucy's use of this language therefore mirrors the part of herself of which she is unsure, of which she is lacking or of which she has but society condemns. It also signifies that the language of Empire is used not just by the English, but by

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<sup>125</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 471 translation found in note 4 under chapter 33

<sup>126</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 404 – translation: Note 2, Chapter 27

other Europeans and that they have the “savage woman” as the lowest part of the spectrum of difference. Mr. Paul’s assertion that savage is the opposite of submissive is very interesting because sheds light on Lucy’s inner battles. These confrontations between the savage soul and the imperialistic reason, where the last one tries to hold down the first in order to maintain a calm and presentable appearance as exemplified in this passage: “Sitting down before this dark comforter, I presently fell into a deep argument with myself on life and its chances, on destiny and her decrees. My mind, calmer and stronger now than last night, made for itself some imperious rules prohibiting under deadly penalties all weak retrospect of happiness past.”<sup>127</sup> These thoughts come after Graham dropped her off to go back and live in Rue Fossette after a long period of staying with the Brettons, and she is having an argument with herself about whether to write Graham a letter. The controlling part of her mind is compared to an imperial leader who must beat down the savage soul. Therefore for Lucy to consent to that label, to admit that she has a blazing soul creates a link both between women with blazing souls and the savage, but also between the repressed savage within Lucy.

When talking about imperialistic language and foreign allusions it is absolutely necessary to mention the most direct way that the imperialistic endeavour of the times figures in the story: Mr Paul’s stay at the colonial estate in Guadeloupe. The chief driving force behind colonialism is in *Villette* a woman: Madame Walravens, who in Lucy’s own words was “Hunchbacked, dwarfish, and doting, she was adorned like a barbarian queen.”<sup>128</sup> The foreign allusion here functions as a reminder that although Madame Walravens may have an estate in Guadalupe that can earn her a lot of money, she is a subjected woman who depends on the help of a man in order to get her wealth. Also, when Lucy mentions the jewellery she is always wearing, that reminds me of Jane Eyre’s refusal to wear any, because for her it symbolized a form of ownership, physically linking the woman to the man. So when Walravens is wearing a lot of jewellery, this

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<sup>127</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 309

<sup>128</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 482

symbolizes the heavy bond patriarchy has on her. Eastern or colonial references, when it comes to women, means that they are particularly subjected to the rule of men, who are playing along with the role patriarchal society gave them, which again explains the split that exists between Lucy's idea of herself and those kind of women. Even so, Walraven's is the person most heavily involved in the imperialistic game and therefore the person responsible for taking Mr Paul away from Lucy. Colonial business, then, becomes the negative force that keeps Lucy away from the man she loves.

What is the reason for including exotic, foreign women, women of oppressed races into the world of Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe? What function do they have that English or white European women could not fill? What aspect of their behaviour is of importance, what do they bring out in Jane or Lucy? As stated before, Lucy Snowe seems to be suffering even more than Jane Eyre under the oppressive culture of patriarchy and experiences a deeper form of estrangement from the world and especially from her fellow women. Being in a foreign country seems to underline this, and the stressing of foreignness in the description of female characters becomes a signifier for another form of difference in relation to Lucy. Her feeling of superiority towards women of another culture and country is consistent throughout the novel and seemingly the further away from home these women originated the greater the dislike. If I look at an example from the chapter "The Cleopatra," when Lucy is watching the painting with the same name, her evaluation reveals the nature of the scale by which she judges women. As Lucy is already in a foreign country with many foreign women, the fact that she chooses a woman that is even further away from England, geographically and culturally, as the object of her most damning description is important. "The Cleopatra" was not exactly a real character; she is a painting, a representation of a woman. But she is dedicated almost a whole chapter so she is certainly an interesting and important representation of a type of woman. She represents the exotic foreign woman, as the name indicates, and her description lacks nothing from the

stereotypical. All body, as the native woman was deemed to be, and seemingly a lot of it, as Lucy describes her as “extremely well fed”<sup>129</sup> and in possession of an “affluence of flesh.”<sup>130</sup> Body, when featured in Victorian fiction, almost always represented something indecent, uncontrollable or abnormal as the Cleopatra obviously does for Lucy, who complains that “she had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa.”<sup>131</sup> As if to pronounce the unworthiness of such dark and exotic women, Lucy soon tires of looking at the picture or “this huge, dark-complexioned gipsy queen,”<sup>132</sup> as Lucy names her. Then Mr Paul arrives and is in shock that she is looking at this picture and tells her to rather look at a series of pictures depicting women in the different ascribed roles in life, all with the denominator of living for somebody else than her own self. Just as bad as Cleopatra, Lucy thinks. This whole scene for me represents how native women, generally at the time and specifically in this book, function in patriarchal society as the frightening and hideous example of how women can become if they were not following the rules. Men rather want women to be like the “Angeles”, just like Mr Paul wants Lucy to look at those pictures, rather than at Cleopatra.

To use foreignness and exoticism in order to demonize a certain kind of behaviour is related to using it to defend repressive acts. In the book *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, it is stated that one of the major parts of studies of gender in relation to colonial and post-colonial theories is “the ways in which colonialism in practice as in ideology draws upon a mythology of the black male sexual threat to white femininity to legitimate itself.”<sup>133</sup> I find this quote interesting in relation to my discoveries about Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* because it is all turned around in the sense that it is female sexuality that is a threat to white femininity as created by men. In Brontë’s world the foreign and exotic sexuality comes from women who are the most

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<sup>129</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 275

<sup>130</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 275

<sup>131</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 275

<sup>132</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 276

<sup>133</sup> *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory- A Reader*, ed. by Williams, Patrick & Chrisman, Laura (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) p. 193

suppressed, so foreign sexuality becomes a reference point of how suppressive patriarchy can be instead of it representing something that threatens the patriarchal system. Cleopatra's sexuality and corporality become the negative example of what adhering to the feminine role created by men can make of women, how women internalise the prejudices men have about them and actually become the perversions of nature men deem them to be. The fact that Brontë chooses to put these "bad examples" forward in the guise of a woman from a foreign or exotic part of the world can have as much to do with writing and living in a milieu that promoted subservient and subjugated behaviour amongst the female members of its culture, than it had to do with living in an imperial society which professed its superiority over every other nation in the world. Instead of making the foreign world a place of people who need to be ruled or suppressed, it becomes a place where women are suppressed and subjugated by men.

This pattern is repeated in the chapter called "Vashti", where Lucy herself uses the native woman, Cleopatra, as a negative comparison to a woman she obviously admires. The actress called Vashti is disapproved by men, as exemplified by Doctor John, but looked up to by Lucy. In *Villette*, the native woman seems to be the female role that both Lucy and the men in her life disapprove of. The native woman therefore represents the end of the gradation for both Lucy and men but in different ways. For Lucy the women she respects the least are the same women who succumb the most to a female role that is essentially man made. And for Lucy the foreign or eastern or exotic equals less developed cultures which again correspond to the level of subjection of women. The darker, or more foreign a woman is, the less free she is. Bringing in Kristeva again, this "foreignization" of repression has to do with what Lucy does not like in herself and in her home culture. In order to deal with the fact that it is there, she labels it as a foreign influence in order to abstract herself and her home country England from blame. The further away geographically she claims the origin, the less comfortable she is with it herself.

As well as the language of empire was used to indicate the inferiority of a person, it was also used when Lucy had an interior conflict, a conflict between who she truly was and who society had brainwashed her into believing she ought and wished to be. “These struggles with the natural character, the strong native bent of the heart, may seem futile and fruitless, but in the end they do good,”<sup>134</sup> because they enable her to leave her conflicts and rebellions on the inside, making the outside calm. The heart is here associated with the oppressed, a pattern that is repeated and strengthened by the use of the word slave to describe it: “On all occasions of vehement, unrestrained expansion, a sense of disdain or ridicule comes to the weary spectator's relief; whereas I have ever felt most burdensome that sort of sensibility which bends of its own will, a giant slave under the sway of good sense”. The use of the word slave is very interesting because it evokes subjection other than that of women, another “other” of the patriarchal world.

Sensibility, a particularly “feminine” trait of character is here associated with a slave, a fact that implicates and reinforces the earlier mentioned connection between femininity and repression.

Carl Plasa in one way is the odd one out as the only male critic in my female dominated landscape of literary criticism. While most colonial criticism on *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* sees the race and colonial factors in tandem with the gender issues of the book, Plasa completely denies Lucy's gender any comparative or meaningful role. At the beginning of his chapter on *Villette*, Plasa states that “*Villette* clearly marks a significant departure from the male-centred stance adopted in the earlier text (*The Professor*)”, yet he thinks that “such a difference should not be allowed to obscure the continuities between the two novels.”<sup>135</sup> He states that gender issues do not need to be addressed when discussing colonial trends and influences in the book, that what he wants is to make a general assessment of the importance and meaning of the slave metaphor that runs throughout all of Brontë's texts. He, too, cites Said as an inspiration and has adopted his contrapuntual reading technique. He does mention how Lucy struggles with her notion about

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<sup>134</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 252

<sup>135</sup> Carl Plasa, *Critical Issues – Charlotte Brontë*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) p. 125

how a proper Englishwoman should behave, based on the fact that it is the opposite of the continental female, but he never problematizes it. He analyzes how Lucy judges her fellow women of the continent, but he does not ask why she does it; it is as if he is only interested in these passages of judgement to prove how Brontë herself judged women of the continent as beneath her. His point is that all of Lucy's improper desire gets projected onto the foreigner and therefore the foreigner is rejected. Plasa ends his piece with the conclusion that Lucy is trying to "maintain a difference between herself as Englishwoman and the foreigners whom she encounters in the course of the novel."<sup>136</sup> What he neglects looking at is what kind of relationship Lucy has to her own countrywomen, in order to undoubtedly say that her rejection of the foreign women lies in the fact that they are foreign or because they are female.

The reason for this neglect perhaps simply lies in the fact that he is a man. I remember reading a piece by Patrocinio P. Schweickart called "Reading ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," and it appeared to me that perhaps feminist reading is something distinctively female, that men, although familiar with previous feminist works, never fully occupy themselves with a fully feminist reading of a work. One easy answer comes up in my mind that only a woman who knows what it is like to be subjected to patriarchal restrictions can recognize the female voice and characteristics in a text. But if that indeed is the case why do so many men and women recognize the voice of the repressed native, Bertha in the case of *Jane Eyre*, when they themselves do not belong to any repressed native group? What is it about the feminist critical stance that excludes men to take any significant part in this critical debate? As my previous chapter hopefully proved, Lucy's resistance and disapproving attitude towards the other English female characters in the book is evidence which for me proves that the rejection is much more based on the gender than on the nationality. For feminist critics the rejection of the various women throughout *Villette* mirrors the rejection of the different female roles imposed on

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<sup>136</sup> Plasa, *Critical Issues – Charlotte Brontë*, p. 151



women through patriarchy, while for post-colonial critics Lucy's rejection mirrors the English imperialist rejection and subjection of people who were not English, especially those of another race. Another scene of comparison, the matter of Mr Paul, is also a frequent point of analysis. Plasa sees Lucy's and Paul's relationship and confrontations as a series of re-enactments of "the invisible power relationships played out among and within the 'persons not named [and] circumstances not defined' (p. 463) of colonial Guadeloupe."<sup>137</sup> Therefore their relationship only has value in a metaphorical and referential way, denying it any real presence in itself. What I feel is that what both post colonial and feminist critics should take into consideration is the importance of the gender of the protagonist, and without taking anything away from the post-colonial stance of for example, Plasa. It is a critical factor that somebody who knowingly suffers under the hand of one form of unjust repression should inflict others with a different kind. This is because it sheds a light on the act of repression, and at the psychological process behind the action. It is also interesting because it opens up for an interpretation of the text that assumes that the author used this technique intentionally.

## CATHOLICISM AS SLAVERY

The slave references in *Villette* are mostly associated with the Catholic faith and doctrine, and the dislike Lucy feels for it is very clear. She early states that she feels that "Each mind was being reared in slavery."<sup>138</sup> After listening in on the 'lecture pieuse' given to the pupils of the Pensionnat she excites a rather harsh judgement on the content:

"The ears burned on each side of my head as I listened, perforce, to tales of moral martyrdom inflicted by Rome; the dread boasts of confessors, who had wickedly abused their office, trampling to deep degradation high-born ladies, making of countesses and princesses the most tormented slaves under the sun. Stories like that of Conrad and Elizabeth of Hungary, recurred again and again, with all its dreadful viciousness, sickening tyranny and black impiety: tales that were nightmares of oppression, privation, and agony."<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Plasa, *Critical Issues – Charlotte Brontë*, p. 146

<sup>138</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 195

<sup>139</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 184

Here the slave reference becomes a way of underlining the cruelty of the female oppression executed by men under cover of the Catholic faith. Putting examples of female oppression in the context of Catholicism, and in the context of a foreign culture, reinforces my earlier argument that foreignness and repression get mixed together in Lucy's mind, that in fact anything negative is associated with the non-English is a very characteristic sign of novels written in England around the height of English Imperialism. English novels by the 1840s (*Villette* was published in 1853) had "achieved eminence as *the* aesthetic form and as a major intellectual voice, so to speak, in English society."<sup>140</sup> That meant that the English novel reproduced and reinforced the power of the English Empire through creating an image of English as the ideal. In *Villette*, Brontë too reinforces the English ideal, but at the same time the text is very subversive in the way it criticizes the patriarchal oppressive ways women are being treated generally in the world. Using a foreign country as setting enables Brontë to put those opinions forward under the disguise of being critical towards a foreign culture and its people.

With the already established relationship between Catholicism and slavery, the black and white nun's haunting presence becomes the haunting presence of slavery and oppression, and so Lucy Snowe too is associated with slavery and oppression. Plasa sees the slave association concerning the ghostly nun as important, seeing "the way in which the return of the metaphor in the context of Catholicism invests *Villette's* errant nun with a new symbolic potential. The logical implication of the metaphor is to establish a certain correspondence between the nun's acts of defiance and those of a rebel slave."<sup>141</sup> But while Plasa sees this association as proof of Brontë moving beyond the usual feminist framework, as a sort intertextual chain binding it together with Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, I feel differently. Without taking anything away from his interpretation I think that the slave trope is there to underline the

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<sup>140</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 71-72

<sup>141</sup> Plasa, "'A Thing Double-Existent': Foreigners and Slaves in *Villette*," p. 139

tragic fate of the nun, in addition to placing slaves in a sympathetic relationship to the repressed woman. Throughout the book, in almost all the references to Catholicism it is always a woman, or women, who are termed slaves and who suffer under slavery's oppressive doctrines. Lucy Snowe's own meeting with the church came through Père Silas, about whom she proclaims: "Did I, do you suppose, reader, contemplate venturing again within that worthy priest's reach? As soon should I have thought of walking into a Babylonish furnace."<sup>142</sup> In an earlier scene, back at Bretton, Lucy finds Paulina "kneeling upright in bed, and praying like some Catholic" because she misses her father. Mr Paul also tries to make a Catholic out of Lucy against her will, giving her books that try to persuade her. All these incidents have one thing in common: male figures have power over women and try to take advantage of that. Catholicism, a religion that is not English, becomes another cover for condemnation of the patriarchal culture. Coming back to the Nun, a woman who had suffered death by the hands of tyrannical slavery upholders, echoes the social death of Lucy by the hands of oppressive upholders of patriarchy.

The language of empire indicates inferiority, but by looking at the mechanics behind it, it also means and signifies insecurity about oneself. The facets of Lucy and her own English culture which she does not approve of are repressed and claimed alien in order for her to be comfortable with her own identity. Being already an outsider, both in relation to regular society and the fact that she lives in a foreign country, she needs to clarify what her identity is and the easiest way of doing that is stating what and who she is not. Not being able to relate to the feminine role, Lucy emphasizes the foreignness of her fellow women in order to make femininity foreign and repressing, and therefore a concept she does not need to adhere to.

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<sup>142</sup> Brontë, *Villette*, p. 235

## CONCLUSION

I wanted to study Brontë's representation of the racially and culturally "other" and see how that works in relation to her representation of the repressed female. Born into a society where a woman's value is measured in her looks and ability to conform to the set standard of femininity, Jane's and Lucy's feeling of uniqueness and insistence on autonomy set them up for hardship. With no family and a childhood defined by their situation as outsiders, they will never be able to play the feminine role. But they are doomed to live in patriarchal society, and not being part of it, they are left to observe it from the outside. Frustrated by their exclusion they see the silliness of the female role.

While society keeps telling Jane and Lucy how they are inferior to men, and expecting them to behave a certain way, their own inner voice says something else. Not comfortable with the identity assigned them as the female "other" to men, they try to establish one on their own. And since they have no other reference point to creating an identity than the way men do it, they start defining the people and habits they feel they are superior to, people who are more repressed than themselves. Difference becomes a negative concept. By internalizing the politics of difference, they are also internalizing the politics of patriarchy: 'Difference' is an artefact of patriarchy just as imperial language is an artefact of patriarchy. "Difference also means a negative category which includes the exclusion and subordination of women."<sup>143</sup> Both Jane and Lucy focus on what is different between them and other women, and the way they make clear that this difference is negative is in the use of oriental or foreign references. But the politics of the novels as a whole liberates Jane and Lucy from being labelled racist, because they themselves use the oriental and foreign references on themselves when they feel particularly oppressed, as

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<sup>143</sup>Maggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989) p. 51

for example Jane calls herself a slave at Gateshead. Therefore the language of empire becomes the only way that they can express dissatisfaction about the patriarchal system at home. They employ the patriarchal politics of difference to express a reaction to, and dissatisfaction with, being judged by the patriarchal politics of difference.

”Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present,”<sup>144</sup> Edward Said once said, and that is certainly true. One thing which I find a bit sad amongst women in today’s society is the lack in a feeling of solidarity amongst women, a lack of sisterhood in a way. What I found out through the process of writing my thesis is that this was something that lacked in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century too and patriarchy is to blame. By living in patriarchal society women came to view themselves and other women as men did, namely as inferior. Lucy and Jane exemplify the destructive effect that fact had on women and how truly difficult it was to step forward and claim their independence.

Applying post-colonial theories when reading literature written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, like in the case of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, is very useful. Colonialism was one of the ideological pillar stones in English society and therefore informed and influenced the way people viewed themselves and the people around them including women, which is why it is so interesting to combine post-colonial and feminist theories. The ideology of empire influenced and was part of the patriarchal way of viewing women, both as a way of keeping women down and as a desperate way of female empowerment. When female writers use the *language of empire* in an attempt to carve out an identity in a female hostile environment, it reveals the fears and uneasiness about the society they live in. The traditional use of the colonial space in 19<sup>th</sup> century texts is as a place of both exoticism and sensuality at the same time that it provides a place to put the fears of the times into. In a feminine and feminist text it becomes a place of female repression, somewhere to place practises that they do not approve of in their own home country. The geographical

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<sup>144</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993) p. 3

misplacement of practices that goes against their own sense of justice and integrity is a common form of self preserving in a hostile culture. This mirrors the psychological repression of facets of their personality that goes against patriarchal society's view of proper femininity, in the way that these facets awake thoughts of rebelliousness against the repressive strictures of proper femininity. To quell the feeling of being a victim and being less worth than man, they quell their true personality in order to deal with the injustice experienced and inflicted on themselves by the people they care about. Lucy Snowe and Jane Eyre are examples on the complexity and difficulty of this process as shown by their strong self division and constant inner battles.

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