

From Cabinets of Curiosities to Exhibitions: Victorian Curiosity, Curiousness, and  
Curious Things in Charlotte Brontë

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## Dedication

This thesis would never have come into being without the thorough and thoughtful supervision of Dr. Sophie Gilmartin. She has witnessed and helped cultivate the arduous developments of both this thesis and my yet wanting academic aptitude. To her support, both academic and moral, I will always bear immense gratitude.

I am equally grateful for my parents. Their own academic expertise in the field of history has greatly influenced my interest in literature; their invariable and perpetual support for my choices in life has freed me of any concerns about walking such a lonely and strenuous path.

My examiners have also helped bring this thesis to completion by providing many inspiring suggestions. Their feedbacks will indeed serve as a valuable guidance for me while I revise this thesis for publication.

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Finally, special thanks to my love, Pan, who had patiently accompanied me through the last, most psychologically and emotionally trying stages of the writing-up.

## Declaration of Authorship

I, Han-ying Liu, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

*Han-ying Liu*

*April, 2012*

## Abstract

From Cabinets of Curiosity to Exhibitions: Victorian Curiosity, Curiousness, and Curious Things in Charlotte Brontë

Han-ying Liu

This thesis intends to answer these questions: What did “curiosity” mean in the nineteenth century, and how do Charlotte Brontë’s four major works represent such curiosity? How were women looked at, formulated, and situated under the nineteenth-century curious gaze?

In order to answer these questions, this thesis examines Brontë’s works by juxtaposing them with nineteenth-century exhibitions. Four chapters are thus dedicated to this study: in each a type of exhibition is contemplated, and in each the definition of “curiosity” is defined through the discussions of boundary-breaking. The first chapter discusses the metaphors of “cabinets of curiosities” throughout Brontë’s texts. The most intimate and enclosed spaces occupied by women and / or their objects—attics, desks, drawers, lockets—are searched in order to reveal the secret relationship between Brontë’s heroines and the objects they have hidden away, especially the souvenirs. From cabinets of curiosities the thesis moves to another space in which the mechanism of curiosity and display takes place—the garden. The second chapter thus discusses the supposed antithesis between the innocent and the experienced, between the Power of Nature and the Power of Man, by reading the garden imagery in Brontë’s works along with nineteenth-century pleasure gardens and the Wardian case. The imagery of Eve is also taken into consideration to discuss the concept of innocence. In the third chapter, metaphors of waxworks and the Pygmalion myth are applied to discuss the image of women’s bodies in Brontë’s texts, and the boundary between the living body and the non-living statue is seen as blurred. In the final chapter, dolls’ houses and their metaphors in Brontë’s works are examined in order to explicate Brontë’s concept of “home,” and the dolls’ house thus poses a question on the relationships between the interior and the exterior, the gigantic and the miniature, and the domestic and the public spaces.

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## Introduction

“Mama, I believe that creature is a changeling: she is a perfect *cabinet of oddities*; but I should be dull without her: she amuses me a great deal more than you or Lucy Snowe” (*Villette* 32, my italics).<sup>1</sup> So comments Graham of little Polly in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the cabinet of curiosity, part of the prevalent mania for collecting, became a phenomenal vogue among the European affluent. Amid the many vicissitudes of this fashion, an inclination shared by the cabinet proprietors as to what was to be collected, encased, and displayed became quite clear. William Mueller points out that, at the turn of the seventeenth century, “[t]he wealthy and the well-connected were hoarding things—*strange* things—into obsessive personal collections” (785, original italics). Bettina Dietz and Thomas Nutz also notice that “eighteenth-century curiosité took the greatest pleasure in possessing and looking at objects that were rare, refined, and visually appealing” (54). The *strange* assortments exhibited—sensational, grotesque and aesthetically provocative—were an intersection of art and nature. The objects contained in the “cabinets of curiosity” were thus those able to arouse in the spectator a sense of curiosity and awe. Even such scientific institutions as the Royal Society became obsessed with reports and exhibitions of novelties such as unusual surgical occurrences and monstrous births. Fellows and correspondents of the society often recorded these abnormalities, and their specimens were brought into the Society for demonstration and display, as P. Fontes Da Costa points out in “The Culture of Curiosity at The Royal Society in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century.” For example, Revd. Charles Ellis mentions in a letter, which was read at the Society, an “[a]ccount of a young Lady, born Deaf and Dumb, taught to speak,” and “the Physick Garden at Amsterdam, the Chamber of Rarities at Bohn, a Monstrous Birth, the Quarry at Maestricht, Fr. Linus’ Dyals at Liege, the Cachot or Rooms cut in the Rock of the Castle in Namur, Sir Jo. Mandevil’s Tomb at Leige [and] the Frieland Boy with Letters in his Eye” (qtd. in Da Costa 148). The surgeon Claude Amyand once presented the account of a female monkey with unusual generative parts, and he also illustrated the dissection of the specimen (*R. Society Journal* Nov. 23, 1738). At

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990), ed. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten. All further references are to this edition.

another meeting, the Revd. William Derham showed a specimen of “the monstrous face of a Child” (R. Society Journal Mar. 20, 1712).

Nonetheless, by the end of the eighteenth century, these privately owned cabinets of curiosity had given way to commercialized exhibitions, and the collected specimens, exotic objects, and bizarre rarities had evolved into forms of public performance, or “theatrum” (Stafford 238). Towards the turn of the eighteenth century, the unorganized, often serendipitous assortments of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century “Kunst- und Wunderkammern,” the eighteenth century private exhibitions featuring the co-existence of natural and artificial objects, along with the age-long tradition of traveling showmen with en-route peep shows, had entered such in-door exhibiting spaces as William Bullock’s Egyptian Hall. In these new exhibition spaces, simulations of natural environments—down to the details of plants and animal specimens—existed side-by-side with objects of art, historical relics such as Napoleon’s legendary carriage, and anatomical models like the “Hottentot Venus.”<sup>2</sup> The specimens and objects were “staged” so that they seemed to exist in their original habitats. Other exhibitions housed what were once the trade of traveling performers: freak shows, “noble savages,” and talking animals. Nineteenth-century exhibitions combined both objects and performances so as to draw the most attention from the curious spectators. Hence, in the nineteenth century, “cabinets of curiosities” entailed not merely a category of exhibition, but also specific forms of public performance in which the natural and the artificial overlapped, and in which anomaly was emphasized, eulogized, and eroticized.<sup>3</sup> Whatever the form of display was, the element of “curiosity” was always an important element.

Putting violence<sup>4</sup> and sensuality on display, the nineteenth-century cabinet-of-curiosity-style exhibition was at once public and private, as the open exhibition/performance appealed to the spectator’s curiosity, and was inevitably colored by a sense of voyeurism, a desire to peep into the shut cabinet for something unknown, secretive, and forbidden. As the “cabinet of curiosity” metamorphosed in form, so the concept of “cabinet” evolved and extended, ranging from such private “zones forbidden to the opposite sex” (Apter 7) as caskets, drawers, the boudoir, and

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<sup>2</sup> For details of the Egyptian Hall see Richard D. Altick, “William Bullock and the Egyptian Hall,” *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard U P, 1978) 235-252.

<sup>3</sup> See Emily Apter, “Cabinet Secrets: Fetishism, Prostitution, and the Fin de Siècle Interior,” *Assemblage* 9 (1989): 6-19.

<sup>4</sup> See Marjean D. Purinton, “George Colman’s *The Iron Chest* and *Blue-Beard* and the Pseudoscience of Curiosity Cabinets,” *Victorian Studies* 49.2 (2007): 250-57.



the *salle d'antiquités* (man's study), to theatres, galleries, museums—public spaces where the gaze rules. The yearning to look and to collect, to “behold” and also to “get hold of” objects otherwise inaccessible, looms behind the nineteenth-century attentiveness to detail and, moreover, the period's literary meticulousness in recounting the minutiae of daily life. What Emily Apter calls the “increasingly refined, *recherché* developments” of the mania of collecting—“bric-a-bracomania,” “tableaumania,” “bibliophilia,” “vestigonomia” (Apter 9), prevailed throughout the nineteenth century, and was also embodied in the detailed accounts characteristic of the nineteenth-century realistic novel.

The nineteenth century was the heyday for public exhibitions. Exhibiting spaces were crowded by curious spectators wishing to get a glimpse of the novel, the rare, or the bizarre: half-human-half-beasts, human-like waxworks, and miniatures of grand architecture were all equally popular. As Richard Altick comments on nineteenth-century London spectatorship:

As a class London exhibition-goers were credited with little aesthetic discrimination. . . . They were willing to gaze at any mimicry of reality, no matter how grotesque, clumsy, unsuitable, or improbable: shellwork, fishbone flowers, paper constructions, glass work, waxen tableaux.  
(Altick 399)

It was curiosity, instead of taste, that drove the crowd into the exhibition halls. The objects behind glass, curtains and railings, as well as the ardent eyes that beheld them, reveal a nineteenth-century admiration of and anxiety about “curiosities.” It is thus via the exploration of “curiousness” and “curiosities” that I will discuss Charlotte Brontë's major novelistic works. In order to do so, I will first consider nineteenth-century “curiosity.”

### **Curiosity: What it Meant in Victorian England**

In order to establish the definition of “curiosity” in the nineteenth century, the preceding period, the early modern period, must first be examined. In her investigation of the early-modern sense of curiosity, Barbara M. Benedict discusses the “fluid exchange between agency and objectivity, curiosity and curiousness” (Benedict 2). She sees curiosity as portrayed in English culture as “the mark of a threatening ambition, an ambition that takes the form of a perceptible violation of species and categories: an ontological transgression that is registered empirically. Curiosity is seeing your way out of your place. It is looking beyond” (2). Indeed

curiosity is inseparable from visual experience, and, furthermore, when it comes to curiosity, a sense of transgression, of boundary-crossing, is always present. Furthermore, Benedict points out that in the early modern period (1660 to 1820, as she defines it), as the sense of curiosity reached its “peak of frenzied attention,” questions were raised to challenge the status quo, and, in reaction, the more conservative literary culture “represented these queries as social or intellectual transgressions that were parallel to the physical transgressions of oddly formed people” (2).<sup>5</sup> Represented as monsters, curious people were thus turned into curiosities themselves.<sup>6</sup> This conflation of categories can be explicated further etymologically. Benedict argues that, whether derived from *monstrare*, “to show,” or *monere*, “to warn,” the term “monster” illustrates a sense of “passive exhibition” (Benedict 6).<sup>7</sup> Rendered monster-like by conservative representations, the curious inquirers became a form of exhibition. This is a double transgression: the transgressor himself is turned from the spectator to the spectacle. Such a paradox is apposite, for the early modern period engaged curiosity in both positive and negative terms: it was an elite “inclination to enquiry,” and a “mechanical carefulness associated with intricacy, novelty, and elegant workmanship” (Benedict 3);<sup>8</sup> but it was also a dangerous transgression of social and cultural roles and order. Defined as such, both curiosity and curiousness entail “a great but hazardous value,” for they “confuse distinctions between the abstract and material,” and they “have the potential to usurp common culture with idiosyncratic concerns” (3). The ambiguities thus surrounding curiosity were quite prevalent throughout the early modern period. Brontë’s heroines also slip readily from curious women to objects of curiosity; for example, out of curiosity Jane Eyre attempts to find the origin of the strange laughter at night, and in the end the voice—Bertha’s voice—finds her at her wedding night, and her face mirrors that of Bertha’s monstrous figure in the looking glass. Furthermore, as Rochester constantly names Jane in curious terms: fairy, spirit, animals, Jane is turned into a curiosity.

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<sup>5</sup> For examples of early-modern depictions of curiosity as connected with ontological transgression, ambition, hypocrisy, impiety, and insatiability, which were all represented as monstrous, see Benedict 32-36.

<sup>6</sup> For discussions of such representations see Benedict 118-157.

<sup>7</sup> See Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1163; C. J. S. Thompson, *The Mystery and Lore of Monsters: With Accounts of Some Giants, Dwarfs, and Prodigies* (London: Williams and Norgate Ltd., 1930), 23-4.

<sup>8</sup> For these definitions Benedict refers to Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755; reprint, London: Time books, 1979) and *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1985).

On the other hand, in the early modern period, curious objects were likewise characterized by such paradox. According to Benedict, under such ambiguous representation of curiosity, the “curiosities” were demarcated as “objects without a clear use”:

They are ornaments selected because they look too strange to be ornamental; broken tools or implements immobilized in cabinets so that they can never be used; coins in cases or framed paper money that serve as icons outside economic circulation: things that have no function but to be looked at. (3)

The collected and displayed curiosities thus serve a similar function as the curious inquirer in that they challenge established cultural values. Out-of-context and ambiguous, curiosities in the early modern period, along with curious people, characterized an England that was gradually coming into its modern form. Benedict explicitly delineates such re-shaping of established boundaries:

. . . [A]s humanity’s traditionally insatiable appetite, curiosity is always transgressive, always a sign of the rejection of the known as inadequate, incorrect, even uninteresting. Whether scientists or performers, curious people seek and manifest new realities and reshape their own identities, and their products—curiosities—incarnate these new realities and identities as examples of ontological transgression. As they acquire these new identities, curious people and curious things destabilized the categories and identities of others. (4)

With such a radical sense of transgression and social progression in mind, this thesis will discuss “curiosity” as it was in the period immediately following the early modern period defined by Benedict. The slippage of curiosity into curiousness, of the curious inquirer into the curious object, still remains. However, it is my contention that the two characteristics of the early-modern curiosities—out-of-context qualities and ambiguity—still exist in the Victorian curiosities, but the sense of ambiguity is further developed. I will argue that, throughout Brontë’s texts, not only are the heroines and the things surrounding them defamiliarized by the narration that highlights their out-of-context qualities, but also they embody a sense of curiosity in which both sides of the boundary co-exist: boundaries are seen as blurred, if not broken. The animate and the inanimate, the living and the non-living coincide; the innocent and the experienced, the Edenic and the mundane conflate; and the differences between the interior and exterior, the tiny and the gigantic, the replica and the original are also collapsed. While boundaries were challenged and categories were transgressed by the early-modern curiosity, in Brontë’s texts the very existence of “boundary” itself is interrogated via curiosities and curiosity.

### **Ambiguities in Style: The Grotesque**

In order to explain further how Victorian curiosity, and the paradoxes it entails, are defined in this thesis, the reception of the 1851 Great Exhibition must first be examined. As a milestone in the development of nineteenth-century exhibitions, the Great Exhibition received world-wide attention, as well as international praise and criticism. Among the many reactions, critiques, and repercussions of the Exhibition were sarcastic remarks against the mixed styles and the overwhelming cluster of visual stimulus. Isobel Armstrong points out such a tendency in *Victorian Glassworlds*: “the optical shock and exhaustion of the eye. . . produced an intense disorientation that undermined ordering principles: a surreal heterogeneity juxtaposed erotic and mundane objects” (Armstrong 198). One of the writers for *The Ecclesiologist* (1841-1869),<sup>9</sup> for example, mocks the “naked gods, demi-gods, heroes, muses, graces, in plaister of Paris or marble, which are placed between Manchester wares and Sheffield cutlery, Birmingham buttons, Persian carpets, ploughs, and circular saws” (*Ecclesiologist* 12, 386). The disorientation created by such a seemingly random amalgamation of objects was growing familiar to mid-nineteenth-century spectators: with the popularization of glass came “the era of public glass” (Armstrong 1), and arcades and store windows became a prevalent sight in the mid-nineteenth-century metropolis, flamboyantly bombarding passers-by with objects behind glass, objects both disturbingly alluring with the consumerist desire they provoke and gnawingly draining with the glamour, novelty, and wealth that seemed to be ubiquitous and thus inevitable.

The Exhibition provided an extreme example of such a visual conundrum. Brontë’s own experience in the Great Exhibition in 1851, which was recorded in her letter to her father on June 9, 1851, illustrates such visual experience: “It is a wonderful place,” writes Brontë after her second visit, “vast, strange, new and impossible to describe. Its grandeur does not consist in *one* thing, but in the unique assemblage of *all* things” (*LL* vol. II, 215). In her first visit in May, she also describes the Crystal Palace as a place “fine, gorgeous, animated, bewildering” (*LL* vol. II, 213).

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<sup>9</sup> *The Ecclesiologist* was the newsletter of The Cambridge Camden Society, an architectural society founded in 1839 at Cambridge University to study the Gothic architecture and Ecclesiastic antiques. It was later known as the Ecclesiological Society.

Armstrong points out that many critics, among them Nikolaus Pevsner,<sup>10</sup> criticized the “bastardizations of form and style” (Armstrong 199) in the Exhibition, for

Materials perversely imitate other materials (glass and wood marble, for instance) or materials familiar in one context are reproduced in another (brass drawing-room furniture, iron beds) or new materials such as papier mâché, india rubber, and gutta-percha are invoked as substitutions. Styles range from Cottage Ornée, Tudor, Stuart, Anglo-Grecian, Moorish, Spanish, French Rococo, Chinese, and mixtures of these. (Armstrong 199-200)

The objects receiving most reprimands were those of hybrid nature: Armstrong observes that what seemed most disturbing and thus ludicrous for critics was the fact that “the category of manufacture ‘lying between’ beauty and use systematically distorts the human body, and combines the naked human form with *things* in an abusive way” (Armstrong 201, original emphasis). The “unclad Nymphs surge round a clock,” “the grotesque fusion of a man’s head with a coffeepot lid, or the human head crushed under a teapot spout,” are those objects that seem like “a violation of species being, an unsettling distortion of the human” (Armstrong 201). Such “grotesque violation,” according to Armstrong, blends “the biological and the artefactual body,” which “fails to separate the categories of thing and being,” and such categorical confusion received most criticism and sarcasm (201). Another example was the criticism published by the *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* (1851), which Armstrong quotes in her discussion of the Exhibition:

Contemplating the grotesque body of the Amazon (a “dauntless damsel,” “evidently not indebted to the milliner for her costume”) fused with her horse and with the tiger “wanting to breakfast upon her horse’s shoulder,” the *Tait’s* reviewer negotiates gender shock, animal violence, and the existence of this triple being seemingly outside both use and exchange, the “milliner” and the “mart,” as he terms it. (Armstrong 201-2)

Such breaking of boundaries was not confined to the exhibition space. Armstrong brings the story of Cinderella into the discussions of what she terms “glass culture,” in which the style of the Grotesque is interrogated. For the sake of this thesis, which centers on Victorian women, here the discussions of a story about a girl surrounded by elements of “the grotesque” which in turn help her in the pursuit of marriage, seems appropriate. From 1830 to 1890, the titles of as many as seventeen Cinderella stories were recorded to incorporate the element of glass slippers (Armstrong 207),

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<sup>10</sup> See Nikolaus Pevsner, *High Victorian Design: A Study of the Exhibits of 1851* (London : Architectural Press, 1951).

and, expectedly, the anxiety towards “an intensified, feminized commodity culture of endless consumption” is perceivable throughout these Victorian versions, embodied in the added elements of enormous looking glasses and endless accounts of fabrics, jewelry, flowers, and other ornaments (Armstrong 206). However, throughout all its vicissitudes, the Cinderella story maintains two elements: transformation and the “transgression of typological boundaries” (206). Armstrong clearly articulates this boundary-breaking:

With magic, vegetative life becomes a vehicle, a thing, a moving object, creatures are *mobilized* as human bodies, crossing categories, their species being metamorphosed, captured to work the will of “higher” beings. . . . The boundary firstly between animal, vegetable, and human, and secondly between living beings and things, bodies and objects, is disrupted. (207, original emphasis)

Within the world of Cinderella, distinctions between the animate and the inanimate, and between different species, are broken. Armstrong further argues that, in the nineteenth century, even the glass slippers fit into this world of metamorphosis and hybridity, as the fact that glass comes from sand and is transformed by “human labour and by breath” was then common knowledge. Thought of as “the residues of sand and human corporeality,” glass could be seen as a kind of hybrid between living being and things (207).

Such hybridity was particularly characteristic of the mid-nineteenth century when most of Brontë’s works were written, when exhibition spaces were packed with objects of mixed styles, etched glass with “natural floral and animal forms” began to develop (Armstrong 214), and green houses, conservatories, and pleasure gardens displayed floral hybrids, animals of mixed species, and even human beings, purposely merged with the plantations around them. John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843), author of several horticultural encyclopedias and the founder of the *Gardener’s Magazine* (1826),<sup>11</sup> for example, wrote about displaying “human species from the different countries imitated, habited in their peculiar costumes, and who may serve as gardeners or curators of the different productions” (*Remarks* 49). This style, characterized by a mixture of human bodies with objects, animals, and plants, constituted a “genre of the Grotesque,” which Christopher Dresser regards as a

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<sup>11</sup> The *Gardener’s Magazine* was the first periodical dedicated solely to horticulture. Loudon’s other publications included *The Encyclopedia of Gardening* (1822), *The Encyclopedia of Agriculture* (1825), *Magazine of Natural History* (1828), *The Encyclopedia of Plants* (1828), *Hortus Britannicus* (1830), *The Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, Villa Architecture* (1834), *Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum* (1838), *Suburban Gardener* (1838), *The Encyclopedia of Trees and Shrubs* (1842), and *On the Laying Out, Planting and managing of Cemeteries* (1843).

legitimate aesthetic category (Dresser 26-9), and which Armstrong adopts to discuss the mid-nineteenth century “glass culture” and things under glass, was a popular topic for critics of Victorian culture and scholars of Victorian design. Shelagh Wilson, for example, highlights the stylistic combination of plants and animals with utensils and vessels, or the mixture of the animate and the inanimate, in Victorian design, which is characterized by a “form of bodily presence. . . transgress[ing] the proper formal boundaries of an object” (Wilson 150). According to Wilson, the Grotesque is not merely a style of design, but serves as a site of reflection on the complexity of Victorian society: as the skins of savage beasts are turned into furniture, the realms of domesticity and wilderness merge, and a sense of simultaneous terror and delight surfaces. For Wilson the Grotesque is a way of dealing with the paradoxical co-existence of cultural phenomena by bringing them “into the actual *encounter* with objects” (Wilson 151). It is my contention that the concept of the Grotesque can also be applied to the “curious” in the nineteenth century. The sense of hybridity, of being both one thing and another, is central to my definition of “curiosity,” and in the nineteenth-century exhibition space from which my studies of Brontë’s works initiate, the Grotesque can be seen as an appropriate subsidiary category of “the curious,” which I regard as a site for the interrogation of boundaries, and how they are blurred, though not completely broken, throughout Brontë’s works.

### **Interrogations of the Boundary: The Object**

Besides the genre of “the Grotesque,” the sense of paradox involved in what I define as “Victorian curiosity” can be further explicated via discussion of Julia Kristeva’s “Object.” In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva defines the object as something that is, like the object, opposed to *I* (Kristeva 1). While the object “settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which. . . makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it,” the object is “the jettisoned object” through the exclusion of which the *I* is defined (2). Loathings of food, filth, waste, or dung are examples of abjection (2), and the “clean and proper” human body can only be delineated through the rejection of excrements, body fluids, and other physical wastes—the corpse is the ultimate bodily refuse, through the “thrust[ing] aside” of which the *I* is able to establish itself as a living being (3). However, it is not so much the lack of cleanness that evokes abjection, but

What disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. . . . Abjection. . . is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you. . . (4)

Thus, it can be deduced that “abjection is above all ambiguity” (9), something that threatens the boundary line, for, “while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens [sic] it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger” (9). The separation of the body from the abject does not cease; thus its cleanness and propriety are continually threatened. The abject is thus for the *I* “a *land of oblivion* that is constantly remembered” (8, original emphasis).

With the ambiguity and necessity of abjection in mind, I will define the nineteenth-century sense of “curiosity” as something metaphorically similar to the “skin on the surface of milk” that Kristeva contemplates as she explicates the process of abjection: when seeing or touching the skin, the *I* experiences a “gagging sensation” and “nausea”:

Along with sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. “I” want none of that element, sign of their desire; “I” do not want to listen, “I” do not assimilate it, “I” expel it. But since the food is not an “other” for “me,” who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish *myself*. (2-3, original emphases)

The skin on the surface of milk causes nausea primarily because it disrupts the borderline between liquid and solid, between food and waste, and ultimately such nausea, such a reaction of abjection, delimits the *I* while threatening it. Thus while following the tradition of cabinets of curiosities and defining curious objects as something out of their original context, something collected and taken away from their natural habitats and displayed in a certain way, in this thesis I will also consider nineteenth-century “curiosities” as those that threaten established boundaries: like the skin of milk, they are one and the other at the same time. Hence, the attraction of curious exhibitions in nineteenth-century England: by looking at these curiosities—waxworks, improbable hybrids, primitives, rare plants in conservatories—Victorians were thus able to separate themselves from the improper and unclean and in turn enhance the social, cultural, and anthropological categories and hierarchies so essential to Victorian society. On the other hand, like the skin on the surface of milk, these curiosities threaten with their ambiguity: waxworks resemble both living and



dead bodies; conservatory plants disrupt the rules of time and space; naked or half-naked “primitives” seem disturbing because of their similarity to their well-dressed spectators; delicate miniatures, models, and dolls’ houses subvert the difference between original and replica, gigantic and minuscule, and interior and exterior. In exhibitions of hybrids, taxonomical and categorical problems are particularly conspicuous. Like the abject, these curiosities define propriety, yet not without the consequence of “I abject[ing] myself within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish myself.” It is with such ambiguity that the first-person narrator of *Jane Eyre* attempts to delineate the relationship between herself and the monstrous Bertha, her predecessor as Rochester’s wife and her doppelgänger. Given the suggested similarities and mirrored relationships between Jane and Bertha, the latter’s confinement and absence both guarantees the “cleanness and propriety” of Jane’s body and legitimizes her moral integrity as Rochester’s future wife. Yet the recurring presence of Bertha in the house constantly threatens any sense of physical and moral completeness. The curiosity here lies in the ambiguous similarity and difference between Jane and Bertha, and such curiosity is both reassuring and threatening.

The concept of the cabinet of curiosity, or rather its ramifications, abounds in all of Brontë’s works: *boîtes*, portmanteaus, desks, drawers, cabinets, boudoirs, chambers, attics, houses... these are all given special attention; indeed, even Thornfield is intimated to be Bluebeard’s cabinet. The element of “curiosity” contained by the closed or locked “cabinets” exists in the heroines’ lives as they grow from adolescent girls to women, filling their upbringings with unsolved mysteries, mirroring images, and a sense of bizarreness that separates them from other women. Although cabinets of curiosities were traditionally filled with objects collected and arranged by men, in the domestic domain of these every-day cabinets of curiosities, it is a woman’s hand that rummages their contents. As Graham observes of Polly, even the girl herself is seen as a cabinet of curiosity, whose “amusement” lies within, where wonders are waiting to be extricated. Slipping readily from the position of curious spectators/collectors to the status of curiosities themselves, Brontëan heroines define themselves by interacting with the curious objects around them. Given the ubiquity of the image of “the cabinet of curiosity” in Brontë’s works, I will center my research on the subject of “curiosity,” and read Brontë’s works against various nineteenth-century *exhibitions*—which were the nineteenth-century version of that

long tradition called the “cabinet of curiosity”—in order to render explicit how, in Charlotte Brontë’s writing, the female image is explored, and how women become desirable by way of being “curious” to men.

### **Objects and Things**

This thesis thus centers on the relationship between subjects and objects, between human beings—especially women—and things. In order to elucidate the approach that this thesis adopts, a discussion of object-thing theories must be presented. Many thinkers have considered the difference between the “object” and the “thing.” Martin Heidegger, for example, points out that, etymologically, the word “object” entails oppositions: “to stand against or before,” “to throw against,” or “dissent” (qtd. in *OR* 10). Thus the object is defined against the subject, for it is only in relation to the subject that the object exists. The thing, on the other hand, denies the subject-object hierarchy and thus stands independently, exempt from the necessity to exist in relation to the subject. Heidegger takes the jug as an example:

The jug is a thing. What is the jug? We say: a vessel, something of the kind that holds something else within it. The jug’s holding is done by its base and sides. This container itself can again be held by the handle. As a vessel the jug is something self-sustained, something that stands on its own. This standing on its own characterizes the jug as something that is self-supporting, or independent. As the self-supporting independence of something independent, the jug differs from an object. An independent, self-supporting thing may become an object if we place it before us, whether in immediate perception or by bringing it to mind in a recollective re-presentation. However, the thingly character of the thing does not consist in its being a represented object, nor can it be defined in any way in terms of the objectness, the over-againstness, of the object. (Heidegger 114)

When placed in front of us—that is, when we interact with it or even think about it—the jug is considered an object, but as a thing in itself the jug eludes such definition. Kant defines “thing” as something that is, but, according to Heidegger, for Kant “that which is becomes the object of a representing that runs its course in the self-consciousness of the human ego. The thing-in-itself means for Kant: the object-in-itself” (Heidegger 119). Heidegger thus differentiates the thing from its entanglement with the object in the Kantian paradigm. Elizabeth Grosz contributes to this differentiation when she points out that from Descartes to Kant, the thing “became that against which we measured ourselves and our limits, the mirror of what we are not” (Grosz 124), thus the thing is “conceived as the other, or binary double, of the

subject, the self, embodiment, or consciousness” (124). She proposes that instead of thus seeing the “thing” as the object of human perceptions and experiences, we should consider it in terms of the theories of Darwin, Nietzsche, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, Henri Bergson, Richard Rorty, and Gilles Deleuze. These thinkers are “pragmatist philosophers,” for they “put the question of action, practice, and movement at the center of ontology” (125), and what their theories have in common is the “understanding of the *thing as question*, as provocation, incitement, or enigma” (125, original emphasis). The thing within these theories thus challenges the established epistemological hierarchy, just like the nineteenth-century “curiosities” I have hitherto defined. In order to explicate further the anxieties and ambiguities inherent in Victorian culture, this thesis examines closely the relationships between women and things.

Bill Brown further emphasizes the thing-ness of things, taking A. S. Byatt’s *The Biographer’s Tale* (2000) as an example: At the outset of the story,

Fed up with Lacan as with deconstructions of the Wolf-Man, a doctoral student looks up at a filthy window and epiphanically thinks, “I must have *things*.” He relinquishes theory to relish the world at hand: “A real, very dirty window, shutting out the sun. A *thing*.” (Brown 139, original emphasis)<sup>12</sup>

However, the exhausting over-theorization of things is inevitable, for “even the most coarse and commonsensical things, mere things, perpetually pose a problem because of the specific unspecificity that ‘things’ denotes” (Brown 140). Brown points out the specificity of objects and the unspecificity of things by highlighting that, in Byatt’s novel,

the interruption of the habit of looking *through* windows as transparencies enables the protagonist to look *at* a window itself in its opacity. As they circulate *through* our lives, we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture—above all, what they disclose about *us*), but we only catch a glimpse of things. We look through objects because there are codes by which our interpretative attention makes them meaningful, because there is a discourse of objectivity that allows us to use them as facts. A *thing*, in contrast, can hardly function as a window. We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us. . . (Brown 140, original emphasis)

It is only when the window loses its function as a window—only when the “codes by which our interpretative attention makes it meaningful”—that its being a “thing” becomes obvious to us. Here, the difficulty of theorizing the “thing” is resolved by its

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<sup>12</sup> Quotations from A. S. Byatt, *The Biographer’s Tale*: New York, 2001, p.2.

being out-of-context, estranged, and thus rendered *curious*; this is exactly what this thesis intends to do. By bringing into light the objects either removed from their original contexts and functions or having no practical function besides being looked at—such objects as those curiosities in a cabinet, which Benedict terms as “objects without a clear use”—this thesis aims to reveal the “curiosities” in Charlotte Brontë’s texts in order to highlight what a “thing” meant in Victorian culture, and how things helped to shape that culture. As Arjun Appadurai points out in *The Social Life of Things*, “even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context” (5). Furthermore, while such modernist theorists as Bruno Latour endeavor to argue that the dichotomy between the subject and the object, the thing and the human being, is something artificially fashioned by modernity,<sup>13</sup> this thesis tackles the moments when such distinction becomes problematic, when boundaries are blurred, and the curious people—especially women—become inseparable from curious objects.

From the outset of her writing career, Brontë’s imaginary world has been established upon a colossal amalgamation of grandiose scenery and things, magnificent things. Her juvenilia were “crowded with splendid palaces, hoary woods, rushing torrents, towering mountains, and the grand gestures of noble figures surrounded by luxurious drapery” (Alexander 303). The Angrians themselves are characterized by a majestic physicality; their bodies are, above all, “magnificently voluptuous” (*EW* II:2:4). Furthermore, the minuscule books in which the stories were written are themselves illustrative of the “thingness” that I have by far highlighted. According to Kate E. Brown, miniature books are “the site where craft becomes art and where the precious text becomes precious object,” and as a result the texts themselves become “curiously redundant” (Brown 404). Ultimately, Brontë’s early writings exhibit a curious play on size. While miniature books entails] for the reader an accessibility to the whole, the difficulty involved in reading such small words on the other hand implies a “commensurate inaccessibility” (Brown 405). Furthermore, while the books are tiny, they carry texts chronicling a world of grandiosity. Brown

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<sup>13</sup> Latour goes as far as arguing that instead of subjects and objects, the world of meaning consists of “quasi-objects” and “quasi subjects,” terms he borrows from Michel Serres. See Latour, “The Berlin Key or How to Do Words with Things,” trans. Lydia Davis, in *Matter, Maternity, and Modern Culture*, ed. P. M. Graves-Brown (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 10, 20.

points out that such “discrepancy between form and content” brings into question “the limitations of the body, rendering it gigantic, the hand too large to turn pages, the eyes too weak to make out the text” (405). Thus while the miniature books cannot be practically read, and while the Angrians are described as grand and voluptuous in stature but are in fact the literary counterpart of wooden toy soldiers, these early writings further explicate the curiousness of a miniature *thing*.

Along this line, this thesis draws mainly from Victorian material culture, from the constantly interrogated issues of “things” and how aspects of the culture was, and still is, reflected in, shaped by, and acted upon by things. Critics of Brontë have not neglected the interactive relationships between things and the Brontëan heroines. Elaine Freedgood, for example, examines the mahogany furniture in *Jane Eyre*, which, along with deal, walnut, and other then popular furniture material, not only serve as the “great class markers in Victorian fiction” (Freedgood 31), but also illustrate issues of class, environment, slavery, individualism, and imperialism brought forth by enclosure and deforestation, which in turn highlights the power relations involved in what Freedgood terms the “long violence of empire” (54). While I also examine things in the Victorian interiors and their cultural backgrounds, my focus is on the relationship between things in the Victorian interior and the interiority of Brontë’s heroines. With the abundance of insightful postcolonial and imperialistic studies on Brontë in mind, I seek to enrich the field by turning from the external world to that of the interior, by exploring further within from the domestic space to the innermost, most intimate spaces that enclose, and is enclosed within, Brontë’s mid-Victorian women.

In terms of such a focus on the interiority of Brontëan heroines, my approach is more similar to that of Sara T. Bernstein. Bernstein explores the function of fashion in the world delineated in *Villette*. She interrogates the relationship between fashion and the novel, two forms that are “interrelated” and “interdependent” (Bernstein 150): both “conjure the dead,” for both attempt to “reanimate the past, and in so doing, invent new possible futures” (152). Bernstein insists that, writing in a society dominated by fashion, by using fashion (and anti-fashion) as “a presence, an absence, and a ghost space,” Brontë shapes her heroine’s “views on gender, acquisition, and loss” (167). While I also see the things in Brontë’s world as conjuring death and informing the inner world of women, I do not consider Brontë’s imagery of things as functional. Whether consciously or unconsciously, I think

Brontë not only participated in the making of a material—and specifically “material”—culture, but was also in turn shaped by such culture. While Bernstein focuses on how Brontë uses fashion, I consider fashion, among other forms of expression in the nineteenth century, by first setting it against the socio-cultural and biographical background of Brontë herself. Furthermore, my studies center around the element of “curiosity” in Brontë’s texts, which highlights the thingness of things—an element that sets me apart from Bernstein’s contemplation of fashion in Brontë.

As far as the sense of curiosity in things is concerned, my research comes close to that of Eva Badowska. She points out that the original title of *Villette* was *Choseville*, which not only underscores the importance of “things,” but also illustrates the ambivalence inherent in the text:

Villette, “little city,” is a place apart, anonymous, diminutive, and self-referential, claustrophobically focused on Lucy's interiority. Choseville, however, is a public place, a modern and disorienting forum for flanerism and ventures to concerts, museums, and brilliant festivals. Lucy, the novel's first person narrator, belongs to both dimensions. (Badowska 1513)

I also consider the element of ambivalence as a recurring theme throughout Brontë’s texts, which helps define what I term “nineteenth-century curiosity.” Furthermore, Badowska asserts that “the cabinet of curiosities, a collection of buried treasures, is the text's most accurate image of the state of the bourgeois interior at mid-century, imagined as it is as a nostalgic collection of things” (1522), an observation that I acquiesce entirely. In this thesis I push the imagery of curiosity further, inspecting in Brontë not merely things and the spaces surrounding things, but also the bodies of Brontë’s heroines. Brontë’s female bodies, their shapes and boundaries, are as much fields/spaces of curiosity as the things and spaces surrounding them. Keeping in mind previous studies of curious *choses* in Brontë, I seek to provide a more thorough and focused reading of Brontë’s heroines.

Differing greatly from displays of fine arts, nineteenth-century novelty exhibitions permeated Victorian culture, influencing and reflecting the mode of Victorian desire, yet they are seldom discussed outside of the domain of historiography or museology. Yet contemplating nineteenth-century yearning for “curiosities” reveals much about the period’s fascination with secrecy, spectacle and desire, as well as the way women are represented. In this thesis, I will approach the Victorian female image as delineated in Brontë’s texts by exploring the Victorian anxiety over “boundaries.” The publication of evolutionary theories threatened the

boundary between human beings and animals, and theoretical developments in mental health put sanity and insanity on a spectrum instead of at two ends of a binary opposition: boundaries were thus shaken. I will argue that the domesticated exhibition spaces throughout Charlotte Brontë's works—cabinets of curiosities, pleasure gardens and conservatories, exhibitions of waxworks, and dolls' houses—reflect both an anxiety about and obsession with “over-reaching” or “boundary-crossing.” By juxtaposing the exhibitions and the established Victorian female image, I intend to explicate the Victorian sense of curiosity as reflected in Brontë's works. I believe that the discussion of exhibitions serves as an appropriate point of departure for the exploration of Victorian culture: although the nineteenth-century spectator realizes that the exhibiting space is “staged,”—with the objects of nature and art removed from their origins and placed in a space specially constructed for show—he is still willing to pay to gaze at those “curiosities”; likewise the anxiety evident in Brontë's description of her curious heroines and the curiosities surrounding them reveals how much Victorian society was actually aware of the “artificial constructedness” of the ideal female image and the domestic order established upon such an image.

## Chapter One Cabinet of Curiosity

In her 1846 poem entitled “Mementos,” Charlotte Brontë writes of the story of a girl not unlike the “first blue-stocking” in *Shirley*, the mind-child and literary counterpart of Shirley Keeldar. From the beginning stanzas of the poem, it becomes clear that there is an inherent parallel between the female protagonist and *things*. The poem begins thus:

Arranging long-locked drawers and shelves  
Of cabinets, shut up for years,  
What a strange task we've set ourselves!  
How still the lonely room appears!  
How strange this mass of ancient treasures,  
Mementos of past pains and pleasures;  
These volumes, clasped with costly stone,  
With print all faded, gilding gone;

These fans of leaves from Indian trees—  
These crimson shells, from Indian seas—  
These tiny portraits, set in rings—  
Once, doubtless, deemed such precious things;  
Keepsakes bestowed by Love on Faith,  
And worn till the receiver's death,  
Now stored with cameos, china, shells,  
In this old closet's dusty cells. (*Poems* 11)

The narrator goes on to describe the interior of the deserted house, where all is “unused, and dim, and damp” (*Poems* 12) and outside “all is ivy, clinging to chimney, lattice, gable grey” (12). It is later disclosed that these desolate mementos belong to the former mistress of the house, the heroine's deceased mother, whose death has rendered her daughter motherless—and emotionally fatherless, for the grieved father cannot stand the sight of the daughter. She thus grows up “uncherished” (16). Unlike most fictional heroines at her time, she is delineated entirely in terms of her interior merits: she has a “keen and fine intelligence,” which is sometimes shown through a fitful “ardour in her eye” and her “force of eloquence” (16-7), yet among crowds she is often “grave and retiring,” and only in “quiet spots by woods concealed” does her joy grow “wild and fresh” (17). Seemingly indifferent, she is by no means without feelings, for, “shrined in her heart and hid from day, / They [nature's feelings] burned unseen with silent flame” (18). It is not an accident that, in order to narrate the story of the girl, the poem starts from the innermost space—that of the drawers in which mementos are kept—and proceeds outwards to the interior and exterior of the house. Like these forsaken mementos, the girl is “concealed,” hidden deep in the core of the



ruins; her intelligence, passion, and originality shine unseen to the unobservant eye. As I will illustrate later, Brontë reveals here a then popular association of the woman and the intimate, private space that she occupies—as well as the objects kept in such a space. Besides the obvious fact that the “drawers and shelves of cabinets” treasuring “mementos of past pains and pleasures” constitute a private cabinet of curiosities, the repetition of “strange,” which the narrator exclaims twice in the first stanza, further defamiliarizes the space and the objects within, which in turn renders them “curious.” I will argue that it is precisely in the context of such “curiousness” that the hidden power of women can be revealed. Thus, in the following discussions, the interactions between Brontë’s heroines and their possessions are examined in order to explicate further the essential power of Brontëan heroines, which in turn reveals how womanhood is presented in Brontë’s world.

In *The System of Objects* Jean Baudrillard contemplates the order inherent in the bourgeois interior, where the furniture is “highly integrated,” and

[t]here is a tendency to accumulate, to fill and close off the space. The emphasis is on unfunctionality, immovability, imposing presence and hierarchical labeling. Each room has a strictly defined role corresponding to one or another of the various functions of the family unit, and each ultimately refers to a view which conceives of the individual as a balanced assemblage of distinct faculties. The pieces of furniture confront one another, jostle one another, and implicate one another in a unity that is not so much spatial as moral in character. (*SO* 13)

Indeed the unity formed by objects within the home is moral in character, for it conforms to the order of human society. The objects within the bourgeois interior work together to form an “organism” that reflects the familial order and the human relationship among the inhabitants. Thus, asserts Baudrillard, the “primary function of furniture and objects” in such a space is “to personify human relationships, to fill the space that they share between them, and to be inhabited by a soul” (13-4). As the interior of the home reflects the patriarchal order and social hierarchy more than that of any other space, within the home “[h]uman beings and objects are. . . bound together in a collusion in which the objects take on a certain density, an emotional value” (14). Given the essential role of the woman in Victorian domestic space, the interior space delineated by Brontë, consisted of the furniture and other objects with which the inhabitants daily interact, serves as a vantage point from which the emotional trajectory of her heroines can be mapped.

This chapter intends to explore Brontë's interpretation of womanhood by inspecting the "cabinets of curiosities" throughout her works—the enclosed spaces in which things are hidden, kept, or displayed, things especially significant to the heroines in different ways and rendered "curious" through Brontë's narratives. It is through their interaction with hidden objects that the hidden fire in Brontë's heroines can be externalized. Illuminated by Brontë's observations, the seemingly banal everyday objects become curious—displaced, hidden, or described in excessive detail; these objects are thus *defamiliarized*. They are hidden, for they carry meanings that, once deciphered, would shed light on the inner fire of Brontë's heroines. This chapter will first seek to illuminate the relationship between women and things by analyzing closely the most clandestine spaces in the home: the drawers. Then it goes on to observe the actual objects contained, or, rather, hidden, in tiny spaces, in order to explicate the "hidden power" so intrinsic to Brontë's heroines. In the last section of this chapter, the necessity of "cover" in Brontë's own life is examined. However, before actually examining these curious, hidden objects, the relationship between women and the space of the domestic interior must be discussed.

### **I. The Victorian Interior as Reflection of Women**

Victorian design manuals, asserts Michael Klotz in "Rearranging Furniture in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*," have their part in the discourse surrounding Victorian interior designs, which emphasize the associations between the furnishing of a space and its inhabitants. Lucy Orrinsmith, for example, asserts in her 1877 manual for the drawing room that "there is scope for originality within doors, and surely our rooms should be made to suit our individual tastes and characters" (144). Indeed, in the century with an "eruption of objects in the home" (Logan 26), one's "individual taste and character" was more than ever reflected in the rooms one inhabited. In *The Victorian Parlour*, Thad Logan points out that "the characteristic bourgeois interior" becomes "increasingly full of objects, cluttered—to modern eyes, at least—with a profusion of things, things that are not primarily functional, that do not have obvious use-value, but rather participate in a decorative, semiotic economy" (26). This semiotic economy allows the visitor of a space to read into the taste and character of its owner. This economy of course goes far beyond the Victorian period. It is similar to what Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood explain in *The World of Goods* (1979): "goods assembled together in ownership make physical, visible statements," argue

Douglas and Isherwood, and these statements are “read by those who know the code and scan them for information” (5). When assembled and arranged by a certain hand, objects would inevitably reflect the traces of that very hand.

Walter Benjamin has a similar notion in mind when he mulls over the most ordinary objects of daily life:

To dwell means to leave traces. In the interior, these are accentuated. Coverlets and antimacassars, cases and containers are devised in abundance; in these, the traces of the most ordinary objects of use are imprinted. In just the same way, the traces of the inhabitant are imprinted in the interior. (*Arcades* 9)

Writing in the twentieth century of nineteenth-century Paris, Benjamin’s contemplations are readily applicable to Victorian England, where the enthusiasm in interior designs became a national phenomenon. Although the association between objects and the human traces upon them is by no means specific to the nineteenth century, it was however at the time that such an association gradually gained popularity. Diana Fuss notes in *The Sense of an Interior* that “interiority” acquires its present meaning of “inner character or nature” in 1803 and “interior decoration” first appears in English only four years later, in 1807 (Fuss 16). Thus from the etymological development of the word “interiority,” comments Klotz, we can see clearly that in the nineteenth century “increasingly detailed and extensive thinking about the decoration of the home evolved in tandem with the growingly realistic depiction of interior life” (Klotz 17). Susan Stewart also points out that the urge to fill spaces with objects is inseparable from the modern anxiety to form a self:

For the environment to be an extension of the self, it is necessary not to act upon and transform it, but to declare its essential emptiness by filling it. . . . This filling in is a matter of ornamentation and presentation in which the interior is both a model and a projection of self-fashioning. (157)

I would push this point further to argue that as far as the meaning of “home” is concerned, women at Brontë’s time were more involved in the “semiotic economy” of interior design—as well as in the mutually-projective relationship between the self and the interior—than men. Elsie de Wolfe (1865-1950), for example, explicates in her influential book *The House in Good Taste* the important role women play in decorating a home. Though published in 1913, this volume records de Wolfe’s observations throughout the later half of the nineteenth century:

I . . . wish to trace briefly the development of the modern house, the woman’s house, to show you that all that is intimate and charming in the home as we know it has come from the unmeasured influence of women.

Man conceived the great house with its parade rooms, its *grand apartments* but woman found eternal parade tiresome, and planned for herself little retreats, rooms small enough for comfort and intimacy. In short, man made the house: woman went one better and made of it a home. (Wolfe I, original italics)

In other words, it is woman who is responsible for the construction of a home, and the taste of a domestic space is often thought to demonstrate the taste of its mistress.

Wolfe explains this clearly in her description of the perspective of a visitor in a late Victorian house:

A house is a dead-give-away . . . We are sure to judge a woman in whose house we find ourselves for the first time, by her surroundings. We judge her temperament, her habits, her inclinations, by the interior of her home. We may talk of the weather, but we are looking at the furniture. (Wolfe I)

The woman is judged by her surroundings, and even her womanliness is at stake.

Writer Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904) puts it clearly:

The more womanly a woman is, the more she is sure to throw her personality over the home, and transform it, from a mere eating and sleeping place, or an upholsterer's showroom, into a sort of outermost garment of her soul; harmonised with all her nature as her robe and the flower in her hair are harmonised with her bodily beauty . . . A woman whose home does not bear to her this relation of nest to bird, calyx to flower, shell to mollusk, is in one or another imperfect condition. She is either not really mistress of her home; or being so, she is herself deficient in the womanly power of thoroughly imposing her personality upon her belongings. (Cobbe)

As the outermost garment of a woman's soul, the home embodies and illustrates not only the ability and taste of its mistress, not only the traces of her presence as represented by the moving and arranging of furniture, but her innermost soul and her womanliness—her nature as a woman. The interiority of a room is inseparable from the “interiority” of its female owner.

## II. Private Spaces: The Model of Intimacy and the Sense of Control

With such a woman-object relationship in view, it is not a surprise that the Brontëan heroine is often seen against the environment that she occupies; ultimately she is presumed to “impose her personality upon her belongings.” In the same vein, here I would like to inspect the interior of the heroines' most private spaces—their drawers, desks, toilettes—which seem to be so purposefully ubiquitous throughout Brontë's texts, for the objects within these miniature cabinets of curiosities illustrate most clearly the inner economies of their owners, and it is by controlling these objects that external forces seek to control their owners. Indeed, as Gaston Bachelard insists,

wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life. Indeed, without these “objects” and a few others in equally high favor, our intimate life would lack a model of intimacy. (*PS* 78)

Through this “model of intimacy” I intend to explore the most private, the innermost, world of Brontë’s heroines. Here I also have Susan Stewart’s description of the narratives surrounding “collection” in mind. She explains that “the collection relies upon the box, the cabinet, the cupboard, the seriality of shelves. It is determined by these boundaries, just as the self is invited to expand within the confines of bourgeois domestic space” (157). I argue that the metaphor can work both ways: within the domestic domain, women hoard objects as if displaying a collection within a curiosity cabinet—it is in such enclosed spaces that the self is fully represented.

Thus in *Villette*, Madame Beck seeks to uncover Lucy’s personality and her intentions by examining Lucy’s belongings and raiding her drawer. She meticulously inspects Lucy and her belongings the very first night she lodges at her school. Madame Beck turns Lucy’s pockets inside out, counts her money, copies her keys, and even opens Lucy’s little memorandum-book—in which lies a “small plaited lock of Miss Marchmont’s grey hair” (*Villette* 85). It is clear from Brontë’s description that, among Lucy’s belongings, the lock of grey hair is the most curious object, and it is supposedly in this very object that Lucy’s secret inner life is to be revealed. However, as Lucy’s sole souvenir with a sentimental value, the lock of grey hair—obviously from the head of an elderly person—suggests the lack of romance in Lucy’s life. Presuming, wrongly, the covertness of human intentions in general, and women’s penchant for concealment in particular, the Madame turns to inspect Lucy’s belongings instead of observing her attitude and behavior; the banality of these objects proves that Lucy, as she herself says later, is “[I]overless and inexpectant of love” and thus “as safe from spies in [her] heart-poverty, as the beggar from thieves in his destitution of purse” (146). This is said when Lucy witnesses the Madame rummaging through her toilette and drawers, suspecting that there is a secret rendezvous between Lucy and Dr. John. Lucy watches the Madame’s inspection with curious eyes:

Open stood the lid of the work-box, open the top drawer; duly and impartially was each succeeding drawer opened in turn: not an article of their contents but was lifted and unfolded, not a paper but was glanced over, not a little box but was unlidded; and beautiful was the adroitness, exemplary the care with which the search was accomplished. . . . I will not deny that it was with a secret glee I watched her. . . . she was so

handy, neat, thorough in all she did: some people's movements provoke the soul by their loose awkwardness, hers satisfied by their trim compactness. I stood, in short, fascinated. . . (145)

It is obvious that, by handling Lucy's objects, Mme. Beck feels herself in full control of Lucy's being. The neatness of her movement and the exactness of her search communicate a sense of certainty, and, since Lucy has no secret at all, she in her turn enjoys the scene. Retreating quietly and coming back moments later, Lucy finds her belongings restored to their original state:

On revisiting my drawers, I found them all securely locked; the closest subsequent examination could not discover change or apparent disturbance in the position of one object. My few dresses were folded as I had left them; a certain little bunch of white violets that had once been silently presented to me by a stranger. . . , and which I had dried and kept for its sweet perfume between the folds of my best dress, lay there unstirred. . . (146-7)

The female hand that intrudes into the space of a female owner fights here a silent battle of espionage. If the womanliness, or, in Lucy's case, the spinsterhood, of the female owner is reflected by the interiority of her drawer, then here the intruding female hand—a hand that organizes, tidies, and carefully obliterates its own traces—is equally illustrative: while Lucy claims to hide no secrets, the Madame's sense of control is employed in secrecy. A female sense of control, at least as far as Madame Beck is concerned, should be invisible. A man would break into a woman's private space in an entirely different way. In Brontë, the male hand that probes into the female space always does so flamboyantly, leaving its traces everywhere.

An example of such male intrusion takes place between Lucy and M. Paul. One day, on seeing the Monsieur bending over her opened desk, she comments,

Now I knew, and had long known, that that hand of M. Emanuel's was on intimate terms with my desk; that it raised and lowered the lid, ransacked and arranged the contents, almost as familiarly as my own. The fact was not dubious, nor did he wish it to be so: he left signs of each visit palpable and unmistakable (430).

The dominating male hand "ransacked and arranged" the contents of the woman's space, offering instruction and control that is not to be ignored. Besides leaving tactile traces and little gifts—mainly books he thinks Lucy should read, which, though given with generosity and sincerity, no doubt serve as another means of control—he furthermore marks his visit with traces of smell:

I profited by his capricious good-will in loans full welcome and refreshing. Between a shallow dictionary and worn-out grammar would magically grow a fresh interesting new work, or a classic, mellow and sweet in its ripe page. Out of my work-basket would laughingly peep a

romance, under it would lurk the pamphlet, the magazine, whence last evening's reading had been extracted. Impossible to doubt the source whence these treasures flowed. . . —*they smelt of cigars*. (431, original italics)

His presence, always highlighted by the scent of cigar, becomes ubiquitous. The smell lingers in the interior space of Lucy's desk, and the sense of control that such close attendance and inspection inevitably evoke thus stays long after the Professor himself has left. Even the books themselves are censored before lent to Lucy—especially when they are novels—pages are cut away to the point that sometimes even the narratives are interrupted (435). Such censorship was often employed by fathers and husbands in the nineteenth century to ensure the intactness of innocence and womanliness, and here it is apposite that such censorship takes place within a female domain: as Lucy's future lover the Monsieur is looking to maintain the “womanliness” supposedly inherent in the interior space of her desk.

If in M. Paul and Lucy's case the flirtation seems to be intimated in the maneuvering of Lucy's objects, in the case of Louis and Shirley in *Shirley* such sexual tension is rendered more physical and more obvious. In the absence of Shirley and the Symptons, Louis Moore wanders around the house alone, until he stops in the oak-room, where Shirley's desk is situated. Louis walks towards the desk and inspects Shirley's working station:

He makes discoveries. A bag, a small satin bag, hangs on the chair-back. The desk is open, the keys are in the lock; a pretty seal, a silver pen, a crimson berry or two of ripe fruit on a green leaf, a small, clean, delicate glove—these trifles at once decorate and disarrange the stand they strew. Order forbids details in a picture: she puts them tidily away; but details give charm. (*Shirley* 435)

Indeed, the details of Shirley's touches are enchanting in Louis' eyes. “Her mark,” he exclaims, “here she has been—careless, attractive thing!. . . Why does she leave fascination in her footprints?” (435) It is not surprising that Louis finds these objects fascinating. Exhibiting both delicate man-made objects and fruits from nature, this working stand resembles a cabinet of curiosity. It is through the curious eye, the eye of defamiliarization, that Louis sees Shirley's belongings, whose physical presence punctuates Shirley's absence. While the seal and the pen certainly belong to the desk, the crimson berries “of ripe fruit” indicate a sensuousness not entirely compatible with the space. Furthermore, the single glove apparently left behind in haste, though clean and delicate, illustrates the endearing carelessness in Shirley's character. Furthermore, the glove, redolent of the hand it once enveloped, intimates a

corporeality strongest in her absence. Such a curious combination of elements strongly marks Shirley's presence at her absence; even the relatively uninteresting seal and pen indeed carry her traces, for they are constantly touched by her fingers.

By admiring, handling, and mentally collecting her traces—her “footprints,” as he calls them—Louis feels an almost physical closeness to Shirley. His strategy of actually maneuvering Shirley through the manipulation of her things—from her belongings his control extends to her own body, and such control is conducted entirely through tactile metaphors—is so germane to the relationship between women and things that it is worthy to be mentioned here in its entirety:

“. . . Let me lock up the desk and pocket the keys: she will be seeking them to-morrow: she will have to come to me. I hear her—

“Mr. Moore, have you seen my keys?”

“So she will say in her clear voice, speaking with reluctance, looking ashamed, conscious that this is the twentieth time of asking. I will tantalize her: keep her with me, expecting, doubting; and when I *do* restore them, it shall not be without a lecture. Here is the bag, too and the purse; the glove—pen—seal. She shall wring them all out of me slowly and separately: only by confession, penitence, entreaty. I never can touch her hand, or a ringlet of her head, or a ribbon of her dress, but I will make privileges for myself: every feature of her face, her bright eyes, her lips, shall go through each change they know, for my pleasure: display each exquisite variety of glance and curve, to delight—thrill—perhaps, more hopelessly to enchain me. If I *must* be her slave, I will not lose my freedom for nothing.” (440-1, original italics)

It is obvious that hiding Shirley's keys is a habitual trick of Louis'. He grasps the opportunity to tantalize her by controlling her things. Indeed he cannot touch her hand, hair, or dress—although the emphasis on his inability to touch them further intimates his desire to do so—yet by keeping her things as hostage, he is able to control entirely her emotions and even her body. Handling the objects covered by the traces of her touch, Louis in turn touches her mentally by picturing her face, eyes, and lips; he handles her body by making her expressions change *for his pleasure*. From touch to touch these objects of curiosity exhibit a sense of control, a sensuous physicality too strong to overlook. While the woman bestows her own self upon her objects—the objects enclosed within a space belonging to her—the male hand arranges, controls, and brings changes, inevitably inscribing them with sensuality.

If the desire to inspect/control others via inspecting/controlling their drawers and desks—the spaces containing objects by which one's personality is most directly embodied; spaces in which one's deepest secrets are most easily found hidden—is illustrated by the searches of Madame Beck, M. Paul, and Louis, another sense of



control, the control of one's own life via interior objects, is embodied in the compulsive habit of Hortense Moore. The issue of spinsterhood is discussed throughout *Shirley*, and, although she is not yet an old maid, Hortense seems to be bound to lead the life of a spinster. Her first appearance in the book is directly followed by the repulsed reaction of a man. Her head appears behind the open door:

It might not be the head of a goddess—indeed a screw of curl-paper on each side the temples quite forbade that supposition—but neither was it the head of a Gorgon, yet Malone seemed to take it in the latter light. (18)

Indeed, Hortense is not the most popular among young gentlemen, nor is she as able and enterprising as Miss Mann and Miss Ainley, who dedicate their lives to the betterment of the society. She has managed to make her home “clean and fresh” (18), yet her house-keeping ability does not set her apart from other spinsters. Miss Mann's house, for example, looks tidy and comfortable enough when Caroline enters:

Ushered into Miss Mann's little parlour, Caroline found her as she always found her, surrounded by perfect neatness, cleanness, and comfort; (after all, is it not a virtue in old maids that solitude rarely makes them negligent or disorderly?) no dust on her polished furniture, none on her carpet, fresh flowers in the vase on her table, a bright fire in the grate. She herself sat primly and somewhat grimly tidy in a cushioned rocking-chair, her hands busied with some knitting. . . (152)

Just like the milieu that she inhabits, Miss Mann sits “primly and grimly tidy.”

Surrounded by the tidiness that is her home, Miss Mann becomes yet another piece of furniture. Susan Stewart's delineation of the mechanism inherent in collected objects enclosed in a space seems here appropriate: she argues that “the contained here *is* the self; the material body is simply one more position within the seriality and diversity of objects. Private space is marked by an exterior material boundary and an interior surplus of signification” (159). Being a spinster, the entirety of Miss Mann's life is embodied by the space that she occupies alone, and she becomes part of that space, just like other objects. Likewise, Hortense's purpose in life consists merely of managing the Moore household and teaching Caroline, the climax of her days being the intense arguments she has with her maid concerning how the food should be prepared. She depends so much on such negligible pleasures that she has to make excuses for it: “I am harassed with the girl,” complains Hortense of her maid Sara, “yet I cannot part with her lest I should get a worse” (56). She claims to be “possessed of penetration” (57), yet she is blind to the true nature of events and people around her, including those most close to her. She is able to see neither the

character and ability of her cousin-student Caroline (57-8), nor the burgeoning affection between her brother and Caroline. She

had an excellent opinion of herself, an opinion not wholly undeserved, for she possessed some good and sterling qualities; but she rather over-estimated the kind and degree of these qualities, and quite left out of the account sundry little defects which accompanied them. You could never have persuaded her that she was a prejudiced and narrow-minded person, that she was too susceptible on the subject of her own dignity and importance, and too apt to take offence about trifles; yet all this was true. (55)

Although Hortense seems to indulge in her own prejudice and ignorance to the point that she is unaware of the pathetic nature of her own life, her almost obsessive habit of arranging her drawers illustrates her anxiety. She is forever rummaging her drawers alone up-stairs, an “unaccountable occupation in which she spen[ds] a large portion of each day, arranging, disarranging, rearranging and counter-arranging” (66). During this time, Caroline, getting lost in the “maze” of her studies, in her teacher’s absence carries her book to the counting house and “get[s] the rough place made smooth” by Robert’s aid (66).

When Robert comes home after his injury, Caroline comes to visit. However, even at the presence of a long-absent brother and a long-absent guest, Hortense still goes upstairs after tea, for “she ha[s] not rummaged her drawers for a month past” due to Robert’s condition, and “the impulse to perform that operation [is] now become restless” (501). Again Hortense’s absence provides Caroline and Robert with the opportunity to reconcile, and to resume the familiar terms on which they used to be. Brontë’s repeated mentioning of Hortense’s habit makes it curious: in the monotony of Miss Moore’s life, the only thing she has full control over is the content of her drawers. This seemingly curious habit can be better understood when seen in the light of Susan Stewart’s contemplation of the relationship between the self and the interior space: “[n]ot simply a consumer of the objects that fill the décor,” she writes, “the self generates a fantasy in which it becomes producer of those objects, a producer by arrangement and manipulation” (158). Thus by rummaging her drawers—by overcoming *things*—Hortense not only maintains a sense of certainty that her life fails to provide, but she also acquires a sense of autonomy and creativity otherwise lacking in her life; amidst the meaninglessness of her life, her only escape lies in giving significance to the trivialities of which such a life is composed. It is through the objects which predominate Victorian households that the very nature of Hortense’s

life—the life of a spinster whose happiness and existence lies in housekeeping for her brother, in other words, in managing *things*—is revealed. Ironically, this habit repeatedly provides the chance for Robert and Caroline to establish a relationship that might render Hortense superfluous. Her habit of controlling things betrays her pathetic lack of control. Although Hortense is not included by Brontë in the category of “old maids”—shrunken by age, unattractive, and even masculine—the material reality surrounding her life—the hideousness of her attire, the meticulousness with which she attends to trifling matters, the stubbornness with which she maintains both her opinion and her life-style, and the curiousness of her habit to rummage drawers—all point to the barrenness that is her life.

If Hortense finds temporary relief in rummaging the interior of her drawers, and if, as Susan Stewart points out, the filling of a space with objects is “a matter of ornamentation and presentation in which the interior is both a model and a projection of self-fashioning,” then in Caroline’s case it is precisely the inability to “fill the space” that reflects the desperation of her life. As a child she was almost kept captive by her own father:

She recollected—a dark recollection it was—some weeks that she had spent with him in a great town somewhere, when she had had no maid to dress her or take care of her; when she had been shut up, day and night, in a high garret-room, without a carpet, with a bare uncurtained bed, and scarcely any other furniture; when he went out early every morning, and often forgot to return and give her her dinner during the day, and at night, when he came back, was like a madman, furious, terrible; or—still more painful—like an idiot, imbecile, senseless. (87-8)

Here the *lack* of objects becomes nightmarish: the monotony of her days corresponds both to the emptiness of the room and to the painful experience with a failed father figure. Locked up as if abandoned in a void, Caroline waits endlessly for the return of her father to relieve her of the emptiness that is her life. His presence is most strongly felt in his absence, for in such an empty life his reappearance at the door is all that Caroline longs for, even though his arrival brings with it as much dread and misery as his leaving. The imprisonment seems to last forever. Even her father’s return—as either a madman or an idiot—would not signify an end to her torture. She is the sole object in the cabinet of curiosity, locked up, hidden, frequently visited yet never taken out of the box. For her father, she is nothing but a burden (88). It is not until she becomes desperate at the control of her father and bursts out screaming that she is finally rescued from the dungeon-like room (88). The childhood trauma haunts her

even after she grows up, for she merely moves from one empty house to another. Lacking a mistress of the house, the Rectory is dominated by a father figure almost as negligent as the father that Caroline remembers. In such a household, Caroline has no place in the decorating and furnishing of rooms—she is bereft of the opportunity to “throw her personality over the home, and transform it. . . into a sort of outermost garment of her soul.” The lack of such opportunity to have her “interiority” embodied by the objects in the domestic interior corresponds to the lack of meaning in her life. Thus she “continually think[s] of the Rectory as a dreary old place” because in her desperation and loneliness she cannot shed thoughts of the graves under the churchyard. She is so obsessed with such thoughts that she “grow[s] what is called nervous” (202). She cannot stop “musing” about “remnants of shrouds, and fragments of coffins, and human bones and mould” (206). The traces of death in the objects buried underground haunt her in a way not unlike the memory of her childhood experience: the emptiness of her childhood days is reincarnated in the remnants of death that seem to negate human efforts towards happiness and render such endeavors futile.

Given the close relationship between the interior space and its female owner, it is not surprising that when Jane Eyre turns out to be the heiress of a handsome fortune and the cousin of the Riverses, the first thing she does is to “*clean down* Moor House from chamber to cellar,” polish everything and then arrange all the objects “with mathematical precision” (450, original italics). Her stance in the world is indeed marked by her newly acquired wealth, yet her identity as an independent and complete *self* is defined by her place in a household, as the manager of domestic affairs. Hortense’s compulsive drawer-rummaging thus can be seen as epitomizing a persistent, though unsuccessful, attempt to create for herself a permissible place within a household in which she will one day become redundant—the “third party” in a home based on a conjugal relationship. Caroline’s desperation comes from her inability to find a meaning in life to thus define her being, which is the result of her failure to feel any domestic happiness at all: living in a house—to wit, not a home—without a female touch, and seeing no hope in becoming a mistress, the co-founder of a future family, Caroline is trapped within empty spaces in which no furniture is to be arranged. In Brontë, the identity of an individual being—particularly of a woman, that is—is embodied by objects enclosed within a certain space. The countless

cabinets of curiosity thus created should each be examined in order to reveal the true self, the aspirations, struggles, traumas and hidden power of the heroines.

### III. Souvenirs Kept in Enclosed Spaces

It is telling that Brontë has entitled her 1846 poem about a girl characterized by her hidden power “Mementos.” While the objects hoarded, collected, or displayed in the interior living spaces in which Brontë’s heroines reside somehow stand in for the mental, or emotional, interiority of their female owners, and while the hand of external control seeks to grasp, subjugate, or manipulate these women by handling the objects lying within the most private of their living spaces, souvenirs—objects whose value lies not in functionality, and which are especially kept invisible in casketed spaces “out of the context” of every-day life—serve as the embodiment of a “hidden fire” characteristic of Brontë’s heroines. A sense of disorientation—the above-mentioned “out-of-context-ness”—renders these souvenirs curious, and, kept within tiny enclosed spaces, they constitute the content of a cabinet of curiosity. The souvenir, in this sense, is commensurate with Baudrillard’s definition of the “possessed object”:

If I use a refrigerator to refrigerate, it is a practical mediation: it is not an object but a refrigerator. And in that sense I do not possess it. *A utensil is never possessed, because a utensil refers one to the world; what is possessed is always an object abstracted from its function and thus brought into relationship with the subject. . . .* Such objects together make up the system through which the subject strives to construct a world, a private totality. (SO 91-2, original italics)

Having no practical value at all, souvenirs are the “possessed objects” *par excellence*. Thus, in Brontë, it is the souvenir that is “brought into relationship” with the heroines; it is through the souvenir that the “private totality” they strive to construct can be illustrated. Baudrillard further asserts that the object is a mirror to human consciousness, and “as a mirror the object is perfect, precisely because it sends back not real images, but desired ones,” and thus “*everything that cannot be invested in human relationships is invested in objects*” (SO 96, original italics). Thus I will argue that the souvenir, carrying immense emotional value, mirrors, externalizes, and embodies the unaccountable “hidden fire” inherent in these heroines. Furthermore, enclosed, these souvenirs and the aforementioned interior spaces can be seen as cabinets of curiosities that epitomize what “womanliness” means for Brontë.

Susan Stewart explains how the capacity that objects have to “serve as traces of authentic experience” is “exemplified by the souvenir” (135). In Brontë, souvenirs abound—they are casketed and kept carefully in the possession of the heroines, commemorating events and feelings in their lives: events whose significance can only be deciphered by the keeper of these souvenirs, and feelings meant to be hidden or buried along with the objects emblemized. Stewart explains the system of the souvenir:

The souvenir is by definition always incomplete. And this incompleteness works on two levels. First, the object is metonymic to the scene of its original appropriation in the sense that it is a sample. . . . Second, the souvenir must remain impoverished and partial so that it can be supplemented by a narrative discourse, a narrative discourse which articulates the play of desire. . . It [the souvenir] will not function without the supplementary narrative discourse that both attaches it to its origins and creates a myth with regard to those origins. (136)

The value of the souvenir thus depends on the narrative that the keeper ascribes to it, and such value is private, personal, and intimate. The souvenir “reduces the public, the monumental, and the three-dimensional into the miniature, that which can be enveloped by the body, or into the two-dimensional representation, that which can be appropriated within the privatized view of the individual subject” (137-8). Thus the souvenir is far from an abstract idea, a mere emblem of a past experience—the materiality of the object itself is an essential element in the entire system of nostalgia, for “the acute sensation of the object—its perception by hand taking precedence over its perception by eye—promises, and yet does not keep the promise of, *reunion*” (Stewart 139, original italics). By touching the souvenir, the possessor thus expects to revisit the already lived experience, now existing only in memories. In other words, the “acute sensation” brings back memories so vivid that one seems able to re-experience the experienced.

In Brontë, it is usually the woman who keeps souvenirs, and not only do these souvenirs—kept and revisited with the curious eye and hand as if curiosities in a cabinet—empower the woman with narrative ability, but their secrecy and concealment often correspond to the hidden fire that serves as the quintessential characteristic of Brontë’s heroines. In consideration of the narrative power associated with the souvenir, as well as the essentiality of the tactile experience in its system, I have singled out “hair” among other souvenirs surrounding Brontë’s heroines in order to examine how, through delineating the interactions between women and these hair-

as-souvenirs, Brontë seeks to represent her vision of the female “hidden power.” While souvenirs serve to reduce “the public, the monumental, and the three-dimensional” into something that can be “enveloped by the body,” hair-as-souvenir is by nature already one with the body, and thus more private and intimate than souvenirs of any other form. If in the “Victorian interior” section I have contemplated Victorian womanhood as reflected in the space occupied by a woman, in the following discussion I intend to examine how such womanhood is further reflected in the *objects* most adjacent to the female body.

### **Hair as Souvenir: the Brontëan Heroine as Idolater**

In her 1984 article, “The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination,” Elizabeth Gitter explores the intricate and ambivalent imagery of women's hair in nineteenth-century novels, paintings, and poetry. Hair has long been associated with narrative power. In William Holman Hunt's renowned painting, for example, “The Lady of Shalott” (Fig.1) is “either frenziedly weaving her web or fighting to get free of it” (Gitter 939), and the entangling, cobweb-like thread answers to her free-flowing hair. This image is derived from Lord Tennyson's 1842 poem of that same title, in which the Lady, unseen and unheard by the world she observes day after day, re-creates with thread what she sees: “in her web she still delights / To weave the mirror's magic sights” (“Shalott” II. 64-5). The web is her text. As a weaver, both the thread and her hair bespeak a self-assertion that compensates for her silence and invisibility. The Arachne-like Lady embodies not merely sexual power, but a power of narrative, a power charged with both creativity and a strong voice. Such narrative power is, as I will later argue, again exemplified in *Villette*, where, as mentioned before, Lucy Snowe keeps a lock of Miss Marchmont's grey hair in her pocket (*Villette* 85). This lock of hair accompanies her across the sea on a journey to her new life—it is the sole souvenir of her life before *Villette*. Susan Stewart explains the semiotics of the souvenir: “Within the operation of the souvenir, the sign functions not so much as object to object, but beyond this relation, metonymically, as object to event/experience” (136), and in Lucy's case the lock of hair from the head of a deceased woman commemorates an event of death that becomes paradoxically empowering to her.

Looking after Miss Marchmont one February night, Lucy trembles at the piercing sound of the storm, which she considers as an ominous premonition. Indeed,

this night is in Lucy's recollection—for the entire novel is narrated in the past tense, in the form of a memoir—filled with images of death and Miss Marchmont's momentary recovery prior to death, yet the fierceness and power associated with the imagery of the storm foretells a sense of action, of impulse. The storm falls to “a dead calm” around midnight, and the fire in the hearth, which “had been burning dead,” suddenly “glow[s] up vividly” (47). At this very moment, Miss Marchmont also wakes up and regards Lucy “with unusual earnestness” (47). “I love Memory tonight,” she tells Lucy, for Memory is “bringing back to [her] heart, in warm and beautiful life, realities—not mere empty ideas—but what were once realities, and that [she] long ha[d] thought *decayed, dissolved, mixed in with grave-mould*” (47, my italics): in the midst of the night she recalls time and again her bygone youth and the moment when her lover died in her arms (48-50). At the end of this very stormy night, Miss Marchmont herself passes away. The lock of Miss Marchmont's hair is for Lucy a memento of the old lady who she has grown to love, yet, taken from the head of the deceased old woman, the lock of hair is also inevitably associated with death, and with the stormy night which saw the last of Miss Marchmont. Paradoxically, the referent behind such a souvenir of death—the stormy February night—is what “stimulate[s]” Lucy “into action” (45), for she must be “goaded, driven, stung, forced to energy” (45). It is this very night of death that prompts Lucy; she thus embarks on her journey to a new life abroad, although she does complain of the ephemerality of her seemingly sheltered life with Miss Marchmont: “My little morsel of human affection,” contemplates Lucy of her relationship with the late Miss Marchmont, “which I prized as if it were a solid pearl, must melt in my fingers and slip thence like a dissolving hailstone” (46). While the “morsel of human affection” has vanished along with the old lady, the lock of hair—an actual part of the human body from whence the affection came—is kept in Lucy's possession. As a token, paradoxically, of both death and undying memories, of both passive nostalgia and active progression in life, the lock of female hair empowers its female keeper, teaching her the necessary pains in life while inspiring her to move forward.

Besides inspiring her into action, for Lucy the lock of hair also represents a narrative power. For one thing, it is taken on the night in which Miss Marchmont seems to come alive after a long ailment and tells the story of her own life. On the other hand, up to this point Lucy has not been able to tell her own story: what has happened to her between her visit to the Bretttons and her employment by Miss



Marchmont is unknown, and, while she narrates the incidents between the Brettons and Little Polly with details, her own involvement in the narrative seems to be minimal. Miss Marchmont's death seems to transform her, and she is gradually able to delineate her own story—though not without reserve and denial. The lock of hair thus can be seen as a token of such transformation, such awakening of narrative power. It is telling that this lock of hair seems to be insignificant under Mme. Beck's surveillance, for, as in the story of the Lady of Shalott, who is never seen ("Shalott" I.24-7) and whose narrative power lies in the web she weaves—a web that visually represents her vision<sup>14</sup>—Lucy's "hidden fire" and her narrative power, both emblemized by the lock of hair, are invisible. Furthermore, if hair-as-souvenir here serves as a token of memory and death—death that is both agonizing and inspiring—it also serves as the emblem of a power specifically feminine. Besides the fact that Miss Marchmont's given name is Maria, the name of Charlotte Brontë's deceased sister whose piety and female virtue had been immortalized in Charlotte's mind by her early death, the story that the old lady tells prior to her own death serves to illuminate Brontë's interpretation of female power. It is in the stormy night that the lock of hair stands for that the turning point in Miss Marchmont's life is disclosed, from which point on she leads the life of a spinster, a life of barrenness and despair. It is the prophetic ending of such a life—an ending in which all the womanly energy that Miss Marchmont has hoarded unused throughout the years is released, and all the aspirations for happiness that she has forsaken are revived—that awakens Lucy from her quiet, cloistered life. The greyness of the hair, the very materiality of it, serves as a warning, a symbol of repressed sexuality and wasted youth. From a life lacking in domestic blessings, Lucy acquires the momentum to pursue her own life—for, no matter how Lucy attempts to dismiss the possibility of her own happiness, she still wishes to find a place for herself in the world, preferably as a wife or otherwise as an independent woman.

Indeed, hair has long been seen as an embodiment of female sexuality, a sexuality both powerful and ambivalent, challenging the boundary between the divine and the wicked. Elizabeth Gitter points out that, endowed with long hair that seems to flow out of control, woman is both Penelope and Circe, both the angel and the

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<sup>14</sup> As shown in William Holman Hunt's popular painting "the Lady of Shalott" (1905), the Lady's thread is entangled with her hair, which flows freely around her as if underwater. The link between the power of hair and her weaving is quite conceivable.

mermaid (939): while the “hair tents” (Gitter 941) of the loving women envelop their men and provide them with shelter, the hair as a representation of sexuality also allures and ensnares men. Indeed, well before the Victorian “obsession” (Gitter 936) with the imagery of golden hair, an established paradigm of hair symbolism had already been ingrained in the Western imagination. Hair has long been regarded as a symbol of female power that is at once innocent and decadent, both magically sheltering and malevolently enchanting. Milton’s Eve, for example, boasts of hair that betrays her sexuality:

Her unadorned golden tresses wore  
 Dissheveld, but in wanton ringlets wav'd  
 As the Vine curls her tendrils, which impli'd  
 Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway,  
 And by her yeilded, by him best receivd,  
 Yeilded with coy submission, modest pride,  
 And sweet reluctant amorous delay. (*PL* 4.305-11)

Innocent as Eve is supposed to be, her subjection is a disguise of her “gentle sway”; her submission is coy, and her pride modest. Her ambivalent attitude is embodied by her hair, which is “dissheveld” and in “wanton ringlets.” For Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar such descriptions suggest “a sinister potential” (Gilbert and Gubar 199). At the extreme of such sinister potential are the mermaids who sit on rocks combing their hair while charming sailors with their enthralling songs, and Medusa, characterized by her hair of snakes which embodies the power to render men impotent.

In Brontë, the female sexuality embodied by hair-as-souvenir, while not so violent, is equally ambivalent. Emblemized as an object enclosed in a tiny space, the female sexuality delineated by Brontë is inseparable from secrecy and disavowal. If Miss Marchmont’s grey hair is associated with narrative power, in *Shirley*, hair becomes for the heroine a token of thwarted narrative—thwarted because of the impossibility of narration, thwarted because of the disavowal necessary in the case of uncontrollable passion. This uncontrollable passion is represented by Caroline. Escorted home by Robert after a pleasant night, Caroline returns to her room and lets down her hair, which is now “loosened and falling thick, soft, and wavy to her waist” (84). It is apparent that her sexuality is here unraveled along with her hair. Indeed, Caroline has “a fine flow” of hair, which she wears “in picturesque profusion” (64), while Shirley is “not a blonde, like Caroline” (170) and wears her dark brown hair in a clear, distinguished way (170). Elizabeth G. Gitter discusses the imagery of golden hair as follows:

While women's hair, particularly when it is golden, has always been a Western preoccupation, for the Victorians it became an obsession. In painting and literature, as well as in their popular culture, they discovered in the image of women's hair a variety of rich and complex meanings, ascribing to it powers both magical and symbolic. Golden hair, through which wealth and female sexuality are inevitably linked, was the obvious and ideal vehicle for expressing their notorious—and ambivalent—fascination both with money and with female sexual power. (936)

Caroline's sexuality and her desire to assert herself in the world are, like her hair, too profuse and too blonde to stay within bounds. After all, it is an all-too-familiar concept in Western literature, states Gitter, that "the more abundant the hair, the more potent the sexual invitation implied by its display, for folk, literary, and psychoanalytic traditions agree that the luxuriance of the hair is an index of vigorous sexuality, even of wantonness" (Gitter 938).<sup>15</sup> Thus, in *Shirley*, as in many other Victorian texts, the exchange of locks of hair as romantic souvenirs can be seen as charged with sexual tension. Such intimation can be traced back to the hair imagery established in the early eighteenth-century literary tradition, the most renowned example being Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712). Here it is noteworthy that it is through the exchange of hair, her luxuriant locks for Robert's short curls, that Caroline's sexuality is materialized. Caroline treasures the lock of Robert's short, curly hair, which she keeps in a tiny locket. She never parts with the trinket: "when dressed it was hidden in her bosom; as she lay in bed she always held it in her hand" (355), and she clings to it in her sickness. When Mrs. Pryor examines the necklace while Caroline sleeps, she suddenly wakes up in terror and exclaims in delirium: "Don't take it from me, Robert! Don't! It is my last comfort, let me keep it. I never tell any one whose hair it is—I never show it" (355). While Robert has not asked her to keep it a secret, her own guilt in treasuring this trinket has rendered her silent.

This silence is indicative of a fear of confronting her own emotions. Her complicated feelings towards Robert are here embodied by a souvenir of hair. The lock of hair, lying under the "crystal face" of the locket, resembles an object displayed—though privately—in a cabinet of curiosity. It is curious for it is a souvenir of the human body. Severed from its original source, the lock of hair is a metonymic reminder of a whole that is forever out of reach. Here, Susan Stewart's

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<sup>15</sup> For examples of hair as an embodiment of sexuality see Charles Berg, *The Unconscious Significance of Hair* (London: Allen, 1951) 26-30, and Havelock Ellis, *Erotic Symbolism*, vol. 5 of his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: Davis, 1920) 194.

contemplation of the souvenir seems quite apposite: “The souvenir speaks to a context of origin through a language of longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia” (135). For Caroline, the value of the lock of hair—a sample taken from a human body—is thus in proportion to the impossibility of acquiring its entirety. Such structure of mind is, in Stewart’s words, similar to “the structure of Freud’s description of the genesis of the fetish”:

[A] part of the body is substituted for the whole, or an object is substituted for the part, until finally, and inversely, the whole body can become object, substituting for the whole. Thus we have the systematic transformation of the object into its own impossibility, its loss and the simultaneous experience of a difference which Freud characterizes as the fetishist’s both knowing and not knowing the anatomical distinctions between the sexes. (Stewart 135)

Despite the fact that the Freudian fetishist is usually a man, here the mental condition of disavowal, the “knowing and not knowing,” does apply. The simultaneous acknowledgment and denial of the fetishist is here embodied by Caroline’s obsessive possession of the trinket, which she considers as her “last comfort.” She is fully aware of the impossibility of her conjugal future with Robert, and the lock of hair, along with the common meanings of emotional bond inherent in it, serve as a temporary escape from such a fact. However,

The possession of the metonymic object is a kind of dispossession in that the presence of the object all the more radically speaks to its status as a mere substitution and to its subsequent distance from the self. . . It is experienced, as is the loss of the dual relation with the mother, as catastrophe and *jouissance* simultaneously. (Stewart 135, original italics)

Indeed, as far as Freud is concerned, the fetishist disavows his perception of the mother’s lack instead of “scotomizing” it: for in scotomization the perception is “entirely wiped out, so that the result is the same as when a visual impression falls on the blind spot in the retina,” whereas in the case of fetishism the perception “has persisted, and. . . a very energetic action has been undertaken to maintain the disavowal” (Freud 953-4). This energetic action comes in the form of a substitution, a desired Object, or object, that stands in for the penis that the mother is supposed to have (953). The substitution is always unnerving, for the pleasure it brings forth is always accompanied by the painful fact that it is a mere substitution. In order to scrutinize further Caroline’s intricate emotions, here such knowing denial is singled out from its psychoanalytical context, with only the mechanism of disavowal left for discussion. Thus, in Caroline’s case, with the impossibility of the domestic bliss that

the exchanges of hair usually promise always looming behind the casketed souvenir, Caroline is knowingly in denial. Robert both belongs and does not belong to her, and she both acknowledges and does not acknowledge such fact. The *jouissance* brought forth by the sense of intimacy inherent in the lock of hair is here coupled with the catastrophe that Caroline feels in her hopelessness. Thus Caroline's "sudden, insane-sounding interjections" (Shirley 194) come from such simultaneity of seemingly incompatible emotions that the souvenir evokes.

Although in Stewart's analysis *jouissance* seems to represent merely an extreme pleasure, psychoanalytically speaking *jouissance* indicates a combination of both pleasure and pain, or rather an ecstasy so intense that it exceeds the pleasure principle and becomes agonizing. Due to the psychoanalytical prerequisites—the relationship with the Mother, the phallic issues, the fear of castration—from which fetishism is impossible to separate, and, therefore, the largely sexual focus of the fetishist, it might be more appropriate to consider Brontë's characters through the lens of the idolater. Idolatry was seen by some as the predecessor of the concept of fetishism. As a matter of fact, idolatry is appropriated by Marx and Freud in the development of their theory of fetishism (*History* 244 n.181).<sup>16</sup> David Simpson also states that "in the nineteenth century . . . [fetishism] frequently seems synonymous with *idolatry*" (Simpson 9, original italics). However, Heather Glen argues in *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (2002) that these two concepts belong to different categories: while "fetishism" entered the English language as a term of "anthropological description,"<sup>17</sup> "idolatry" was a theological term (*History* 244 n.181).<sup>18</sup> Glen explains the nineteenth-century perspective of idolatry, and its influence on Brontë:

Although it had become a cliché in the discourse of romantic love, it was still believed to be a sin. It was certainly far more likely than fetishism to be seen as an intimate temptation or pain. There is, indeed, a graphic account of the "intense anxieties and apprehensions inseparable from all

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<sup>16</sup> See also Emily Apter, Introduction, *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, ed. Emily Apter and William Pietz (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1993), 1-12.

<sup>17</sup> Glen suggests the possibility that Charlotte Brontë has read of it in "the 18-page review of T. Edward Bowditch's *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1819" (Barker 155, noted in *History* 244, n.181).

<sup>18</sup> The attention towards "idolatry" renewed around the early 1850s, and it was of interest to critics including Ruskin and Carlyle. See, for example, John Ruskin, "Proper Sense of the Word Idolatry," *The Stones of Venice* (2 vols, 1851-3), ii. app. 10; Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841), Lecture IV.

idoltrous attachment” in a book that Brontë seems to have read with attention whilst she was writing *Villette*. (*History* 244, n.181)<sup>19</sup> According to Glen, “idolatry” was “a commonplace in nineteenth-century England, used—both flippantly and seriously—to denote that excessive love of the creature against which Scripture warned” (244)—thus the “intense anxieties”—and Charlotte Brontë was certainly intrigued by such a concept. In fact, in one of the earliest issues of *Fraser’s Magazine* to come to the Brontës’ possession a poem entitled “Love’s Idolatry” was published (*History* 244).<sup>20</sup> Indeed, throughout Brontë’s works the trace of idolatry is ubiquitous. “I could not . . . see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol” (316), thus Jane Eyre rues her own worship of Rochester; Ginevra is Dr. John’s “idol” (228); Miss Marchmont also confesses her own idolatry towards her late fiancé: “I still think of Frank more than of God,” she says to Lucy, “and unless it be counted that in thus loving the creature so much, so long, and so exclusively, I have not at least blasphemed the Creator, small is my chance of salvation” (*Villette* 50). In *Shirley*, Caroline’s emotions towards Robert—the emotions embodied by the lock of hair—are those of an idolater. At church on Sunday, Caroline can not help but stare at Robert, though the looking brings forth internal turmoil almost unbearable for her; it is “both too much pain and too much pleasure to look: it excite[s] too much emotion; and that it [is] all wasted emotion, she ha[s] learned well to comprehend” (137). The fact that she keeps looking at him and divining his thoughts instead of paying attention to the service is idolatrous enough. It is not surprising that, throughout Brontë’s works, the emotions of idolaters abound: this co-existence of “too much pain” and “too much pleasure” is indeed experienced by Brontë herself. “Idolator I kneeled to an idol cut in rock!” writes Brontë in a poem very likely dedicated to M. Heger:

I might have slashed my flesh and drawn my heart’s best blood:  
The Granite God had felt no tenderness, no shock;  
My Baal had not seen nor heard nor understood. (“He saw my heart’s woe,” *CBP* 244-5, qtd. in *History* 249)

This subtle emotion of concurrent pain and happiness, of comfort and self-loathing, is echoed by Caroline’s conjecture of Robert’s attitude towards the hair-as-souvenir:

I keep his, but, I dare say, he has lost mine. It was my doing, and one of those silly deeds it distresses the heart and sets the face on fire to think of: one of those small but sharp recollections that return, lacerating your

<sup>19</sup> Revd. Hugh White, *The Gospel Promotive of True Happiness* (Dublin: James McGlashan, 1851), 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Fraser’s Magazine*, 34 (1832), 415.

self-respect like tiny penknives, and forcing from your lips, as you sit alone, sudden, insane-sounding interjections. (194)

It is not difficult to imagine that Brontë had M. Heger in mind when she wrote these piercing words. Indeed, Caroline's "sudden, insane-sounding interjections" can be understood as an externalized expression of Brontë's strong feelings. As in a system of fetishism, Caroline-the-idolater's desired object is replaced, or rather represented by, an actual object. What differentiates such representation from the fetish is that here this object—this physical part of the human body—stands for an unattainable whole that she loves more than she does God.

In another example in *Villette*, the "catastrophe and *jouissance*" experienced simultaneously by the fetishist and the emotional trait of "too much pain and too much pleasure" that characterise the idolater—the synchronized acknowledgement and denial of the irrevocability of the past—is embodied again in the imagery of hair. After Lucy realizes that no more letters will come from Graham, she ponders over their "one-sided friendship," which is "half marble and half life" (454): "The Hope I am bemoaning suffered and made me suffer much: it did not die till it was full time: following an agony so lingering, death ought to be welcome," says Lucy to herself, having inscribed the friendship with allegories of death, "[w]elcome I endeavoured to make it. Indeed, long pain had made patience a habit. In the end I closed the eyes of my dead, covered its face, and composed its limbs with great calm" (366). Here, as in the case of Miss Marchmont, the irrevocable past is inseparable from the imagery of death. Thus Lucy decides to put away the letters, for, like the bereaved who always "jealously gather together and lock away mementos," Lucy is determined to prevent herself from being "stabbed to the heart each moment by sharp revival of regret" (366). Her self-loathing is similar to Caroline's—both are suffering from the position of the idolater. By sealing the letters in the pear tree, Lucy has not only "hid[den] a treasure," but also "bur[ried] a grief" (369). Here, the hiding and thus treasuring of a souvenir is equated to the burying of dead memories—the meaning inherent in the letters is at once fetishized and objectified, both elevated into a fetish and reduced into mere materiality. Kate E. Brown contemplates such ambiguity in "Beloved Objects," pointing out that Lucy buries these letters "the better to treasure them" (Brown 397):

Wrapped in oiled silk, hermetically sealed in a glass jar, and cemented under the roots of the buried nun's pear-tree, the letters are equally safe from denigrating readers (including, perhaps, Lucy herself) and from material decay; as such, they can retain their meaningfulness even in the absence of the relationship they memorialize. (398)

Such a burial, suggests Brown, should be read in terms of disavowal instead of repudiation (398). Her analysis of the system of disavowal can be applied to other cases in Brontë's works, such as the case of Caroline pondering over Robert's hair:

Disavowal offers more contradictory satisfactions: it both denies and accedes to loss so as to perpetuate grief. Put otherwise, disavowal is a mode of loss that allows for two mutually exclusive responses to coexist nonetheless: by burying John's letters, Lucy maintains that he is and isn't loved, is and isn't lost. (398)

In much the same way, Caroline reads in the lock of hair both the possibility and impossibility of her union with Robert. Along with disavowal, Brown introduces a concept she terms the "beloved object":

This term points both internally, to the psychic representations of significant others that psychoanalysis calls "objects," and externally, to the actual material objects we invest with value. Treasured precisely in their materiality, beloved objects function to "objectify" the self in its relation to significant others. My argument, then, is that beloved objects function as a form of disavowal, at once memorializing a lost love and denying its loss. (398)

Here, the Object worshipped by the idolater is collapsed into an actual "object" possessed, fondled, and guarded with jealousy. This concept of "beloved object"—its inherent function as a form of disavowal—fits perfectly into my discussion of the souvenir. Souvenirs entail a narrative of nostalgia that "plays in the distance between the present and an imagined, prelapsarian experience, experience as it might be 'directly lived'" (Stewart 139), and thus seem to promise a re-experience of the past, the very materiality of the souvenirs, the arbitrariness of the relationship between the actual objects and the memories they represent. They also render plain the fact that the past can never be experienced again; souvenirs thus embody both illusion and disillusionment. Idolaters that Brontë's heroines are, the objects—the souvenirs—in which their beloved are idolized and through which they treasure the memories can also be agonizing, for the difference between these objects and the flesh-and-blood Objects they represent is too stark to overlook. Thus in disavowal these objects must be hidden, buried, or revisited with secrecy, as their existence brings forth as much pain as pleasure.

Indeed, for Brontë, the most treasured objects are often kept out of sight. For example, she refused her publisher George Smith's offer to "take *The Professor* 'into custody' in lieu of publication" after he had rejected publication of the book for the third time in 1851, perhaps in order to "release Charlotte from an obstinate attachment" (Gordon 228):



“Ah, no!” He might, she pictured, make tapers with the manuscript to light his cigars. No, she would lock it safely in its own cupboard at Haworth, for she remained partial to it “as a doting parent towards an idiot child.” (Gordon 228)

Given that *The Professor* is Brontë’s first complete novel, and is based primarily on her relationship with M. Heger, the sentimental value inherent in the physical form of the novel becomes obvious. Like the letters that Lucy buries, the memories of M. Heger inscribed in this novel are hidden out of sight, away from unsympathetic reading and material decay. In a sense the memories represented by objects are thus immortalized. Jean Baudrillard attributes a similar significance to the *absence* of an object when he discusses the collection. Baudrillard first evokes one of the definitions of *objet* in Littré’s dictionary: “anything which is the cause or subject of a passion; figuratively—and *par excellence*—the loved object” (qtd. in *SO* 91, original italics). In this sense, objects are “intimately bound up with the subject: no longer simply material bodies offering a certain resistance, they become mental precincts over which I hold sway, they become things of which I am the meaning, they become my property and my passion” (*SO* 91). Thus the sense of self is dependent upon the objects one possesses. For the collector who amasses objects, “just one object no longer suffices,” for “the fulfilment of the project of possession always means a succession or even a complete series of objects. This is why owning absolutely any object is always so satisfying and so disappointing at the same time” (*SO* 92). Yet in the end

*One cannot but wonder whether collections are in fact meant to be completed, whether lack does not play an essential part here—a positive one, moreover, as the means whereby the subject reapprehends his own objectivity. If so, the presence of the final object of the collection would basically signify the death of the subject, whereas its absence would be what enables him merely to rehearse his death (and so exorcize it) by having an object represent it. (SO 99, original italics)*

Here as the subject’s sense of self becomes dependent upon the collection of objects, the last object collected would be followed by the end of all meaning.

In the case of Dr. John’s letters, knowing that the “collection” is curtailed, Lucy buries the collection entirely and thus removes both the hope of the emergence of “the last object” and the necessity of acknowledging the impossibility of completing the collection. Thus buried like a dead body the entire collection/fetish/idol is elevated beyond its materiality, for its material form is no longer accessible. The ambiguity in the transformation of Lucy’s buried letters into

both fetish and dead body is further complicated by the hair imagery that Lucy later invokes as she falls into reminiscing for this friendship:

Was this feeling dead? I do not know, but it was buried. Sometimes I thought the tomb unquiet, and dreamed strangely of disturbed earth, and of hair, still golden and living, obtruded through coffin-chinks. (454)

Again, the buried souvenir is turned into hair, this time dead but living, growing out of the grave. The buried is alive. The paradox is appropriate, for, as the letters are kept out of sight, they are evermore treasured in Lucy's memories. It is in death and burial that the souvenir reaches its utmost power. Here, the imagery of hair seems most apposite—the portion of human body gruesomely growing out of the dead serves as a symbol *par excellence* in the system of the souvenir, where the object is endowed with meanings while meanings are also transformed into dead memories. Hair-as-souvenir—whether literally or metaphorically speaking—is thus in Brontë the most appropriate embodiment of the “beloved object,” the ultimate materialization of disavowal.

Hair itself is endowed with meanings associated with death. Taken from flesh and blood, the lock of hair spans life and death—thus the tradition for the bereaved to keep a lock of hair of their deceased beloved. Christiane Holm points out that “it was in eighteenth-century England that mourning jewelry first became widely popular, spreading from there to other European countries during the ‘sentimental period’” (Holm 139). In the seventeenth century, hair as mourning jewelry was produced for an “exclusive, elite clientele,” and was a symbol of the social status of the deceased (139); in the eighteenth century, however, these objects started to be defined by their “intimate and emotional value,” and the focus in the mourning process switched from “the mourned and their fame” to “the mourners and their mourning” (139). Such meaning of hair-as-keepsake was not unfamiliar to the Brontës and their friends. Ellen Nussey had in her possession two mourning envelopes, in which lie the tresses of Charlotte and Anne Brontë.

The association between souvenir—here the letters, as they are mementos of Lucy's infatuation for Dr. John—and death, embodied in the form of hair, becomes more literal in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, where it is precisely a lock of hair that stands as the sole symbol of Heathcliff's mourning at Catherine's death: “I shouldn't have discovered that he had been there,” reports Ellen,

“Except for the disarrangement of the drapery about the corpse's face, and for observing on the floor a curl of light hair, fastened with a silver

thread, which, on examination, I ascertained to have been taken from a locket hung around Catherine's neck. Heathcliff had opened the trinket and cast out its contents, replacing them by a black lock of his own."  
(WH 131)

Here Heathcliff gives the already dead Catherine his hair as a keepsake. Writing with a cruder delineation of the dead body and of human brutality than her sister, Emily Brontë's hair-as-keepsakes are no less associated with idolatry and disavowal. The incentive is again disavowal, here the denial of death. The dead possessing a souvenir of the living helps to create the illusion, for the sake of the bereaved, that the deceased still cherishes the memories of their past; thus in conscious pretense, the living denies the truth of death. No other souvenir serves as a better bridge between life and death than a lock of hair, for, whether from a living body or a corpse, the hair is both a literal part of the body and, with its multiple meanings of sexuality, conjugal bond, and blood heritage, a token of love and memory. Holm explains the mourning process through hair:

The separated hair can last forever whereas the body will not. Moreover, the separated hair will no longer grow, it embodies as materialized time an epoch that is absolutely past. Its temporal semantics privileged and still privilege the hair cut in the rites de passage. The cut edge of the hair in the material medium of remembrance marks the act of remembrance as the very moment when its natural status was transformed into a cultural status, and when the present presence of the body is anticipated as a future absence. (140)

The absence of the person is thus replaced by the presence of a lock of hair, a physical portion of his / her body. Again Stewart's words seem appropriate here when she considers the souvenirs of death, which "mark the horrible transformation of meaning into materiality more than they mark, as other souvenirs do, the transformation of materiality into meaning" (Stewart 140). Thus while hair-as-souvenir is the object proper of memories, its inevitable materiality—and physicality—make it an ever-more pertinent token of death. Here, the denial of death is always accompanied by a painful awareness of the "transformation of meaning into materiality," the transformation of a living being into a corpse. While here, as in Miss Marchmont's case, the hair is a souvenir of death, Lucy's burial of the letters marks *the death of the souvenir*, which comes back and haunts her in the form of hair. Through the image of hair growing irrepressibly out of the burial ground, the inevitable death inherent in the system of souvenirs—as the souvenir is the token of a past already gone—as well as the invariable denial of death, becomes explicit.

It is not surprising that Heathcliff's last attempt to make Catherine his is presented in the form of hair-as-keepsake. As part of the physical body that can be removed and given as souvenirs, the exchange of locks of hair—thus, to render it plain, the exchange of body parts— between lovers is often seen as a token of a conjugal bond and an initiation of blood relations. Lucy, for example, watches the initiation of a familial relation emblemized in the form of hair-as-souvenir:

with the tiny pair of scissors, glittering in her lap, she had severed spoils from each manly head beside her, and was now occupied in plaiting together the gray lock and the golden wave. The plait woven—no silk-thread being at hand to bind it—a tress of her own hair was made to serve that purpose; she tied it like a knot, prisoned it in a locket, and laid it on her heart.

“Now,” said she, “there is an amulet made, which has virtue to keep you two always friends. You can never quarrel so long as I wear this.” (545-6)

Here it is the female hair that serves to bind the hair of the father and husband; and it is the wife and daughter who own the binding power in the family. This is the very same girl who, as Lucy remembers, had once made another souvenir in an attempt to bind her family. Surrounded by the Brettons who, though kind and warm, are by no means her own family, the doll-like Little Polly, then a mere child, sits making a “keepsake” for her “papa” (22). She is

Perched now on a high chair beside a stand, whereon was her toy work-box of white varnished wood, and holding in her hands a shred of a handkerchief, which she was professing to hem, and at which she bored perseveringly with a needle, that in her fingers seemed almost a skewer, pricking herself ever and anon, marking the cambric with a trace of minute red dots; occasionally starting when the perverse weapon—swerving from her control—inflicted a deeper stab than usual; but still silent, diligent, absorbed, womanly. (18-9)

The “scarlet-speckled handkerchief” (22) carries her affection for her father, who has to leave her temporarily. Little Polly's doll-like movements, the disproportional needle in her hands, and the womanly attitude that seems inappropriate for a child of her age create curiosity in the same way that Lilliputians do. Furthermore, like the lock of hair she is to use to bind her men decades hence, here the keepsake is not only the product of her “womanly” effort, but also contains, and is marked by, a physical part of her body. The blood on the handkerchief does not merely illustrate the extent of her endeavor and the level of her yearning to make her papa remember her—for such is the function of the keepsake—but also creates a very physical link between the giver and the receiver. With the blood-stained handkerchief as keepsake, the sexual

intimacy is unmistakable. Such expression of female sexuality enhances the element of curiosity, coming from a girl who has not yet reached her puberty. The little “woman” in a girl’s body thus seems misplaced, out of context, and curious. Whether in the form of hair or blood, parts of Paulina’s body become an essential component of the curious souvenir, which is thus endowed with a specific power: as the giver gives part of herself to the receiver—and souvenirs are meant to be touched and fondled—the tactile experience is transmitted from one body to another via a medium of physicality, and the memory thus summoned is much stronger.

It is worth noting that, like Miss Marchmont, Caroline, and Lucy, Paulina is an idolater. In her youthful days in Bretton, Lucy used to stare for hours at the portrait of Graham: “How it was that what charmed so much, could at the same time so keenly pain?” Lucy the idolater often ponders. One day, she lifts Little Polly up to look at the picture:

“Do you like it, Polly?” I asked. She never answered, but gazed long, and at last a darkness went trembling through her sensitive eye, as she said, “Put me down.” So I put her down, saying to myself: “The child feels it too.” (214)

The very same child who “feels it too”—the feeling similar to the “too much pleasure and too much pain” that strikes Caroline as she watches Robert at the church—eventually grows into a young woman who thinks of her men before she thinks of God. Receiving a love letter from Graham one day, she becomes so preoccupied that she almost forgets her duty:

“On the point of reading the letter at last, I once more drew back voluntarily; it was too soon yet to drink that draught—the sparkle in the cup was so beautiful—I would watch it yet a minute. Then I remembered all at once that I had not said my prayers that morning. Having heard papa go down to breakfast a little earlier than usual, I had been afraid of keeping him waiting, and had hastened to join him as soon as dressed, thinking no harm to put off prayers till afterwards. Some people would say I ought to have served God first and then man; but I don’t think Heaven could be jealous of anything I might do for papa. A voice seemed now to say that another feeling than filial affection was in question—to urge me to pray before I dared to read what I so longed to read—to deny myself yet a moment, and remember first a great duty.” (469-70)

The feeling is described so intricately that the passage is worth quoting in its entirety. Her prayer is first delayed because she thinks of her father before she does God, and then when she does say her prayers it is because she wishes to prolong the excitement and happiness that Graham’s letter brings to her. She confesses that she does not

“serve God first and then man.” Furthermore, after she reads the letter, like an “animal athirst” who lies down at a well and drinks, she becomes awed by it: “I saw the sun through its gush,” she says to Lucy, “and not a mote, Lucy, no moss, no insect, no atom in the thrice-refined golden gurgle” (470). In the well that is the letter, Paulina sees reflected her idol: the sun. According to Heather Glen, Brontë had since girlhood “been fascinated by sun-worship,”<sup>21</sup> and “[a]gain and again in [*Villette*], John Bretton, his ‘face bright with beaming . . . energy,’ is likened to the sun” (*History* 243). Thus fascinated by Graham’s sun-like radiance, Paulina is as much an idolater as Miss Marchmont, Caroline, Lucy, and Brontë herself.

However, unlike these other idolaters, Polly is blessed with domestic happiness. While Caroline’s locket is hidden as a secret, and Lucy’s letters are buried and reincarnated into hair in her mind, the hair-souvenir in Paulina’s possession—the locks of her father and future husband—is not “out of place.” The issue of propriety associated with other souvenirs of hair makes them unfit for the domestic space, and thus they are hidden/buried. Their curiosity lies precisely in their being “out of context”—like most souvenirs, they belong to the attic, the closed boxes and locked cabinets, instead of the relatively open space of everyday life. What makes Paulina’s trajectory so different from those of Brontë’s other heroines is that, having disappeared from the narrative herself, she is herself a cabinet of curiosity. As a little girl she is so woman-like that she almost seems to be out of context, and after she reappears in the story she has already grown into a young lady who, as Lucy observes, is as versatile as a chameleon:

She had different moods for different people. With her father she really was still a child, or child-like, affectionate, merry, and playful. With me she was serious, and so womanly as thought and feeling could make her. With Mrs. Bretton she was docile and reliant, but not expansive. With Graham she was shy, at present very shy; at moments she tried to be cold; on occasion she endeavoured to shun him. (373)

Indeed, even her features seem to change (358). Throughout *Villette* Paulina seems to be impossible to grasp: as a child she seems a “changeling” (32), and as a grown woman she is still her father’s “daughterling” (373); for Graham she is always a “cabinet of oddities” (32), and for her father she is forevermore the “strange little mortal” (350), “amusing,” “fairy-like,” and “interesting” (537). Even in the eyes of

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<sup>21</sup> For examples of Charlotte Brontë’s early contact with sun-worship see Heather Glen, “‘Entirely bewildered’: *Villette* and *History* (1),” *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History*, Oxford, NY: Oxford UP, 2002, 243-4.

Lucy, she appears “an airy, fairy thing—small, slight, white—a winter spirit” (343). Paulina defies narration. Paulina’s versatility will be further discussed in the third chapter, where the body images of Brontëan heroines are discussed. It is Paulina that perfectly embodies what Brontë would consider the Victorian woman *par excellence*: she is blessed with domestic happiness precisely because of her versatility and “curiousness.” As I will discuss in detail in the “waxworks” chapter, these traits are what makes a woman desirable for men while adhering to the Victorian protocol of female behavior. Thus her hair can be seen as symbolizing the legitimate link of a happy family.

### **Flowers as Souvenirs: Sense of Secrecy**

While the hair-as-souvenir is a form of souvenir that connects most directly to the human body and is thus the most intimate, another form of souvenir, the flowers, is the furthest from use-value and thus the most “out-of-context” in everyday life. Meant only to be looked at, flowers entail mostly *emotional*, instead of material, transactions. Thus, they are more suitable to be regarded as souvenirs, whose value depends entirely upon their significance to the giver and receiver. Devoid of practical and monetary value, flowers more than any other possessed object suggest the most private world, where, according to Baudrillard, an individual seeks to construct the self through physical experiences. Furthermore, in Brontë, flowers do not so often appear displayed in nosegays as hidden in boxes and between the folds of dresses. These hidden flowers do not fit readily into the semantics of Victorian courtship, which depend heavily upon deciphering the “language of flowers”—namely the different choices of flowers and their arrangements in nosegays. Thus, by examining the description of flowers sent secretly as mementos throughout *Villette*, the internal storm of Lucy Snowe, the heroine whose story resembles Brontë’s own, can be illustrated.

While Paulina is entitled to domestic happiness, Lucy Snowe keeps rejecting such happiness for herself by denying both her own feelings and the feelings that others have for her. Such denial is on a different level from the “disavowal” embodied by the “beloved object”—the simultaneous acknowledgement of loss and the denial of such loss via possession of a certain token. While disavowal characterizes an idolater who both owns and cannot own the idolized Object, Lucy’s denial entirely obscures the fact that she *is* an idolater. Indeed, throughout her life she

is constantly in denial, which is shown not merely in her narration, but also in her name. “A *cold* name she must have,” Brontë writes of Lucy, “partly, perhaps, on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle—partly on that of the ‘fitness of things’” (qtd. in *History* 223, original italics).<sup>22</sup> *Lucus a non lucendo* indicates “a paradoxical or otherwise absurd derivation; something of which the essence or qualities are the opposite of what its name suggests” (*OED* online), which perfectly represents the paradox inherent in Lucy’s personality. She is by no means cold, yet she does her best to appear so. As Brontë’s heroines suffer from the “too much pleasure and too much pain” of idolaters, they intend to neutralize such suffering by disavowal and feigned coldness; even Paulina rewrote her letter to Graham three times until it resembled “a morsel of ice flavoured with ever so slight a zest of fruit or sugar” (471). For Lucy such denial—and the fact that it *is* denial—is embodied in another form of souvenir—the souvenir of flowers.

With such denial in mind, it becomes obvious why in *Villette* flowers-as-souvenirs center on the theme of secrecy: it is through covertness that Lucy’s emotions—as well as those of other Brontë heroines—can be fully illuminated. When Lucy wanders alone one day in “l’allée défendue”—the seclusion of which makes it one of her favorite spots—a “small box of white and coloured ivory” is dropped into the path, in which she finds violets and a note of love (136). A casket filled with flowers is tossed into a “forbidden alley” in a flowery garden—the interior secret and the exterior surveillance echo each other through flowers. Violets in a garden is a quite normal thing, whereas violets in a box dropped within a garden seems out of context and thus curious. Moments later, Dr. John comes into l’allée défendue to look for the casket, intending to protect its targeted receiver. Followed immediately by the intrusion of a man, the casket has penetrated the garden and destroyed the serenity that Lucy so cherishes. She observes the next morning,

My alley, and, indeed, all the walks and shrubs in the garden, had acquired a new, but not a pleasant interest; their seclusion was now become precarious; their calm—insecure. That casement which rained billets, had vulgarized the once dear nook it overlooked; and elsewhere, the eyes of the flowers had gained vision, and the knots in the tree-boles listened like secret ears. (142)

The garden is no longer the same after its penetration by a casket and a man. Flowers and trees seem to become accomplices of surveillance, attempting in droves to

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<sup>22</sup> Charlotte Brontë to George Smith, 6 November 1852 (*Letters* iv. 18).



unravel the secret of the casket. The atmosphere of surveillance is in Lucy's eyes ever threatening, for it is strengthened by the fact that there is a love note within the casket—the secret casket containing a forbidden note would inevitably invite a vigilant gaze. If Lucy is, as she herself says later, “[l]overless and inexpectant of love” and thus “as safe from spies in [her] heart-poverty, as the beggar from thieves in his destitution of purse” (146), then Madame's surveillance should not disturb her so. Such self-description is merely half-truth: it only stands true in the sense that she has nothing in her possession that would arouse suspicion. She can by no means claim herself a bystander. Although Lucy is aware that the casket is not meant for her, her curiosity about the significance of the souvenir, combined with the fact that the casket is addressed to a woman dressed, exactly like herself, in “la robe grise” and “le chapeau de paille,” makes her identify with the receiver of the souvenir, no matter how firmly she asserts otherwise (136-7). The souvenir “represents not the lived experience of its maker but the ‘secondhand’ experience of its possessor/owner” (Stewart 135), and, as the temporary possessor of the souvenir, Lucy's emotional involvement is beyond her expectation. Furthermore, in order to help Dr. John, she finds “a moment's leisure” very early the next morning to efface the footprints he has left on the flower beds, despite the strong wind (142); she literally becomes an accomplice in the crime.

Indeed, Lucy's nature is by no means as cold as her name. At the very beginning of the chapter chronicling the incident of “the casket,” Lucy the narrator contemplates her own nature:

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

At that time, I well remember—whatever could excite—certain accidents of the weather, for instance, were almost dreaded by me, because they woke the being I was always lulling, and stirred up a craving cry I could not satisfy. (134, original italics)

Then she goes on to recall a storm in which she is “roughly roused and obliged *to live*” (134, italics mine). Lucy's passionate nature is merely held back, repressed by force. It threatens to surface, to come alive in ways that she cannot control. Chronicled right before the incident in l'allée défendue, this storm serves as an apposite prologue for the shooting casket that somehow discloses Lucy's hidden passion. Here it is the memento, the casket containing flowers, that embodies the

irrepressibility of her inner self—like the casketed flowers, her true self is hidden; despite her denial, by opening the casket and revealing the violets within, she is somehow awakening her passion as well. It is only appropriate that the violets are enclosed in a casket instead of presented in the form of a nosegay: the casket necessitates touch—inherent in the casket is the process of disclosure, of exploring that which is hidden—while a nosegay merely invites visual contact. This incident is the first clue of Lucy’s hidden passion; up till this moment she is in deep denial. Though indirect, this curious casket suggests the hidden emotions behind the story told by a narrator who unconsciously denies herself any form of emotional involvement.

Indeed, throughout *Villette*, the flowers sent as souvenirs are wrapped up in an atmosphere of denial, for the narrator herself is the embodiment of denial. Witnessing the blessed life of Paulina and Graham, Lucy nonetheless continues to deny herself any opportunity for happiness. This denial is represented time and again in the imagery of flowers-as-souvenirs. In this light, another bunch of violets that Lucy mentions, seemingly in passing, is no longer as innocent as it appears. As referred to earlier, examining her belongings after the incident in l’allée défendue, knowing that the Madame has examined them, Lucy describes casually the perfect condition in which she finds them:

the closest subsequent examination could not discover change or apparent disturbance in the position of one object. My few dresses were folded as I had left them; a certain little bunch of white violets that had once been silently presented to me by a stranger. . . , and which I had dried and kept for its sweet perfume between the folds of my best dress, lay there unstirred. . . (146-7)

Here again the flowers-as-souvenir appear where Lucy attempts to conceal her true emotions, even to herself. For, the singular reference to the white violets offered “by a stranger” renders them curious. Much later in the book, it is finally revealed that these violets are from M. Paul: “do you recollect my once coming silently and offering you a little knot of white violets when we were strangers?” asks the Professor. “I recollect it,” replies Lucy, “I dried the violets, kept them, and have them still” (458). It is not until Lucy has grown close with M. Paul that the significance of the violets is revealed—when Madame Beck goes through her drawers, Lucy can still feign indifference, both to herself and to the readers, and thus these violets seem to warrant no suspicion at all.

Such pretended indifference is illustrated by the additional adjective that Lucy attributes to the violets. While the violets in the casket are not specified, those given to her by M. Paul are “white violets”—as Beverly Seaton points out in *The Language of Flowers*, although in the nineteenth century many systems of floral language were adopted, they all followed “two very traditional guidelines with regard to color and odor” (Seaton 118). The white color in flowers invariably represents purity and innocence (119), and, while the white flowers carry such connotations, those of other colors never do (38). Thus, putting the emphasis on friendship rather than love, Lucy unwittingly understates the romance involved in the gift. Furthermore, as a decayable souvenir, the white violets are dried by Lucy in order to prolong their shape and “sweet perfume”—in other words, to keep them life-like. While the souvenir embodies certain memories or feelings, it also renders such memories *mortal*, for objects are usually perishable. Thus to prevent the referred meaning of the souvenir from withering away, the flowers are kept in denial of death—or, in Stewart’s words, in a state of “eternal death” (144). Lucy’s choice betrays the extent to which she values such a souvenir. The sentimentality behind such a move is impossible to erase, no matter how Lucy intends to keep it hidden.

Indeed, elsewhere Lucy consciously denigrates or rejects the meanings usually attributed to flowers. At M. Paul’s fête, bouquets of flowers are presented to him as presents, and Lucy alone has no flowers to give. She observes,

I like to see flowers growing, but when they are gathered, they ceased to please. I look on them then as things rootless and perishable; their likeness to life makes me sad. I never offer flowers to those I love; I never wish to receive them from hands dear to me. (423-4)

While she keeps the white violets life-like by hiding them between the folds of her best dress, here she claims to be saddened by the “likeness to life” of flower bouquets. Furthermore, as she obviously cherishes the white violets, here she asserts that she never wishes to receive flowers from hands dear to her. The denial is here conspicuous.

#### **IV. Hidden Fire: the Power in Disguise**

Whether it is the disavowal of an idolater or the spinster’s almost masochistic denial of happiness, “knowing yet not knowing” is how Lucy faces the world. It is a kind of disguise, a defense mechanism, with which she seeks to protect herself. Masquerade is a central aspect of what “womanliness” means for Brontë, and in the

following discussions I will further contemplate the power of camouflage as illustrated throughout Brontë's own life. Indeed, the curious objects in Brontë illuminate the essentiality of disguise and secrecy. Heather Glen points out that the 1851 Great Exhibition, which took place in the very year in which Brontë began to write *Villette*, influenced the way that Brontë regarded *things*; in the Great Exhibition

[t]hings were displaced from their contexts, placed in strange juxtapositions, oddly *defamiliarized* by being put on show. Hitherto unregarded things became strangely prominent. Things "inevitably thrust into some obscure corner" were now being produced in "artistic-looking designs," which had "the effect of drawing them from their obscurity, and assigning them an honourable post." (*History* 215, italics mine)<sup>23</sup>

Brontë herself also writes of her experience among the overwhelming objects in the Great Exhibition:

It is a wonderful place—vast, strange, new and impossible to describe. Its grandeur does not consist in *one* thing, but in the unique assemblage of *all* things. . . . It may be called a bazaar or a fair, but it is such a bazaar or fair as Eastern genii might have created. It seems as if only magic could have gathered this mass of wealth from all the ends of the earth—as if none but supernatural hands could have arranged it this [sic], with such a blaze and contrast of colours and marvellous power of effect. ("A visit to the Crystal Palace," 1851, original italics)<sup>24</sup>

Thus, in *Villette*, objects "[assume] a peculiar importance, whether as object of terror or amazement, conferred with unexpected value, or placed 'bewilderingly' on display," and throughout Lucy's narrative there is a "new kind of emphasis on things" (*History* 215). Through this emphasis on things, Brontë creates a world in which reading the significance of objects is interpreting the inner reality of women. Among the curious objects that seem to have exploded in the world of *Villette*, it is again the souvenir that serves as the most apposite representation of what Brontë sees as the hidden interior self of women. Susan Stewart observes that

the actual locale of the souvenir is often commensurate with its material worthlessness: the attic and the cellar, contexts away from the business and engagement of everyday life. Other rooms of a house are tied to function (kitchen, bath) and presentation (parlor, hall) in such a way that they exist within the temporality of everyday life, but the attic and the cellar are tied to the temporality of the past, and they scramble the past into a simultaneous order which memory is invited to rearrange. (Stewart 150)

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<sup>23</sup> *Art Journal Catalogue*, 32.

<sup>24</sup> Charlotte Brontë to Patrick Brontë, 7 June 1851 (*Letters* ii. 631).

Tied to the temporality of the past, souvenirs are not characterized by use-value in everyday life; they are hidden in the attic, the cellar, or even locked drawers—the innermost and yet most remote spaces of the house.

In the preceding discussions, I put a particular emphasis on the analyses of souvenirs, for they embody the paradoxical emotions that Brontë's heroines intend to hide. The sense of hidden-ness and disguise, or, rather, the necessity of *façades*—whether internal, in the form of denial, or external as a masquerade of emotions—are central to Brontë's delineation of the interior storms of her heroines. The “hidden fire,” the confluence of pain and pleasure that Brontë's heroines feel all too acutely, is represented by her description of the “hidden object,” and such hidden fire is inevitably coupled with a constructed façade. Thus in the following discussions I will examine the external disguise, a form of protection that protects the Brontëan heroines from the danger of being regarded as un-womanly. Indeed, it is required by the nineteenth-century social protocol for the woman to prevent being penetrated by the public gaze—especially by the gaze of man who might or might not be emotionally involved with her. Thus, prior to exploring the “covertness” throughout Brontë's works and life, the criteria of Victorian femininity within the mechanism of the “gaze” should be explicated. According to Sally Shuttleworth, in Brontë's era women and men “were situated differently. . . with reference to the interpretative gaze,” and

the condition of femininity was dependent on the woman retaining her impenetrability. . . a woman was deemed to be feminine (and thus truly woman) only if sexually responsive to a man; but should she disclose that responsiveness before the requisite time she would also forfeit her feminine status. Femininity was thus predicated on a condition of concealment, on a disjunction between surface control and inner sexuality. (Shuttleworth 72)

In a word, woman has to be a cabinet of curiosity for man, inviting the hand that yearns to open the lid, and yet she has to struggle against that hand and remain concealed until “the requisite time.” To make the issue even more paradoxical, she also has to appear innocent—in other words, transparent and penetrable—in order to cater to the Victorian notion of a “good woman.” Thus, woman struggles to conceal her true feelings, to resist penetration, while keeping up a façade of openness and penetrability. *Woman's Worth: or, Hints to Raise the Female Character*, one of the many instructive tracts of female behavior published around the mid-nineteenth century, insists on the necessity of an apparent “artless” behavior: “[t]here should be gentleness of manner. . . and, at the same time, it should be artless and free . . .

unconstrained and frank, without ostentation or a vain attempt at display” (*Woman’s Worth* 67). Heather Glen also comments in her discussion of the historical atmosphere of *Jane Eyre* that around the mid-nineteenth century “[w]oman is enjoined never to forget that she is an object of observation: but the concern is less with the all-seeing eye of God than with the judging eyes of the world” (*History* 87). Thus, women at the time were aware of the fact that they were to keep up a certain façade—the façade of artlessness, frankness, and openness—while the very function of such a façade is, paradoxically, concealment. Those who do not keep up this façade of artlessness would risk appearing unwomanly to the public eye. It is worthy of note that not only is “inner sexuality” to be concealed by “surface control,” but any form of excessive emotional reaction should be avoided by a woman.

In *Jane Eyre*, for example, the young Jane is admonished by Mrs. Reed for doing just the opposite. In the very first page we learn that for Mrs. Reed Jane has not a “sociable and child-like disposition,” nor an “attractive and sprightly manner”—she is not “light,” “frank,” or “natural” (9). However, it is at first not explained what constitutes such “un-childlike-ness” and “unnaturalness.” When Jane questions Mrs. Reed about how she has formed such an opinion, the lady simply forbids her to ask more questions (9-10). Jane thus retires to the drawing room and hides herself between the window and the curtain: “I sat cross-legged, like a Turk; and, having drawn the red moreen curtain nearly close, I was shrined in double retirement” (10). It is not a surprise that, in response to Mrs. Reed’s comment, Jane chooses to *hide* herself, to keep herself out of the sight of the Reed family, for it is only revealed later that it is Jane’s aloofness and her impenetrability that makes her seem so “un-childlike” and “unnatural.” The reader soon discovers that, even for Miss Abbot the lady’s maid, she is not a child-like child: “She’s an underhand little thing,” Miss Abbot says, “I never saw a girl of her age with so much *cover*” (16, my italics). Jane’s aloofness from the family—her choice to keep herself always invisible to them—has made her seem impenetrable, threatening, and curious. Her so-called “un-childlike-ness” comes from the inability of others to see through her, for a child should not be a closed cabinet. Sent to the red chamber, Jane cries out in her frenzy and begs her aunt for forgiveness, to which Mrs. Reed coldly replies: “I was a precocious actress in her eyes: she sincerely looked on me as a compound of virulent passions, mean spirit, and dangerous duplicity” (22).

Here the image of the evangelical child is evoked. According to Heather Glen, by the nineteenth century, the pedagogy of evangelicalism, which began to burgeon in the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century, was practiced in boarding schools all over England.<sup>25</sup> Brontë was familiar with such teachings. Legh Richmond's letters to his children, for example, was read by Brontë, and it "strongly attracted and strangely fascinated" her (*Letters* i. 171, qtd. in *History* 69). Richmond cautions his children, "[y]ou are a sinner, and without a gracious Saviour you must perish!" (76). The concept of the child being a sinner whose will must be broken and whose behavior must constantly undergo surveillance is central to the evangelical pedagogy. Children were reminded constantly of the "unceasing scrutiny of the all-seeing eye of God" (*History* 70), and this omnipotent and omnipresent eye appears in almost all the tracts. Here, Jane Eyre's difference from other children becomes obvious. While a good evangelical child should *seem* readily transparent and readable and forever exposed to surveillance, Jane appears distanced and impossible to decipher; while the model damsel should hide her passion, as mentioned earlier, Jane expresses hers frankly and violently. Such unpredictability makes her intimidating in the Victorian household. Indeed, Miss Abbot also compares Jane to Guy Fawkes (31), a rebel in the 1605 Catholic "Gunpowder Plot" who is associated with "the enemy within."<sup>26</sup> In a household, a child who is not open to inspection is a potential danger, an enemy within who threatens to disrupt the familial order.

Such hidden passion is the recurring theme in Charlotte Brontë's works as well as in her personal life. Lyndall Gordon's 1994 biography, *Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life*, traces this motif through Brontë's life. In 1824, the Revd. Patrick Brontë fashioned a small experiment to "elicit the characters and talents of his children": convinced that his children would "reveal more of themselves if they were unseen," he placed a mask over each of their faces in turn and asked them questions concerning proper behavior for evangelical children (Gordon 13). As a result, while the mask was "meant to free their speech," their answers were "smoothly obedient" (13). Though Mr. Brontë was satisfied with the outcome, the experiment failed, for "it revealed nothing that did not reflect adult opinion in the Parsonage," and it was obvious that the Brontë children were "trained and impenetrable" (13), though they

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<sup>25</sup> For the widespread circulation of evangelical tracts see William Jones, *The Jubilee Memorial of the Religious Tract Society* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1850) and Samuel Green, *The Story of the Religious Tract Society* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1899).

<sup>26</sup> See *Jane Eyre* Ch. 3 n10.

appeared obedient and simple. As the children of a Reverend, Charlotte Brontë and her siblings had learned at a very early age the necessity of a permissible façade. Thus as the juvenile Jane Eyre externalizes the internal passion that her author has learned to keep hidden, she is seen as un-childlike and misbehaving.

Growing up to become governesses, Charlotte and her sisters developed a deeper—and more painful—awareness of the difference between the façade and what lies behind it. The experience as an eternal outsider in a household, a perpetual shadow who is neither a family member nor a servant and whose true nature, talents, and intellect are ultimately unseen, takes many shapes in their writings. Anne Brontë, for example, wrote from her six-year experience as a governess:

Never a new idea or stirring thought came to me from without; and such as rose within me were, for the most part, miserably crushed at once, or doomed to sicken and fade away, because they could not see the light. . . . The gross vapours of earth were gathering around me, and closing in upon my inward heaven. (*Agnes Grey* Chap.11)

In a similar tone, Charlotte Brontë wrote to her sister Emily in 1839, “a private governess has no existence” (*Letters*). When people looked at governesses, “it seemed as if they looked on vacancy,” wrote Anne Brontë in the same year (qtd. in Gordon 1). The inner sparkles of the governess are unseen, for her position in the household thwarts her opportunity to express herself. The author of the 1844 “Hints on the Modern Governess System” explicates the governess’ situation clearly:

She must live daily amidst the trials of a home without its blessing; she must bear about on her heart the sins she witnesses and the responsibilities that crush her; without any consent of her will, she is made the *confidante* of many family secrets; she must live in a familial circle as if her eyes did not perceive the tokens of bitterness; she must appear not to hear sharp sayings and *mal-a-propos* speeches; kindly words of courtesy must be always on her lips; she must be ever on her guard. . . (“Hints” 574, original italics)

Her existence in a household is rather functional, and she must forever repress her own feelings. Her duties require suppression of the superior mind and concealment of ambitions and talents. Furthermore, as Mary Poovey points out, the mid-nineteenth-century discourse around the problems of the governess center on her suspicious nature: she is repeatedly linked to the lunatic and the fallen woman (Poovey 129). According to nineteenth-century critics of the governess problem, the governess is tied, like the lunatic, to “a vitality stunted, silenced, driven mad by denial and restraint” (Poovey 130), and, in the same vein, under such “denial and restraint” her sexuality becomes dangerous, threatening with the possibility to back-fire as a result



of the repression. With such prevailing discourse, the “new idea” or “stirring thought” to which Anne Brontë aspires—the inward heaven—is to be guarded and hidden. In a governess, these inner storms are never to be appreciated; furthermore, they are treasured as a haven, a temporary escape, in which one can hide and keep out the “gross vapours of earth.” Like the disavowal mentioned earlier, such a façade is part of the defense mechanism that the Brontë sisters, like their heroines, adopted to protect themselves. Making a living by appearing mediocre in front of their employers, the Brontës learned the value of camouflage. Thus when this “inward heaven” was finally seen by the public in the form of published volumes, it was still disguised by pseudonyms.

While being unseen and unheard is often excruciating for creative minds which yearn for appreciative gazes from readers and viewers, for the Brontës, being seen only in the protective guise of a public persona (and a masculine persona besides), with the true self hidden, was ever more empowering. Gordon considers Charlotte Brontë as

a survivor who mocked her brother’s graveyard postures of doomed genius; a determinedly professional writer who was impatient, sarcastic, strong in spirit, with an unquenchable fire. This “home” character, at odds with her public image, drove her life in a volcanic way beneath the still, grey crust. “Shadow” recurs in her writings, not as feebleness but as a potency that goes unseen. (3-4)

It is with the desire to maintain such “potency” and an awareness of the common nineteenth-century discourse on womanhood that Brontë creates characters that seem so covert. Thus Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, Brontë’s governess-heroines, are both quiet and shadow-like when surrounded by higher society. Brontë herself insisted on keeping her real self—the woman behind the name Currer Bell—a secret. She wrote to Mrs. Gaskell at the end of 1849, when *Shirley* was published and the true identity of Currer Bell sparked so many ardent discussions among the Victorian reading public: “Currer Bell will avow to Mrs. Gaskell that her chief reason for maintaining an incognito is the fear that if she relinquished it, strength and courage would leave her, and she should ever after shrink from writing the plain truth” (*Letters* ii).

The Brontës—or rather Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell—kept their identities a secret even to their publishers until early in July 1848. In June 1848, Anne had *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* published, and her publisher Mr. Newby, intending to sell *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as Currer Bell’s new novel, gave out that Acton Bell was the author of *Jane Eyre*. He was thus in a way intimating that all three Bells were the

same person. Having learned such news, George Smith, Currer Bell's publisher, wrote to inquire whether it was true. The outraged Charlotte and Anne had thus "walked four miles through a thunderstorm, past the dull-coloured rows of stone cottages thrown up by factories, until they reached the station of Keighley," where they took the night train to London (167). Learning that the two little women at his door, quirky-looking and dressed in old-fashioned clothes, were actually Currer and Acton Bell, George Smith was so excited that he immediately made plans to introduce them into the London literary society. Stopping him, Charlotte Brontë reminded him that they were determined to preserve their "incognito." She later wrote to Mary Taylor that she declined such plans because she "felt it would have ended in [their] being made a show of" (*Letters* ii). Thus a compromise was made and George Smith agreed to take the Brontë sisters to town and introduce them as his "country cousins" (168). Even under such circumstances they still projected merely their public images, the "long-practised image of the governess": Charlotte was "shrinking and watchful," and Anne "calm and silent" (169). Under this disguise, they walked among fashionable ladies and literary dandies, secretly entertained. "I smiled inwardly," Charlotte wrote to Mary, describing the bewilderment of George Smith's mother and sisters when they came to take Charlotte and Anne to dine:

I felt pleurably excited. . . . their strange perplexity would have been ludicrous if one dared to laugh – To be brought down to a part of the city into whose obscure streets they said they never penetrated before – to an old, dark strange-looking Inn – to take up in their fine carriage a couple of odd-looking country-women – to see their elegant, handsome son and brother treating with scrupulous politeness these insignificant spinsters must have puzzled them thoroughly. (Gordon 172)

Such public image manipulation did work. In "impenetrable nonentity and voiceless modesty" (Gordon 172), the Brontë sisters successfully passed for two ordinary women from the countryside, and, according to Gordon, from this point on "the visible woman and invisible author became. . . separate. The passion and vehemence that were part of the author, but inadmissible in woman, were given the lie" (172). Unlike Mrs. Gaskell, who was known as a charming beauty, a good wife and mother, or Maria Edgeworth, whose authority as a virtuous and instructive writer was inseparable from her devotion to her father, Charlotte Brontë's public image as an author did not conform to the ideal of Victorian womanhood. In other words, while many other women writers exploited their public personae as model housewives, obedient daughters, or loving mothers, Charlotte Brontë hid her true self behind both

a male alias and the image of a silent homely little woman. Few Victorian woman writer could walk undisguised.

Brontë was perfectly aware of her own power as a writer, a power hidden behind the “meek little woman” seen by the London public. “Though I knew I looked a poor creature,” wrote Brontë, “and in many respects actually was so, nature had given me a voice that could make itself heard, if lifted in excitement or deepened by emotion” (qtd. in Gordon 254). Such a voice, according to Gordon, is “intimate, passionate, caustic,” and it “brings out what was latent in her sex” (254). For Brontë, it was through writing that the latent fire, a theme ubiquitous in her texts, could be illuminated. This particularity is again reflected in both Brontë’s love life and its literary counterpart. Gordon points out what is intrinsic to the master-pupil relationship so dominant in Brontë’s life and works, as well as in those of many other women writers:

When women like Charlotte Brontë, Emily Dickinson, or Gwen John speak to their “maître” or “master” it has no connotation of self-abasement. To them a master is a teacher—one confident enough to engage with genius and to shape whatever it came to be. . . . In the Bible it is always the man who “knows” the woman, and though mutuality may be implied, the man’s act of “knowing” is potentially more dramatic because a woman is hard to know—veiled in biblical times and obscured since by her social position. The “master” is not a man to whom she defers, but that person who would rescue her from unknowability by sharing some fruits of his advantage. (117)

Here, the man’s attempt at “knowing,” despite the pressures placed on women to be all-but unknowable, corresponds to Sally Shuttleworth’s discussions on the active-passive concealment of Victorian women. It is with the longing for such a master-pupil relationship, as well as the awareness of the façade that a woman should keep, that Brontë writes the love scenes of her heroines. They long to be known—their inner fire, their creativity, intelligence, and value awaiting discovery—yet as women they are not allowed to be so readily seen. Thus, for example, for Rochester, Jane Eyre is always a cabinet of curiosity that he cannot help but try to open: “you puzzled me the first evening I invited you down here,” admits Rochester, “It would please me now to draw you out—to learn more of you” (156). Her character is so “unusual” to him that he desires to “search it deeper and know it better” (361). Thus Jane is compelled to resist his attempt to turn her inside out; such resistance piques Rochester and keeps him interested. When she realizes that the fortune-telling gypsy woman is Rochester in disguise, she complains: “I believe you have been trying to draw me

out—or in; you have been talking nonsense to make me talk nonsense. It is scarcely fair, sir” (234). Indeed it is never fair, for in the game of love-making it is usually the man who attempts to penetrate into the woman’s heart—or in this case, to draw her out—while the woman keeps defying such an attempt in order to stay coy. Likewise, in *Villette*, Paulina is the only woman entitled to true happiness, because she is by nature a “cabinet of oddities.” In a more direct way, the master-pupil relationship between M. Paul and Lucy illustrates the mechanism of reading/penetrating. As soon as Lucy has entered Madame Beck’s Pensionnat de Demoiselles, M. Paul is summoned to read her physiognomy. For Lucy, his observation “seemed to say that he meant to see through [Lucy], and that a veil would be no veil for him” (81). From then on, M. Paul repeatedly claims that he has read her skull (164) and understands her faculties. Such reiteration betrays his interest in Lucy and his yearning to see, to penetrate, her character. Indeed M. Paul is always watching, observing human nature, especially female nature. Lucy finds it “very much his habit to wear eyes before, behind, and on each side of him” (290), and he admits to Lucy that he watches her, along with other women in the school, “pretty constantly, nearer and oftener” than she thinks, from his study, which he terms his “post of observation” (455-6). Lucy’s intention to be a mere looker-on of life, to take in everything with emotional indifference, and her latent longing for understanding, are both reflected in the simultaneous anxiety and curiosity that characterize her observations of M. Paul’s penetrative power. His vision is in fact too keen for many. Lucy observes that, for example, Mdlle. Zélie St. Pierre has her eye on M. Paul, and M. Paul’s eye is “certainly often upon her” (422), though with a different meaning:

He would sit and watch her perseveringly for minutes together. I have seen him give her a quarter of an hour’s gaze. . . Conscious always of this basilisk attention, she would writhe under it, half-flattered, half-puzzled, and Monsieur would follow her sensations, sometimes looking appallingly acute. . . he had the terrible unerring penetration of instinct, and pierced in its hiding-place the last lurking thought of the heart, and discerned under florid veilings the bare, barren places of the spirit: yes, and its perverted tendencies, and its hidden false curves (422-3)

Lucy points out that, along with such observations, he would expose all that is ugly in human nature, for he thinks it right to “do justice”: he would “exultantly snatch the screen from poor shrinking wretches, passionately hurry them to the summit of the mount of exposure, and there show them all naked, all false. . .” (423). With a covert wish to be known by her *maître*—to be seen—Lucy studies his ability to “penetrate”

people with both amusement and amazement. This secret wish stems from the “hidden power,” the concealed truth of what storms within a woman and a writer, that is central to Brontë’s life and works.

Though fragmentary, “Emma,” Brontë’s last attempt to initiate a new novel, illustrates most clearly the concealment, the incongruity between the façade and the interior in womanhood. This story tells of a certain Miss Fitzgibbon, a new student in a girls’ school who turns out to be entirely different from what everyone surmises. In the eye of the Misses Featherhed, the school conductresses, this girl, brought in by a rich gentleman, seems to be nothing less than a model student:

Indeed the child had attractions for the principal of a more flourishing establishment than Fuchsia Lodge—though very young—she promised to possess all the points of a shew-pupil—a decoy-bird—As she stood her face and eyes looked very serious—but in her air—her dress—her very attitude there was a curious impress of the stylish little lady. None could appreciate appearances more fully than the Misses Featherhed—in fact they cared for very little else—and it was their consistent unremitting unflagging attention to outside varnish which afterwards brought them into such vogue and from obscure beginnings made theirs in due time the most fashionable and flourishing school for twenty miles around. (app. in *The Professor*, 229)

In comparison with the Misses Sterlings’ school, where “the girls were compelled to learn grammar and to study history to mend or make garments,” and where “there existed a general impolitic system of treating pupils according to their *intrinsic* merits” instead of their connections or appearances (229-30, italics mine), Fuchsia Lodge is a school of appearances. Miss Featherhed treats her with all due partiality and even makes the girl her own bedfellow. However, in due time this “petted heiress” (236) proves to be less lovable than she at first seems: she is neither physically lovable—Miss Featherhed admits that were the girl poor she “would not have liked her physiognomy (231)—nor sociable. Her curiousness—her numbness in society and a general disinterest to everything—has culminated in a terrifying syndrome of sleep-walking (236). Furthermore, it is soon discovered that the girl’s alleged father—Conway Fitzgibbon Esq. May Park—does not exist, nor does the place called May Park. When interrogated sternly by the school mistress, the so-called Matilda Fitzgibbon bursts into a low cry and falls unconscious.

Gordon argues that, in “Emma,” Charlotte Brontë “was clearly posing a challenge to the feminine façade—that ‘eminently artificial thing’” (Gordon 290). Gordon comments,

If Charlotte Brontë had lived to complete this work, the unidentified girl may have become an emblem of her sex, more than a decade before Mill set out his theory of an artifice so sealed that it would be virtually impossible to uncover women's nature. . . . Victorian medicine assumed that a correct female mind was the healthy extension of correct appearance, both rigidly controlled, but here we are shown an extreme antithesis between mind and body. The disturbance of the child's mind tells of a divided existence: a self concealed and inadmissible in the shadow of a constructed façade. (Gordon 291)

Victorian medical discourse does help to strengthen the belief that a woman's mind—and her body of which the said mind is a referent—should be kept under control.

Sally Shuttleworth, for instance, contemplates the Victorian “rhetoric of drains and sewers” used to describe the female body mechanism: the uterus, for example was considered by a physician as “the sewer of all the excrements existing in the body.”<sup>27</sup>

The functioning of menstruation, whose “dark flow” remained “threateningly inexplicable well into the latter part of the century,” was one of the biggest nightmares that “seemed to haunt the male imagination” (Shuttleworth 76-7).

Without proper control, the periodically bleeding female body seemed able to explode with excessive passion. The seemingly contradictory metaphors of the female body as both the center of the household—and thus embodiment of a cleansing, soothing purity—and, simultaneously, the unstable container of an inexplicable, uncontrollable and threatening passion is exemplified by what Dr. John Gideon Millingen (1782-1862) stated in his 1848 work, *The Passions; or Mind and Matter*:

Woman, with her exalted spiritualism, is more forcibly under the control of matter; her sensations are more vivid and acute, her sympathies more irresistible. She is less under the influence of the brain than the uterine system, the plexi of abdominal nerves, and irritation of the spinal cord; in her, a hysteric predisposition is incessantly predominating from the dawn of puberty. (157)

Women are more susceptible to the influence of *matter*, and, in Shuttleworth's words, in the nineteenth-century culture the female body came to represent “the rampant, uncontrolled excesses of the material economy” (76). Here the association between woman and the material culture—the culture essentially of *objects*—is conspicuous. Thus, it is my contention that, in Brontë, the fallacy of the equation of woman's façade to her content is further highlighted by objects—especially by souvenirs, which by nature are to be hidden and in which “an exterior of little material value envelops a great ‘interior significance’” (Stewart 139). In “Emma,” it is also

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<sup>27</sup> Qtd. in Mary Putnam Jacobi, *The Question of Rest for Women During Menstruation* (NY: G. P. Putnam, 1877), p.8.

objects—once, for example, a “great basket of hothouse fruit” arrives as a present to Miss Fetherhed under Miss Fitzgibbon’s name—that time and again salvage the little heiress’ unlovable face from falling out of the school-mistress’ favor (236). These “little incidents” that seem to “invest her [Miss Fitzgibbon’s] insignificance with *artificial* interest” (236, my italics) help to exemplify the significance of object associations in the faltering relationship between woman’s façade and the female inner power, which in “Emma” is embodied by her oppressed sleepwalking and the outburst of a passionate cry.

For Brontë, the “hidden fire” is what empowers women: the necessity of both concealment and a disparity between the façade and the content caters to the Victorian expectation of female behavior. The disguise is a form of protection, a type of defense mechanism, both inward—in the form of denial—and outward. This chapter thus discusses this hidden fire by examining the objects hidden in tiny spaces, objects so intimate and close to the female body, so curiously kept or displayed, that the interactions between the human beings and the objects are always rendered significant. By exploring the intimate interior spaces belonging to Charlotte Brontë’s heroines, the relationship between objects and their female owners is established via discussions of “control.” The intimate, female spaces are so intricately connected to the bodies of their female occupants/owners that by controlling the objects within the space one can thus control the woman behind the space. Furthermore, by investigating souvenirs—objects always out-of-context, having no place in the day-to-day life in any household—the hidden fire in Brontë’s heroines, as well as the disavowal with which they deal with this fire, is illustrated. Throughout Brontë’s works, hidden objects externalize the heroines’ hidden fire—the narrative drive, the intellect, talent, and passion that make them so powerful—and their “hidden-ness” embodies the masquerade and versatility that both Brontë and her heroines learned to utilize. In these tiny cabinets of curiosities, Brontë presents the curiousness of womanhood in nineteenth-century discourses, curious in the sense of masquerade and concealment, of simultaneous acquiescence and denial, of an almost eerie relationship with objects, a relationship that verges on addiction and voodooesque emotional replacement. In the following chapters, such woman-object relationships will be further investigated through other forms of curiosity cabinets.

## Illustrations

Hunt, William Holman. *Lady of Shalott*. 1905.





Fig. 1↑ William Holman Hunt, *Lady of Shalott*, 1905.

## Chapter Two Garden

According to Tom Carter, the significance of Victorian gardens does not cease at a functional level. In his thorough examination of these gardens, he writes that, besides the “practical” value of kitchen gardens and the “aesthetic” value of flower gardens, the Victorian gardens also carried a “potent symbolism” in nineteenth-century imagination:

The process of growth, renewal and decay provided countless moral lessons, with examples drawn as much from the humblest root as from the most exotic blossom. Man’s reliance on the fruits of his labour, which had been taken for granted in previous ages, was a common theme for moralists and educators in the nineteenth century, as they observed an increasingly urban population losing its sense of dependence on the soil. (Carter 8)

It is under this ideology that John Claudius Loudon founded *The Gardener’s Magazine* in 1826, the introduction to whose first volume, written by Loudon himself, declares that “[t]he love of gardening is natural to man.” Gardening was considered a suitable occupation for the rich and poor alike. For the affluent, it was “a source of agreeable domestic recreation” (Loudon, qtd. in Carter 9), and for the poor it was also recommended as an activity economically, physically, and morally beneficial. It is quite conspicuous that gardening and the concept of the garden—along with its symbolism—were pretty prevalent in nineteenth-century daily life.

This chapter will explore the importance of gardens in Brontë’s time and her works. Gardens were spaces situated between the private and the public spheres, spaces of spectacle and entertainment, of spiritual and emotional comfort, but also of voyeurism, illusion and disillusionment. The garden inevitably introduces to the imagination one of its most ancient models: the Biblical garden of Paradise. Reading the role of women as presented in the context of the garden, I will argue, highlights the concept of “innocence” in the nineteenth century. As examples from Charlotte Brontë’s works will reveal, at mid-century, as Victorian society was gradually modernized and the definition of “innocence” ceased to be absolute, woman was presented as neither ignorantly innocent nor corrupt. I will first discuss the wax and wane of pleasure gardens, which corresponded at least temporally to the change in the concept of Eden as represented by gardens; gradually throughout the late-eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries actual gardens had ceased to be seen merely as a reflection of Eden, but was now seen as an illustration of man’s ability to control the environment. Having explicated this change, this chapter intends to explore the image

of woman in the garden by first contemplating the comparison of women to Eve. As gardens ceased to be so readily linked to Eden, I argue, there was a corresponding change in attitudes towards women: they were no longer regarded as daughters of “Eve,” as ignorant sinners, fallen by nature. A paradoxical attitude specific to such a drastically evolving society—a simultaneous nostalgia for Nature and pride in the development of human technology and accomplishments—is reflected in the way woman is presented in these settings. As values associated with an assumed more “innocent” past are replaced by more complicated new values, the “innocence” associated with women also changes. The popularity of the nineteenth-century horticultural novelty—the Wardian case—reflects at once a pride in controlling Nature and a nineteenth-century desire to stop time and preserve “innocence” forever. Adopting the Snow White and Sleeping Beauty stories, which were very popular at the time, as an extension of the Wardian case discussions, I intend to bring woman into the picture again and illustrate how, in the nineteenth century, a desire to keep women in an impossible state of perfect innocence prevailed as a response to a society in flux. But first, a brief introduction to the nineteenth-century reception of pleasure gardens will give context to this discussion.

### **I. Nineteenth-Century Gardens and the Changing Concept of Eden**

For the practical mind of John Loudon as well as for those of other horticultural authorities of his time, the “utility” of the garden outweighed its “agreeableness” (Carter 8). Nevertheless, pleasure gardens exerted such an enchanting influence on the nineteenth-century mind that they were no less significant than the more practical kitchen gardens. From the eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, pleasure gardens were, for city dwellers especially, an important experience. In the bustle and crowding of city life, these gardens not only provided an escape from the polluted air of industrialization, but also a place for public relaxation and entertainment. Shows in pleasure gardens—consisting of fireworks, canon salvos, lights and paintings—could not be equalled by those in indoor exhibition halls. Usually opened at night, these gardens created a magical space with their lights, winding paths and shielding trees. In 1849, for example, Albert Smith recalled the enchantment of Vauxhall Gardens at the summit of its fame, when he had visited it twenty years earlier as a boy:

Twenty years have gone by, this summer, since that eventful night, but the impression made upon me is as vivid as it was on the following day. I remember being shown the lights of the orchestra twinkling through the trees, from the road, and hearing the indistinct crash of the band as I waited for all our party, literally trembling with expectation at the pay place. Then there came the dark passage, which I hurried along with feelings almost of awe: and finally the bewildering coup d'oeil, as the dazzling walk before the great supper-room, with its balloons, and flags, and crowns of light—its panels of looking glass, and long lines of radiant stars, festoons, and arches, burst upon me and took away my breath, with almost every other faculty. I could not speak. I heard nothing that was said to me. . . I have never experienced anything like the intensity of that feeling but once since. . . (A. Smith 92)

The exhilaration reaches its peak at supper, when the entire party is drenched in the carnivalesque atmosphere:

The supper was another great feature—eating by the light of variegated lamps, with romantic views painted on the walls, and music playing all the time, was on a level with the most brilliant entertainment described in the maddest, wildest traditions of Eastern story-tellers. And as the “rack punch”—“racking,” would be a better term—was imbibed, until all the lamps formed a revolving firework of themselves, what little sense of the real and actual I had retained, departed altogether. I broke some wine-glasses, I danced with the waiter in the red coat, and finally I tumbled down, from which point my reminiscences are hazy and confused. (93)

The excitement elicited by such spaces, filled with wondrous displays and overwhelming sensational experiences, had a long-lasting impact on minds dulled by the boredom of everyday life. For Albert Smith's generation, who matured through the 1820s and 1830s, pleasure gardens were deeply rooted in their minds, entwined with a nostalgia for their adolescence. When “jaded, baited, and spirit-wearied,” they would think it “at least pleasant” to remember that

there really was a time when the lamps were regarded—not as little glass vessels with smoky wicks and common oil within, but as terrestrial stars, lighted by fairy hands, and fitted only to shed their radiance round, as did the dazzling and tempting fruit of Aladdin's subterranean garden. (94-95)

The excitement and yearning in his tone is similar to that of William Crimsworth in Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor*, who, “in moments of weariness and low spirits” (55), would imagine again and again the unseen garden of the girls' school outside his boarded window. Although for William the garden represents an ideal space where angels dwell instead of an enjoyable pleasure ground, the emotional comfort brought forth by imagining the garden as a utopia is clearly related. The charm of the Vauxhall Gardens served as a comfort, a little magic to relieve the ordinariness of life. It is no wonder that Dickens described Vauxhall as a place where the “illuminated

groves, . . . the temples and saloons and cosmoramas and fountains glittered and sparkled before our eyes” and “a few hundred thousand of additional lamps dazzled our senses” (*Boz* 129).

Indeed, the Vauxhall Gardens had been, since the eighteenth century, the “chief site of Londoners’ al fresco entertainment” (Altick 319). It was “a recreation place for all classes, from aristocrats to artisans,” and even the Prince of Wales was a regular visitor (Altick 219). Due to the intensity of competition in the nineteenth-century entertainment business, Vauxhall, like all the other pleasure gardens, put on new shows each year. These shows were usually a combination of firework displays, panoramas, and mechanical devices, spectacular simulations of natural or man-made disasters. The most popular features were the Battle of Waterloo and volcanic eruptions. The Battle of Waterloo performance, like other Waterloo-themed shows in the 1820s, was a huge success. As a consequence the open-air theatre was then called “the Waterloo Grounds,” despite the other shows featured at the site. The advertisement of the grand finale reads,

. . . a superb Display of FIREWORKS will take place, and . . . will assume a novel and appropriate effect: during which MR. COOKE will manoeuvre his War Chariot and Six Horses, then mount his celebrated Charger, Bucephalus, and, at full speed, ride up a nearly perpendicular Rock, to the Temple of Fame, at the summit of the Fire-Work Tower, and there deposit the British and French Colors, as an Emblem of Amity, in the Temple of Concord, a Feat unequalled in the Annals of Horsemanship. (Southworth 102)

Despite constant renovations, the popularity of Vauxhall and other pleasure gardens gradually waned in the 1850s. Over the years Vauxhall struggled to maintain patronage by constantly renewing its shows, though in the end such desperate attempts merely further signaled the decline of its influence. In the mid-thirties, Vauxhall resorted to opening its gardens during the day, a decision on which Dickens comments in a newspaper piece entitled “Vauxhall Gardens by Day,”

There was a time when if a man ventured to wonder how Vauxhall Gardens would look by day, he was hailed with a shout of derision at the absurdity of the idea. Vauxhall by daylight! A porter-pot without porter, the House of Commons without the Speaker, a gas-lamp without the gas—pooh, nonsense, the thing was not to be thought of. (*Boz* 127)

Actually visiting the gardens by day, Dickens found the experience one of disenchantment. The entrance was now “nothing more nor less than a combination of very roughly-painted boards and sawdust” (*Boz* 129), and then he

Walked about, and met with a disappointment at every turn; our favorite views were mere patches of paint; the fountain that had sparkled so showily by lamp-light, presented very much the appearance of a water-pipe that had burst; all the ornaments were dingy, and all the walks gloomy. (*Boz* 130)

The disappointment and condemnation evident in this report testifies to the end of an era: the era of pleasure gardens.

Indeed, the chronicle of the demise of the Vauxhall gardens is merely one among many. The popularity of the Surrey Gardens, Vauxhall's biggest competitor, also dwindled quickly in the 1850s. Gardens were no longer sufficient means of escape for urban inhabitants, arguably due to a shift in the attitude towards "garden" and "Eden." In *The Counterfeit Idyll*, a study of the Garden ideal in nineteenth-century fiction, Gail Finney points out that "much of Romantic poetry is informed by nostalgia for a paradise lost" (104), and the Romantic longing for the garden paradise is "backward-directed and nostalgic rather than forward-looking and utopian" (108). Romantic visions of Eden, though varied, shared a tendency to acquire "spatial and temporal concreteness, historicity. . ." and Eden became a metaphor for the "idealized conception of preindustrial England as the embodiment of a natural, 'unspoiled' way of life" (104). For the Romantics, the relationship between the garden and the concept of Eden was literal and direct, but throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries this connection gradually grew complicated and controversial. Max F. Schulz writes in his study of the concept of "Eden" or "Paradise" in the eighteenth and nineteenth century that, by midcentury, while many grieved over the loss of natural environment—and in turn, innocence—due to urbanization, the communal reliance on technology inevitably grew and modernization was glorified and almost mystified: "[i]t was almost as if a dogma had gotten abroad in the land promising that technology would offer material consolation, if not a panacea, for loss of the natural environment and the uncomplicated state of mind of an earlier paradise" (166). While new constructions, providing human life with more substantial comfort, somehow replaced Eden/garden as a manifestation of Paradise and God's bliss, paradoxical attitudes gradually surfaced: while civilization was condemned as being responsible for changes in natural environments and a loss of the innocence imagined as part of an earlier, "simpler" lifestyle, it was also praised as the result of man's ability and determination, and thus a remote manifestation of God's will. Schulz

further points out that, as technology develops, “the long awaited life of plenty was believed yet again to be near at hand,” and within such expectations of a new world

the mechanical was often mistaken for the natural, garden suburbs for the country, public pleasure gardens for private Edens, and mean streets of columnared row houses for the Attic spirit of Vitruvius, Palladio, and Inigo Jones. (155)

The imageries of the natural and the manmade were so entangled that garden becomes an evermore complicated symbol. This changing attitude coincided with, if not directly caused, the decline of pleasure gardens. Thus, according to Schulz, at midcentury the pleasure gardens “offered. . . a sorry version of fallen paradise,” for they had “passed their period of widest social acceptance,” which was roughly between 1750 and 1775 (160).

In addition to pleasure gardens, another type of Victorian garden is defined by its relationship to the city: shifts in the planning of such spaces further explicate nineteenth-century attitudes to the garden. In his 1804 book, *L'architecture considérée sous la rapport de l'art, des mœurs et de la législation*, French architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux delineates his blueprints for an ideal city life that Schulz describes as the “dream of the century,” the dream of “a society living harmoniously in an urban environment of natural rightness, with streets harking back to the prototype of leafy lanes between trees, and of buildings whose columns are reminders of the Edenic forest” (Schulz 156). On the other side of the English Channel, this dream was manifested first in the pleasure gardens at their heyday, when “Londoners could escape the teeming city into its still pastoral suburbs where they might partake in the rage for tea drinking and pretend for a few carefree hours that they were Colin Clouts and fair Rosalind, if not Adam and Eve” (Schulz 160). Furthermore, this ideal prevailed throughout the nineteenth century, and Ledoux’s delineation can be seen as a remote precursor to the nineteenth-century “Garden City Movement,” which developed more than 90 years later. In 1898, Sir Ebenezer Howard published *To-morrow: A peaceful path to Real Reform*,<sup>28</sup> a volume now believed to have catalyzed many modern town-planning movements. Thus the “Garden City Movement,” planned-community initiatives in which Sir Howard’s work played an important part, arose towards the end of the nineteenth century as a reaction to the pollution and population explosion brought forth by the industrial revolution. However, an ideal community surrounded by carefully planned gardening was by no means a new

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<sup>28</sup> In 1902, it was reprinted under the new title *Garden Cities of To-morrow*.

concept. By the mid-nineteenth century, some Village Associations had already been established to develop communities in the suburbs of London. In 1848, one plan around Ilford reads,

Air and space, wood and water, schools and churches, shrubberies and gardens, around pretty self contained cottages in a group neither too large to deprive it of country character, nor too small to diminish the probabilities of social intercourse. (*Edinburgh Magazine*, Dec. 1848)

Such concepts had clearly influenced Sir Howard's Garden City plan:

... by so laying out a Garden City that, as it grows, the free gifts of Nature- fresh air, sunlight, breathing room and playing room- shall be still retained in all needed abundance. (*Garden Cities of To-morrow* 113)

Though reminiscent of the society that Ledoux dreamed of at the beginning of the century, a utopia with "streets harking back to the prototype of leafy lanes between trees" and "buildings whose columns are reminders of the Edenic forest," it is clear that, from Ledoux's emphasis of a city imitating Nature to the Garden City plan whose intention was to create a city retaining Nature, the nineteenth-century society gradually came to view the elements of Nature as catering to human needs. A space where a manipulated version of Nature is embedded in man-made environments, the "garden" was part of a plan that illustrates man's ability to control and change the environment. The garden now provided practical, rather than spiritual, comfort. With the decline of pleasure gardens and the shift in the function of "garden" more generally, Ledoux's longing of an Edenic forest proved to be out-dated by the 1850s, when urbanization had developed to such a level that the concepts of paradise and God's design were no longer considered to be embodied by Edenic gardens, but by urban constructions, technological developments, and other demonstrations of human glory. Roads, canals, and bridges were built, lands were developed, and the quality of human life was improved, due to the work of those Carlyle was to call "Captains of Industry."

Nonetheless, despite disillusionment with, and the decline of, the pleasure gardens, their charms remained nostalgically on the British mind well into the mid-nineteenth-century. Though the Vilette Park scene is most possibly inspired by Brontë's personal experience in the Parc de Bruxelles, when she writes of Lucy Snowe's dream-like wander in the park at midnight, the description reads very much like those delineating the Vauxhall Gardens. Lucy finds on the street that,

Vilette is one blaze, one broad illumination; the whole world seems abroad; moonlight and heaven are banished: the town, by her own



flambeaux, beholds her own splendour—gay dresses, grand equipages, fine horses and gallant riders through the bright streets. (*Villette* 565)

Entering the park, Lucy finds herself

[i]n a land of enchantment, a garden most gorgeous, a plain sprinkled with coloured meteors, a forest with sparks of purple and ruby and golden fire gemming the foliage; a region, not of trees and shadow, but of strangest architectural wealth. (566)

The “gardenhood” of the park, to borrow Horace Walpole’s coinage,<sup>29</sup> is replaced by “architectural wealth,” a symbol of human achievement. Brontë’s description of the park here is as paradoxical as the age itself, the promised redemption of Eden entwined with both a desperation brought forth by the loss of Nature and a compensating belief in the new world that modern technology would realize. Standing amidst the flamboyancy and extravagance of man-made glory, Lucy still pines for a symbol of Eden, a space within the garden that symbolizes a sense of “natural” tranquility. Yet, while seeking the stone basin, Lucy is constantly distracted by the sound and vision of the flaming fête that the park itself has become:

I knew my route, yet it seemed as if I was hindered from pursuing it direct: now a sight, and now a sound, called me aside, luring me down this alley and down that. Already I saw the thick-planted trees which framed this tremulous and rippled glass, when, choiring out of a glade to the right, broke such a sound as I thought might be heard if Heaven were to open. . . . Voices were there, it seemed to me, unnumbered; instruments varied and countless. . . The effect was as a sea breaking into song with all its waves. . . The swaying tide swept this way, and then it fell back, and I followed its retreat. It led me towards a Byzantine building. (568)

Lucy is lost in the labyrinth of visual and aural wonders. She is literally *lost*, though she knows her route, as she never finds the pond she so feverishly pines for in her broken sleep, and which she has come to seek. The enchantment of the space lures her, and she takes her place among the pleasure-seeking crowd, the broad brim of her straw hat bound down “gipsy-wise” in order for her to “feel safe as if masked” (567). To Lucy, as the bystander that she intends to be, the festive park becomes a space of masked observation, though she is not indifferent to its charms. At the concert, she secretly watches her friends—the Brettons and the de Bassompierres—without being seen, and, “straying at random” (573), she spies Madame Walravens, Madame Beck, and Père Silas among the others, and, later, Justine Marie and M. Paul. Hidden among the crowd and shielded by the trees, Lucy sees without being seen.

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<sup>29</sup> The word comes from Walpole’s comment on the Vauxhall Gardens. See Altick 320.

Throughout *Villette*, the theme of surveillance prevails, and the garden is again and again the space where such surveillance—such seeing without being seen—and the power that engenders, takes place. Whether as open to the public as the pleasure garden or as private and secretive as a garden in a girl’s school, the garden, with trees as perfect screens of vision, serpentine paths that seem to lead to nowhere, and a sense of pleasure for those within it, becomes the ideal site of display and voyeurism, of curiosity and mystery, of seduction and secretive rendezvous.

As a space of overwhelming and / or clandestine visual experience, the nineteenth-century pleasure garden also serves as a site in which disillusionment takes place. Yet, as with nineteenth-century exhibition-visitors and show-goers, the disillusionment does not greatly diminish the charm of the visual experience itself. While Lucy discovers the “back-stage” of the façade of the glamorous park at the night of the festival, still she cannot deny its charm:

Not matter that in five minutes the secret was mine—the key of the mystery picked up, and its illusion unveiled—no matter that I quickly recognized the material of these solemn fragments—the timber, the paint, and the paste-board—these inevitable discoveries failed to quite destroy the charm, or undermine the marvel of that night. (*Villette* 566)

Indeed, the enchantment of the mystery is not erased even after the mystery is solved.

Dickens also writes of the time when Vauxhall under daylight was still a mystery:

It was rumoured. . . in those times, that Vauxhall Gardens by day were the scene of secret and hidden experiments; that there, carvers were exercised in the mystic art of cutting a moderate-sized ham into slices thin enough to pave the whole of the grounds; that beneath the shade of the tall trees, studious men were constantly engaged in chemical experiments, with the view of discovering how much water a bowl of negus could possibly bear; and that in some retired nooks, appropriated to the study of ornithology, other sage and learned men were, by a process known only to themselves, incessantly employed in reducing fowls to a mere combination of skin and bone. (*Boz* 127)

Rumours of this kind, according to Dickens, “cast over Vauxhall Gardens an air of deep mystery,” which enhanced the pleasure that Vauxhall has to offer (*Boz* 127-129).

Dickens’ negative attitude towards the open of Vauxhall by day comes from a fear of disillusionment. On the other hand, Albert Smith proves such disillusionment inconsequential. Smith wrote of the rumours surrounding Vauxhall in winter-time, when the gardens were not open, though in this case his imagination ponders how macabre the sight would be:

Amongst the unrevealed mysteries of London, is the hibernal existence of Vauxhall. . . . An imaginative mind, tinged with superstition, can

fancy fearful scenes going on there in dark January. It can picture the cold bright frosty moon shedding a ghastly light upon the almost rained-out Constantinople or Venice, as the case may be; and glistening on the icicles depending from the nostrils of Neptune's horses, or the hair of the Eve at the fountain. The cutting wind whistles through the airy abode of Joel il Diavolo. The snow is deep upon the ground, capping the orchestra also, and drifting into the supper boxes; whilst a few spectral leaves, on which the light of many a summer orgy whilome rested, chase one another with pattering noise along the covered promenades, or whiffle about amongst the decaying benches of the firework gallery. It is impossible to conceive anything more dreary—a wet November Sunday, in a grave family at Clapham, is nothing to it. (*Sketches* 93)

Gothic as it seems, such a description could be fact. The façade and the things behind the façade were equally fascinating for the curious nineteenth-century observer: in his eyes, the disenchantment itself—or rather the imagined disenchantment—was no less enchanting, for the curious inquirer finds satisfaction in such hypothetical voyeuristic pleasure. Thus, while observing the disappointing sight of Vauxhall by day, where, “if there had been any magic about it at all, was now decidedly disenchanted” (*Boz* 129), and witnessing the perishing of the gardens, their old-time grandeur now turned threadbare, the nineteenth-century viewer still saw the pleasure garden as an imaginative dream-land—if anything, the sense of nostalgia further enhanced the charm of the reminisced garden.

A “lost innocence” was sought in the remembered garden, but rather than prelapsarian innocence, it was the innocence of youth that viewed the garden as a magical, enchanted place. As Albert Smith claimed, memories of Vauxhall were significant to his generation: “Despite its hacknied amusements,” writes Smith, “we have all pleasant associations connected with Vauxhall: I would not willingly exchange my own for dearer reminiscences of things far more important in the romance of life” (94). That is why the nineteenth-century viewers were attracted by the advertisements of the shows, even when they realized how disappointing the real sight might be. “I still like to be deceived,” again comments Smith regarding the shows put on in Vauxhall, “to deceive myself even, rather than not give way sometimes to the power of illusion. . . . True it is, that the reality will sometimes fall short of the expectation; but. . . it never annoys me” (95). It is characteristic of the mid-nineteenth century viewer to deceive himself, to feed, knowingly, his own curiosity with a compensative pretense. As mentioned in the introduction, Richard Altick comments in his study of the nineteenth-century London shows that as a class, the show-goers in London at the time were “willing to gaze at any mimicry of reality”

(Altick 399), no matter how poorly staged they were. It is precisely under such semi-self-deception that Lucy is able to remain enchanted by the park even after she sees through its façade. For Smith's generation, the "former days" represented by the glamour of Vauxhall Gardens would always be a kind of "consolation" (96) when remembered. Pleasure gardens were wrapped in nostalgia, just like an old coloured painting that Smith had seen in his childhood, presenting the Gardens "as they were in the time of hoops and high head-dresses, bag-wigs and swords" :

The Royal Property was surrounded by clumps of trees and pastures: shepherds smoked their pipes where the tall chimneys of Lambeth now pour out their dense encircling clouds, to blight or blacken every attempt at vegetation in the neighbourhood: and where the rustics played cricket at the water-side, massive arches and mighty girders bear the steaming, gleaming, screaming train on its way to the new terminus. (91)

The image of the "garden" is a link to the past, when industrialization had not yet polluted the air of England: the garden becomes here a space of preserved pastoral pleasure, a site of nostalgic reminiscence, amid the swiftly changing life.

While memories of the glorious days of pleasure gardens still reminds Smith of simpler times, the actual circumstances of gardens in mid-nineteenth-century urban life seem less positive. According to Schulz,

[a]s the century advanced," the inhabitants of nineteenth-century England, especially those living in urban areas, "discovered less and less solace, allegorical or otherwise, in literal gardens, which took the form increasingly of parks hemmed round by "the girdling city's hum"<sup>30</sup> or of sooty patches of courtyard enveloped by houses.<sup>31</sup> (263)

Despite the promise of the Garden City movement, London "never adequately solved its problem of depressing miles of brick and stucco faced streets," and it remained "relatively poor in garden suburbs" (Schulz 158). The actual garden had thus lost its function as a means of spiritual consolation, although the mere *concept* of gardens alone still brought a sense of nostalgia. Merely one year after Wordsworth's death, Frederick Denison Maurice wrote in an 1851 letter that "Wordsworth's *Prelude* seems to me the dying utterance of the half century we have just passed through" (Maurice 59). By 1851, the first half of the nineteenth century had passed away with Wordsworth, and so had the romantically constructed equivalence between the ideal paradise and actual gardens. In his 1868-70 poem "The Earthly Paradise," William

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<sup>30</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Lines Written in Kensington Gardens," 1852.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Griffin, "The Interior Garden and John Stuart Mill," *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, pp. 171-86.

Morris articulates the disappointment his generation feels towards the paradisaical garden enclosure: the garden had then become more a “shadowy isle of bliss” built by “the poor singer of an empty day” (“Apology” 38, 42) than the paradise delineated by Milton. In the 150 years prior to 1850, “an ahistorical Eden had enjoyed a continuing literal existence as identical with both the cultivated and the natural landscape of earth” (Schulz 269)—both the natural landscape and the artificial gardens shared an identification with Eden.

However, by the mid-century the construction of railroads, canals and bridges had changed the environment: they had not merely greatly minimized the “natural” lands, but at the same time demonstrated human ingenuity, creating a new version of paradise in which technology brought a materialized ideal life-style. The railroad, for example, was regarded with mixed attitudes. Thomas Carlyle exulted in the speed of the train on his first railway ride in 1839,<sup>32</sup> and he admitted that the railroad, with the hum and clank and some and flames, was “not without its attractions, as well as repulsions” (qtd. in Froude 384). In *Sartor Resartus*, on the other hand, he used the steam engine as a gloomy, moribund metaphor: “To me the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb” (Carlyle Bk II, 133). This simultaneous disappointment and belief is specific to the turning-point into modernity, a point at which disillusionment with innocence already lost coincides with newborn myths of human intelligence. It is also worthy of note that it was the railroad that facilitated residents in urban area to reach such less urbanized lands as the Lake District. While an aspiration to surround oneself with Nature still persisted, it was the human creation that enabled such movement toward Nature. I do not agree with Schulz when he suggests that the mid-Victorians watched how gardens were “violently altered in the name of progress into sterile chaos by the manufactory of civilization” (Schulz 273), for I do believe that through a sense of nostalgia the gardens still provided a certain comfort, though one different from that afforded previous generations. However, I do agree with his argument that in the mid-and-late-nineteenth-century, “Victorians looked on the garden with betrayed expectations, identifying it simultaneously with an ideal of perfection that was and with the reality of decay that is” (Schulz 274). The garden serves as a vantage point

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Carlyle’s 13 September 1839 letter to John Aitken Carlyle.

from which the paradoxical Victorian attitude towards both the hope of Eden and the concept of innocence can be illustrated.

Brontë's works, especially the endings of her works, are imbued with this anxiety concerning the shifting idea of a redeemable Eden. In *The Professor*, gardens serve as a space of disillusionment, and the women in the garden—Middle Reuter and the “angels” that William takes his students to be—prove to be equally disappointing. However, as Frances reads to William a passage from *Paradise Lost* after they return to her house from the “well-protected garden” (138) of the cemetery, where he has suddenly realized his love for her, a hope of a life in Eden becomes possible. In the end of the book, a “Promised Land” (208) becomes visible for William and Frances. They move back to England, which is repeatedly referred to as Frances’ “Canaan” (119, 174)—they move to “a region whose verdure the smoke of mills has not yet sullied, whose waters still run pure, whose swells of moorland preserve in some ferny glens, that lie between them, the very primal wildness of nature, her moss, her bracken, her blue-bells” (215). Though carrying different theological meanings, the “Promised Land” and “Canaan” promise not merely a better life, but a life similar to that in Eden: here a redemption, a return to the Paradise, seems possible. Compared with the beginning of the chronicle, when William views with contempt the smoke of factory chimneys that chokes the sky over his brother’s property, where “you cannot dream, you cannot speculate and theorize” (13), the life style of William and Frances embodies a garden still redeemable, where the chance to return to innocence still exists. Their son Victor serves as an even more optimistic symbol of “the Promised Land,” for William sees “in the soil of his heart healthy and swelling germs of compassion, affection, fidelity—[William] discovered in the garden of his intellect a rich growth of wholesome principles—reason, justice, moral courage promised—if not blighted, a fertile bearing” (221). In his son, William sees a new garden, pregnant with possibilities and a bright future. According to Finney, even as early as the Romantic period the necessity of the Fall was apparent: it is the effort made to re-enter the paradise that is essential to the Fall, not the life prior to the eviction. The struggle towards salvation and the resurrection of Eden is apparent in the hopeful ending of *The Professor*.

If optimism prevails in the ending of *The Professor*, it is no less potent even in the seemingly morally controversial *Jane Eyre*. Despite all the ambiguities surrounding gardens, in the end, redemption is achieved, and the Albatross is removed

from Rochester's neck: he is blessed with his vision again. The sense of recovery is unmistakable, and when he holds his son in his arms and sees on the baby's face eyes obviously inherited from him, he "again, with a full heart, acknowledged that God had tempered judgment with mercy" (520).

In 1849, *Shirley* was published. Set against the background of the 1840s cotton-mill workers' strikes, *Shirley* tells a story in which the ideal of paradise and the hope of redemption is gradually compromised by a more complicated reality, a reality in which simultaneous disappointment and belief in the power of man replaces a simple faith in spiritual salvation. The story ends in marriage—two marriages, to be exact—as in Brontë's previous novels. However, in the end, when the narrator describes the world that these two couples have created, it is a paradise very different from the "not yet sullied" land inhabited by William and Frances:

The other day I passed up the Hollow, which tradition says was once green, and lone, and wild; and there I saw the manufacturer's day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes—the cinder-black highway, the cottages, and the cottage-gardens; there I saw a mighty mill, and a chimney, ambitious as the tower of Babel. (541)

Then he discusses this sight with his old housekeeper, who recountss how much the land has altered in a tone neither of regret nor content, but excited wonder (541-542). The condemnation, no matter how slight, is unmistakable in the analogy of the tower of Babel. As a symbol of an exceedingly audacious exultation of human glory over God's design, the Tower of Babel looms as a metaphor for a society in which doubts and beliefs in technology coexist, and an anxiety over the over-confidence of human's ability prevails. The mighty mill and chimney echo the desolate scene William sees at the beginning of *The Professor*, the land of both progress and pollution. The paradise that the Moores come to establish seems to be the opposite of the "Promised Land" that William and Frances so long for. Written years before *Shirley*, *The Professor* at first glance seems to embrace more wholeheartedly the concept of a redeemable Eden. However, the description of the land as "not yet sullied" foreshadows changes to come, the day when the land is finally filled with human constructions. The Moores' is a new version of paradise, an Eden that is to be realized via human effort and intelligence—and in the mid-nineteenth century, as Brontë's words illustrate, this paradise is never entirely free from a sense of anxiety. Without actually resolving the anxiety, the narrator leaves the moral untold (542). Behind such a seemingly paradoxical attitude is the mid-century society in which the

swift process of modernization is watched with a mixture of awe, excitement and concern.

The ending of *Villette* is even less optimistic. On the eve of M. Paul's departure, Lucy sees the hope of Eden:

We walked back to the Rue Fossette by moonlight—such moonlight as fell on Eden—shining through the shades of the Great Garden, and haply gilding a path glorious, for a step divine—a Presence nameless. Once in their lives some men and women go back to these first fresh days of our great Sire and Mother—taste that grand morning's dew—bathe in its sunrise. (612)

Such hope is merely momentary. Expecting M. Paul's return, Lucy has "cultivated out of love for him . . . the plants he preferred, and some of them are yet in bloom" (616). However, the garden that Lucy prepares for M. Paul is never to become the Garden of Eden, in which Adam and Eve are expected to lead a blissful life. Having identified the moment of shipwreck, Lucy halts the narration with an attitude of seeming sanguinity:

Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life. (617)

The "joy born again," the "reprieve from dread," and the "fruition of return" are all symbols of a paradise retrieved. As M. Paul is apparently never able to return from the New World to Lucy, her hope of a new world shall never be realized. The garden is never a space of redemption for Lucy, but instead is one of endless disappointment. The very last sentences that Lucy utters are of the *prosperity* of the lives of Madame Beck, Père Silas, and Madame Walravens (618)—the trio that she spies in the garden-in-carnival, who have conspired to deprive her of her happiness. This last association with the garden, a space in which images of prosperity are abundant, is ineluctably tainted with the forces that drive Lucy further away from her paradise. Like other mid-century gardens, Lucy's is not an Eden of hope, yet neither is it a sign of degradation—gardens, like many other nineteenth-century phenomena, are reflections of a changing society in which old values were gradually dissolved and new values were being established on still shaky grounds. The garden as a biblical symbol, along with the concepts of innocence and degeneration behind it, had become less and less definite.



What separates the tone and ending of *Villette* from Brontë's earlier works is a recurring sense of rootlessness. The narrating voice of *Villette* is, at least on the surface, one of passive acceptance of the fact that, while some are blessed with happiness, others are meant to be shut out of paradise, living without root, without home. However, such acceptance is painfully learned, and the desire to pass through the gates of Eden is never entirely left behind. This is reflected throughout *Villette* by the intricate imagery of roots. Lucy, for example, has buried Dr. John's letters in a hole near the root of an old pear-tree, the tree under which the nun was rumored to be buried. The fact that she admits that she "was not only going to hide a treasure—[she] meant also to bury a grief" (369) illustrates how paradoxical the interment is. She puts the letters in a thick glass bottle and has it sealed hermetically. By burying her feelings for Dr. John, she actually keeps them safe and treasures them further. These buried feelings, like the nun, will come back and haunt the living. Indeed, Lucy ponders one day as she pauses before the pear-tree:

What was become of that curious one-sided friendship which was half marble and half life; only on one hand truth, and on the other perhaps a jest?

Was this feeling dead? I do not know, but it was buried. Sometimes I thought the tomb unquiet, and dreamed strangely of disturbed earth, and of hair, still golden and living, obtruded through coffin-chinks. (454)

This passage was discussed in the first chapter, though with a different emphasis. Here, Lucy's feelings for Dr. John would grow, like a plant, from the earth—buried in the garden near the root of the pear-tree, they would secretly burgeon like the tree itself, whose boughs still "faithfully renewed their perfumed snow in spring, and their honey-sweet pendants in autumn" despite its dead-like appearance (130). Like M. Paul, whose passion "died in the past—in the present it lies buried—its grave is deep-dug, well-heaped, and many winters old," Lucy's passion and hope of domestic happiness is buried, yet "in the future there will be a resurrection" (433), as M. Paul promises. Indeed, after being neglected by M. Paul for a few weeks due to religious differences, Lucy one day sees M. Paul working in the garden, trying to work his emotions away:

There was M. Emanuel, bent over the soil, digging in the wet mould amongst the rain-laden and streaming shrubs, working as hard as if his day's pittance were yet to earn by the literal sweat of his brow.

He would dig thus in frozen snow on the coldest winter day, when urged inwardly by painful emotion, whether of nervous excitation, or sad thoughts, or self-reproach. (520)

This anxious digging takes place after he has put the pamphlet in Lucy's desk. Indeed, he digs in frozen "snow" (Snowe), trying to uproot or unearth something: be it Lucy's religious beliefs, his own buried passion, or Lucy's feelings; his digging in the *garden* at this point, enabling the growth of plants—or feelings, or relationships—and rousing the earth in which secrets are buried, marks the intricacy of the garden imagery in a world where old hopes are buried yet never entirely forgotten. With the buried passion, dead yet still growing, the garden becomes a space in which burial marks not death but a haunting *rootedness*, brought forth by an unresolvable passion and disappointment in life: what is buried will not rest in peace; it will take root, rouse the earth and haunt the ground.

Given the convoluted nineteenth-century attitudes towards the garden as Eden, the image of woman as Eve must be read just as carefully. Intrigues between the sexes are often highlighted against the backdrop of a garden, a space in which seductions often take place. Within such a space, woman (as Eve) inevitably serves as a symbol of both innocence and corruption, or rather, neither. For Charlotte Brontë's novels, as for many nineteenth-century novels in which secrets and mysteries abound, the garden becomes a site of concealed conspiracies, clandestine love affairs, and games of masked flirtation. Within this space of display and concealment, of innocence and the loss of innocence, the image of woman as both the Eve and the garden itself becomes a fundamental issue. Charlotte Brontë's novels offer many examples of how, in the nineteenth century, the garden/Eden became a space in which "innocence" was no longer a simple and absolute concept, and the garden's "Eve" was no longer presented as simply a symbol of innocence.

The garden is an essential image in Brontë's works, and more often than not women are described through metaphors of plants, flowers, or garden. When William observes his pretty but soulless (11) sister-in-law, he looks in vain for "that Promethean spark which will live after the roses and lilies are faded" (11); after he realizes that his students are far from the "angels" that he imagined them to be, he mocks those idealists who dream of "earthly angels and human flowers" (81); Jane Eyre observes Miss Ingram and finds out that "her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil; no unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness" (215-6); when Caroline pines away from lack of love, her "mind's soil and its treasures were freezing gradually to barren stagnation" (158).

Indeed, women are surrounded by the imagery of the garden, and, more importantly, in Brontë such imagery is germane to the concept of innocence.

In *The Professor*, the garden plays an essential role in the protagonist's relationships with women; for William Crimsworth, women seem to be inseparable from the garden. Since the theme of innocence, and its loss thereof, is inextricable from garden imagery, it is not surprising that in this novel the garden is endowed with connotations of sexual intrigue, voyeurism, and seduction. When William Crimsworth comes into the apartment that M. Pelet assigns him as his teacher's "chamber," he finds that the windows, which look down to the garden of the "Pensionnat de demoiselles," are all boarded up, and he laments the amusement he would have felt to "have watched the demoiselles at their play—to have studied female character in a variety of phases, [him]self the while, sheltered from view by a modest muslin curtain" (55). Blocked by the boarded windows, he repeatedly imagines the garden lying beyond, until his own yearning turns it into an "unseen Paradise" in his mind (55). He becomes so obsessed with these thoughts of Paradise that afterwards, especially "in moments of weariness and low spirits," he often "look[s] with dissatisfied eyes on the most tantalizing board, longing to tear it away and get a glimpse of the green region which [he] imagined to lie beyond" (55). Here, his eagerness to peep is so intense that it is almost sexual. When he again becomes an English teacher in Mdlle. Reuter's school, he finally gains access into the garden he desires, the garden where young girls linger and, furthermore, the garden with which Mdlle. Reuter herself is always associated. However, the "angels" that he so aspires to see turn out to be giddy, frivolous girls with "an air of bold, impudent flirtation or a loose, silly leer," who are, in William's words, "mentally depraved" (82). The disillusionment and disappointment thus associated with the garden—and with women—becomes a ubiquitous theme in *The Professor*.

Throughout the novel, Mdlle. Reuter's garden appears and reappears, each time marking a turning point in her relationship with William. It is significant that when William meets the renowned Mademoiselle for the first time, it is not her person, but her garden, that is first observed and described in detail. As a matter of fact, Mdlle. Reuter herself greets William by showing him her garden: "Come to the window and take a better view," says she before she opens the sash for him (65). "It look[s] pleasant, to me—very pleasant," thinks William, and "it [i]s not only on Mdlle. Reuter's garden that [his] eyes dwel[l]," for his glance eventually moves away from

the garden and lingers upon her (65-66), whom his eyes “ha[ve] a pleasure in looking at” (67). It is thus not surprising that William quickly falls into a flirtation game with her, the woman who “opens up her own garden” to him.

After many flirtations, William finally confesses he has fallen prey to her charms, and his confession is emphasized with metaphors of penetration, presumably into his heart: “her finger,” he admits to himself, “essaying, proving every atom of the casket—touched its secret spring and for a moment—the lid sprung open, she laid her hand on the jewel within” (88). It seems inevitable that this instance of penetration takes place in the garden, where all the sexual tension and voyeuristic desire begun. Having had a bad cold and a cough one day, William grows emotionally vulnerable, and as he walks side by side with the caring Mdlle. in her garden, it seems to him that “the romantic *visions* [his] imagination ha[s] suggested of this garden, while it was yet hidden from [him] by the jealous boards, [are] more than realized” (89, italics mine). He asks the Mdlle. to gather a flower and give it to him, with which he satisfies himself by taking as a token—for him a token of love, and for the Mdlle. a token of her prospective victory in gaining control over him.

This passage echoes my discussions of the mechanism of disguise and penetration in the first chapter. Though here the penetration is initiated by a woman, it is not as atypical as it seems—being superior to William in both social status and age, Mdlle. Reuter’s initiative comes as no surprise. Furthermore, throughout *The Professor*, metaphors of penetration abound—the narrator himself often takes pride in his ability to “penetrate” into the minds of others. His observational abilities as well as the relative inability of others is demonstrated in the very first chapter, when he visits his brother and sees his sister-in-law for the first time. He “sought her eye, desirous to read there the intelligence which [he] could not discern in her face or hear in her conversation,” and, finally announcing that in her he has “watched in vain for a glimpse of soul,” he exhales a sigh of disappointment, which is misunderstood by her as a “homage to her beauty” (11). As William comes to enquire for employment, the next day Edward Crimsworth takes him to work, where Edward intends to observe William, yet in vain. William knows that his brother Edward is “trying to read [his] character,” but he feels “as secure” against Edward’s scrutiny as if he “had on a casque with the visor down” (17), and he confidently shows Edward his own countenance; his face is for Edward as “a letter written in Greek” would be for an “unlearned man” (17). As William sees through Edward’s intentions, Edward cannot

read into William's face, for it is as foreign to him as an "unknown tongue" (18). Here penetration symbolizes a form of observational ability, a means of empowerment not necessarily sexual, whether the initiator is a man or a woman. According to Sally Shuttleworth, the Victorian sense of selfhood was dependent upon keeping one's own self from the observation of others: in Victorian England

The model of social interaction employed is conflictual: power resides with the figure who can read the other whilst preserving the illegibility of the self. . . . According to Bentham, the power of the panopticon lay in the fact that it offered contrivances for "seeing without being seen." . . . The self does not exist prior to social interaction, but is actually *constituted* in the social struggle to baffle penetration. (46, original italics)

Indeed, the entire novel is characterized by countless struggles to penetrate others and to ward off their penetration of the self. While originally it is Adam who "knew" Eve, where knowledge, sexuality, and power relations convulge, here, as in other nineteenth-century literary works centering around marriages, "penetration" entails not merely knowledge, but also a power distribution between the penetrator and the penetrated, a power hierarchy that, though often adopted asexually, is impossible to be entirely separated from its origin of sexual differences.

On the very night of Mdlle. Reuter's victory, pondering her grace and the possibility of a future life with her, William sees through his window Mdlle Reuter's garden, where Monsieur Pelet and Mademoiselle Reuter walk arm in arm (or hand in hand) as lovers. He moreover overhears the discussions of their forthcoming marriage, as well as the jokes made upon him for wooing the Mdlle. It is again the garden into which he spies, yet this time by satisfying his voyeuristic needs he also discovers the cruel truth.

As William's relationship with Frances Henri advances, the disgraced Mdlle. contrives to win him back by dismissing Frances from the school, and when William enquires about the whereabouts of Frances, it is again to the garden that Mdlle. Reuter brings him, with the desperate objective to reclaim his favour. This time, she has "determined at last to try a new key, and see if the lock of [William's] heart would yield to that" (129), for up to this moment she has been experimenting with his heart for months without any success. This new key, the key of "a little audacity—a word of truth, a glimpse of the real" (129) works for a while, and as the Mdlle. confesses her own manipulation and makes room for him beside her on the garden chair, William feels that the "temptation penetrate[s] to [his] senses" (130). However, like

the garden breeze whose “refreshing effect penetrates no deeper than the mere surface” (128), Middle. Reuter’s attraction can cut merely skin-deep. Having learned the real nature of the Directress, he no longer falls for her enticement, not even in the garden of his desire.

Serving as a site of seduction, the garden is always, however remotely, reminiscent of Eden, that ultimate origin of the concept of garden. William, for instance, calls the garden at Middle. Reuter’s school “Eden” and the girls lingering upon it “angels” (63). At the night of Rochester’s proposal to Jane, she notices that, in the orchard, there is “[n]o nook in the grounds more sheltered and more Eden-like” (286). In an early chapter of *Shirley*, when Caroline wakes up in the morning, imagining that Robert is in love with her, she takes an early walk in the garden and sees nothing but prosperity; when she meets Robert again, she longs but dares not say that “the very flowers in the garden of Hollow’s cottage were dear to her. . . the little parlour of that house was her earthly paradise. . . she longed to return to it, as much almost as the First Woman, in her exile, must have longed to revisit Eden” (211). With such ubiquitous imagery of Eden, the garden becomes a space where the association between women and innocence is most clearly manifested.

Lucy’s experience in the park has already been briefly discussed to explicate the illusions that nineteenth-century show-goers are willing to believe. In order to illustrate the change in concepts of innocence in Brontë’s world, I return again to this example, for the carnivalesque scene in and around the Park that Lucy witnesses on the night she is drugged epitomizes the theme of innocence, and complications thereof, associated with the garden. Her decision to wander the streets alone at night might easily have put her in a position similar to the “fallen woman.” However, due to cultural differences, in *Villette* her midnight adventure is justified; indeed, as Lucy observes, “[t]hat festal night would have been safe for a very child,” and “[h]alf the peasantry had come in from the outlying environs of Villette, and the decent burghers all abroad and around, dressed in their best.” The communal celebration seems innocent enough (567), and despite the late hours, children are actually brought to the event (573). Even priests do not refrain from attending the event, for the fête is “not considered a show of Vanity Fair, but a commemoration of patriotic sacrifice,” and the Church even patronizes it “with ostentation” (575).

The entire expedition is further justified by Lucy’s intention to find the stone basin, which was why she wandered outside in the first place:

My vague aim, as I went, was to find the stone basin, with its clear depth and green lining: of that coolness and verdure I thought, with the passionate thirst of unconscious fever. Amidst the glare, and hurry, and throng, and noise, I still secretly and chiefly longed to come on that circular mirror of crystal, and surprise the moon glassing therein her pearly front. (568).

Instead of being drawn into the crowd, Lucy seems to be seeking serenity, seeking that “coolness and verdure” to calm her agitated mind. However, the “passionate thirst of unconscious fever” has made her restless, and not only does she intend to “surprise the moon” reflected on the water, but she describes, a few sentences later, the water as a “tremulous and rippled glass” (568). Her mental state is described with metaphors of anxiety. Serenity is nowhere to be found, and although Lucy knows where the stone basin is, and although she is already approaching the spot, she cannot help but be distracted by the joyous atmosphere of the night, which at the moment overwhelms her in the form of sound: “Choiring out of a glade to the right, broke such a sound as I thought might be heard if Heaven were to open—such a sound, perhaps, as *was* heard above the plain of Bethlehem, on the night of glad tidings” (568, original italics). The concert is delineated in terms not merely positive, but also religious. Lucy’s turning away from the quest of quietude is legitimized, and the fête is rendered a pleasure far from decadent. In Villette, where English values do not apply, Lucy’s audacity does not seem inappropriate. What would seem in English culture an extravagant pleasure or even dissipation, inclining to corruption, is here rendered innocent enough.

On the other hand, Lucy’s situation as an outsider in the crowd is evident. She walks in the crowd with her straw hat pulled low and “fe[els] safe as if masked” (567). She blends in, knowing all the while that she is not part of the joyous crowd. She sees her friends from afar, admiring and envying their resplendent happiness while hiding in darkness herself. This is the exact portraiture of her position: a school teacher befriending upper-class personages. Being an *étranger*, she is always the mere onlooker of life, on the margin of social classes and cultures. Even her desire, while still lying restless in bed, to enter the locked midnight park via the “gap in the paling” (563) signifies her position as both the eternal outsider and the boundary-breaker. Indeed her position is awkward. When Graham approaches her, she has made up her mind not to be seen: holding her head down, she gestures a plea to be let alone:

I implied, by a sort of supplicatory gesture, that it was my prayer to be let alone. . . . He looked, but he desisted. He shook his handsome head,

but he was mute. He resumed his seat, nor did he again turn or disturb me by a glance, except indeed for one single instant, when a look, rather solicitous than curious, stole my way. (571-72).

Although the look that he steals is “solicitous rather than curious,” it is obvious that Graham sees her, recognizes her, and acknowledges the awkwardness, if not impropriety, of her being alone at such an hour, in such a place.

If her status as a stranger to the environment, an outsider who is constantly in danger of crossing the boundary-line of propriety—a woman roaming the streets at night—might deprive her of perceived innocence were she in another country, then her knowledge of the world makes the definition of her “innocence” even more complicated. One of her observations of the park illustrates the complication of her thoughts. When she arrives at the park, Lucy finds herself in “a land of enchantment,” yet as she discovers the figurative “back-stage” of the façade of the glamorous park, she cannot deny its charm. As discussed earlier, the enchantment produced by the mystery is not erased even after the mystery is solved. Due to the popularity of nineteenth-century shows and exhibitions, the public eye is accustomed to accept illusion as it is: shows were watched with a sense of willing suspension of disbelief. As mentioned earlier, it is thus a specifically nineteenth-century practice to deceive oneself willingly when facing such spectacles and entertainments, and Lucy is indeed aware of this mechanism, this discrepancy between the façade and the reality behind it.

However, such a tendency in fact extends far beyond show business; it is hinted at in the way the nineteenth-century eye generally regards. Earlier in the same chapter, for example, M. Paul is caught grasping Lucy’s hand in the garden by Mme. Beck and Père Silas. While the latter looks at his pupil “with sternness,” Mme. Beck “of course, saw nothing—nothing; though her kinsman retained in her presence the hand of the heretic foreigner, not suffering withdrawal, but clasping it close and fast” (553). Although Mme. Beck has clearly seen the incident, she “saw nothing.” It is more convenient to bypass the fact than to face it, and in the nineteenth century this self-deception was especially relevant to what *meets the eye*. Such willing self-deception is closely related to the education given to nineteenth-century girls, especially the education regarding sexuality and innocence. According to Peter Gay’s research, in the nineteenth century girls were to be raised with the goal of eventual marriage, and to be married with presumed perfect innocence. Such innocence was in fact a “factitious innocence” (Gay 279), for although girls were not actually sexually



experienced or learned in sexual knowledge, they were able to collect “carnal knowledge” in daily life. “The well-brought up and the comfortable knew rather more than they were willing to reveal to others, or acknowledge to themselves,” states Gay, and “the most sheltered among them could gather sexual knowledge from a walk in town, an older sister, a school friend, or an opportune story” (329). Balzac thus complains: “A girl may leave her boarding school a virgin; chaste? No” (Balzac 94, qtd. in Gay 329). An “atmosphere of sensuality” was in the air (329), even though young girls were inexperienced in sexual encounters. Such being the case, the innocent girls of the nineteenth century were not actually entirely ignorant—their ignorance, as Gay suggests, was “learned.” The nineteenth century was willing to turn a blind eye to such facts, and thus keep the illusion of “innocence” intact.

Lucy’s self-deception regarding the splendor of the park is thus part of a more general nineteenth-century atmosphere. The perfection of the appearance must be maintained, and the innocence of the girls must be kept perfect, no matter how factitious such innocence is. Indeed, as a supposedly innocent woman, Lucy is more knowing than she probably should be, according to social mores. Her observation of Mme. Beck earlier on in the chapter, for example, illustrates her ability to understand as manipulative a mind as Madame’s: “I knew she secretly wanted him, and had always wanted him,” thinks Lucy, “[d]eep into some of Madame’s secrets I had entered—I know not how; by an intuition or an inspiration which came to me—I know not whence” (559). Having observed the world, Lucy is indeed able to decipher Madame Beck’s mind: she recognizes desire in a woman; nor is she alone among the nineteenth-century middle-class, supposedly “innocent” women. For Brontë’s heroines, a comparison to Eve is inevitable when the question of their innocence is involved.

## II. Gardens, Innocence, and Brontë’s Eves

Though not directly relevant to the theme of innocence, the Brontëan heroine’s physiognomic resemblance to her mate echoes a scene in *Paradise Lost*. In Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Eve naively lingers around the water to gaze upon her own image, which she does not yet recognize as her own. God’s voice thus emerges to guide Eve away from her own reflection to Adam, “[w]hose image thou art,” and persists that “him thou shalt enjoy” (*PL* IV.472). Thus, according to Wendy Doniger, “instead of

loving her own image, [Eve] is to let Adam love *his* own image, her” (Doniger 229).

In a similar way, M. Paul tells Lucy how much she looks like him:

but we are alike—there is affinity. Do you see it, mademoiselle, when you look in the glass? Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine—your eyes are cut like mine? Do you hear that you have some of my tones of voice? Do you know that you have many of my looks? I perceive all this, and believe that you were born under my star. Yes, you were born under my star! (460)

Like Adam, M. Paul sees his own image in Lucy and loves her because of that. The intimation of Eden here is further strengthened by the fact that this conversation takes place in the garden where M. Paul has claimed a space from which to observe female nature, and when they are talking about the ghostly Nun, a representative of romantic love whose appearance they have both witnessed. Also, when Rochester disguises himself as an old gypsy woman, Jane sees their similarity without yet recognizing him: “The old woman’s voice had changed: her accent, her gesture, and all, were familiar to me as my own face in a glass—as the speech of my own tongue” (*JE* 233). Even when the similarity is not so physiognomically apparent, the attraction arising from feelings of affinity is still obvious. Jane Eyre talks about her similarity to Rochester: “though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him” (203). Here, unlike in *Villette*, the words are spoken by the Eve instead of the Adam, yet it is still she who is “assimilated to” him.

Created from the rib of her Adam, Eve is always the image of Adam, not the other way around. Indeed, on the night of Rochester’s proposal to Jane—taking place, of course, in the “Eden-like” orchard (286)—he admits to her,

I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you—especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left *ribs*, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame. (291, italics mine)

Connected by the rib, the two corresponding bodies are “one flesh,” as narrated in Genesis. In *Jane Eyre* the relationship between Jane and Rochester is repeatedly presented with biblical allegories of Adam and Eve. Rochester frames his proposal thus: “My bride is here. . . because my equal is here, and *my likeness*. Jane, will you marry me?” (194, italics mine) For Rochester, Jane Eyre’s connection with the image of Eve begins when he first meets her. Her smile is “very shrewd,” and for him it seems to say,

[m]y fine visions are all very well, but I must not forget they are absolutely unreal. I have a rosy sky and a green flowery *Eden* in my brain; but without, I am perfectly aware, lies at my feet a rough tract to travel, and around me gather black tempests to encounter. (361, italics mine)

Leading a hard life, Jane has learned to face reality prudently, yet, as Rochester sees, the innocence and happiness of Eden is not lost in her.

Like Eve, Brontë's heroines are curious, a quality that, in the biblical sense, brings forth the Great Fall. Unlike such early nineteenth-century domestic role-models as Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*, who never seeks to probe into the secrets of others even when the secret is as obvious as that of Lady Delacour or as incredible as that of Clarence Hervey, and unlike such serious moralistics as George Eliot's *Dorothea Brooke* or such obedient daughters as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Molly Gibson*, Brontë's girls never shun an opportunity to grasp the *truth*—or whatever it is that lies behind the mysteries. Jane Eyre's constant inquiries regarding the queer laughter in the house make Rochester restive: “[c]uriosity is a dangerous petition,” he persuades, “don't turn out a downright Eve on my hands!” (302). Ironically, it is not Jane's curiosity that causes the fall. It is the obfuscation of truth, the obstruction of knowledge—the prohibition of Eve to take the fruit—that might lead towards the potential fall. Jane would only be erroneous if she wed Rochester, whether or not she were knowingly committing such bigamy. Furthermore, were Jane to decide to take Rochester's advice and flee with him to southern France, where he promises her a “happy, and guarded, and most innocent life” (350), she couldn't be any further from true innocence, for she would thus become a knowing offender of the sanctity of marriage, which is the most fundamental element in the prelapsarian Eden. The “fool's paradise” at Marseilles, as she calls it (414), would not be a guarantee of a life of bliss, but a “[surrender] to temptation” and a *fall* into a “silken snare” (414). Thus, in order not to fall, she leaves both Thornfield, the “house [she] had found a paradise” (399), and the “fool's paradise.” Paradoxically, she has to leave the paradise to stay innocent. With a flowery Eden inside her head and a tough road under her feet, she is down-to-earth without being too materialistic. Her social understanding and judgment prevents her from actually falling, though in the end she decides to return to Thornfield to steal a glimpse at Rochester. Neither fallen nor ignorantly innocent, Jane Eyre is neither Eve prior to the fall nor after the fall.

The issue of innocence as associated with the garden can be further discussed through Jane Eyre's four journeys, mapping out both her personal growth and her quest for domestic happiness. Just before Jane leaves for Lowood, having had a confrontation with Mrs. Reed, she walks in the garden and finds "no pleasure in the silent trees, the falling fir-cones, the congealed relics of autumn, russet leaves, swept by past winds in heaps, and now stiffened together," and she stands "a wretched child enough," whispering to herself, "What shall I do?—what shall I do?" (46) Echoing Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* at the outset of his quest (8),<sup>33</sup> Jane stands alone in the world, trying to determine her destiny—and her destination. It is from this desolate winter garden that she embarks on a new phase of her life; up to this point, she has been unable either to prove her worth in the world or to be loved. From this frozen soil, she will burgeon into a unique human being. The biblical resonance here suggests that her journey into the world will be difficult, yet essential to her spiritual growth; by leaving this garden she is not banished from the bliss of God, but is embarking on a quest to find her self and her final happiness. Her next journey begins after Miss Temple leaves Lowood to get married. Standing at her window one day, Jane's eyes move from the school garden to "the blue peaks" (101). Suddenly deprived of the companionship of Miss Temple, and thus her reason to stay in Lowood, she remembers that "the real world [i]s wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, await[s] those who had courage to go forth" (101). The reference here to *Genesis* 3:23, "the LORD God sent him forth from the garden," and to the end of *Paradise Lost*, "The world was all before them, where to choose / Their place of rest" (*PL*, book XII, ll. 646-7)<sup>34</sup> both suggest the necessity of the Fall—it is by stepping out of the garden that Jane shall be able to find the "place of rest," the place where she can claim her home. It is through the fall that a final recovery of the Promised Land can be achieved. Though at the time Jane has not yet met her Adam, her role as Eve is intimated. Jane's third journey, as mentioned above, is an escape from the "fool's paradise," and her final travel is a return to Rochester, which takes place after she follows the voice—"Jane! Jane! Jane!"—into the garden of Marsh End (483). In this garden, where "no flowers but of the hardiest species would bloom," Jane finds "a charm both potent and permanent" (402), for the seclusion and calmness of the life in Marsh End provides her with a sense of security.

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<sup>33</sup> See *Jane Eyre* Chapter IV, n. 13.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* Chapter X, n. 2.

The roughness of the garden corresponds to the difficult life subsequent to the Fall, and Jane's decision to return to the "fool's paradise," as well as the benevolent outcome of that decision, illustrate the complexity of the Fall. Risking the danger of falling even deeper into the trap of the fool's paradise, Jane in the end finds a real paradise; for Brontë's Eves, being banished from Eden paradoxically means a journey towards selfhood and love. According to Nina Auerbach's categorization, the female roles portrayed most frequently in nineteenth-century fictional representations are the angel, the demon, the old maid and the fallen woman. In Brontë's fictions, the fallen woman almost never appears. Though often compared to Eve or linked to Eden imagery, her female characters never actually undergo the fall—in the sense of moral and physical degradation, that is.

Brontë's Eves reflect changes in social values and cultural preferences. In the age of industrialization, as attitudes towards Eden became more paradoxical than ever before, the image of Eve also became more complicated. In the nineteenth century, as Schulz points out in his discussions of the representation of Eve in Pre-Raphaelite works, "most Victorian writers had difficulty imagining an unsullied Eve in an ever-blossoming garden" (275). In order to clarify the departure of the Victorian viewpoint from earlier perspectives regarding the innocence of Eve and the garden, an essential metaphor must first be discussed. The *hortus conclusus*, or "enclosed garden" epitomizes a tradition of metaphors in which the woman becomes inseparable from the garden. *Hortus conclusus* is "[a]n enclosed, inviolate garden; in spiritual and exegetical tradition, the symbol of the soul, the Church, or the virginity of Mary," and in art it is "a painting of the Madonna and Child in an enclosed garden."<sup>35</sup> In 1852 Anna B. Jameson writes in *Legends of the Madonna*: "I have seen this enclosed garden very significantly placed in the background of the Annunciation, and in pictures of the Immaculate Conception. Sometimes the enclosure is formed of a treillage or hedge of roses, as in a beautiful Virgin by Francia" (*Legends*). In Christian tradition, the Virgin Mary, the woman who represents the recovery of the earthly paradise that her foremother has lost, is as one with the garden. Often presented at the very moment of the Annunciation, Eve, the Virgin Mary, and the garden are connected through corporeality, procreation, and a sense of Predestination. In the Renaissance tradition, paintings of the Annunciation almost always depict the

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<sup>35</sup> From OED. All the OED entries come from the on-line source *Oxford English Dictionary* <<http://dictionary.oed.com/>>.

Virgin Mary standing or sitting in an enclosed garden, often with the celestial city on a hill visible in the background (See Figs. 1 and 2). Her face is serene and solemn, her posture pious and upright. In nineteenth-century England, however, as the garden loses its reassuring function as a space of purity and innocence, the Eves within the gardens become secularized women who, even at the moment of the Annunciation, demonstrate a physicality consisting of fragility, ecstasy, and bafflement that their composed and sublime predecessors lack.<sup>36</sup> As Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 1849 painting *Ecce Ancilla Domini* illustrates (see Fig. 3), the Virgin Mary is here caught in an awkward position: her face shows nervousness and embarrassment rather than serene acceptance, and the garden symbolizing redemption is nowhere to be seen. Depicted with realistic emotions and perplexity, she is more "corporeal" than her predecessors. The Victorians faced a world in which concepts of spirituality and religious beliefs were gradually replaced by teachings in everyday physical experiences and utilitarian endeavors. Ambivalence towards the garden's biblical associations brings with it a paradoxical attitude towards representing women as Eves. As a nineteenth-century Eve facing a confounding "fool's paradise," Jane Eyre and her sisters deny the destiny of Eve by being neither ignorant nor corrupted, neither obedient nor disobedient.

In *Shirley*, the unorthodoxy of Eve is even more clearly articulated through Shirley Keeldar, the resourceful, shrewd heirhess. Like Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, Shirley shares a similarity with her Adam. As her former tutor, Louis asks her to read a passage of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's writing, which she cannot, due to a lapse of years in her French lessons. Thus Louis reads on, and "[w]hat *he* read, *she* repeated" (404, original italics). Later on, after reciting Shirley's old devoir, "La Première Femme Savante—"the First Blue-Stocking"—Louis again asks Shirley to read, and she again asks him to read first for her to follow. As he reads,

Shirley, by degrees, inclined her ear as he went on. Her face, before turned from him, returned towards him. When he ceased, she took the word up as if from his lips: she took his very tone; she seized his very accent; she delivered the periods as he had delivered them: she reproduced his manner, his pronunciation, his expression. (412)

Furthermore, Shirley often unconsciously whistles the tunes that Louis has taught her. Indeed, Shirley finds pleasure in "making his language her own" (413). She not only

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<sup>36</sup> For more discussions on the Pre-Raphaelite representations of Eve at the Annunciation see Schulz Ch. 13 and 14, pp. 249-305.

“reproduces” his expression like a mirror—much as Eve does to Adam—but echoes his voice like the Nymph to Narcissus. She becomes both the visual and aural “mirror” of Louis. The analogy here is a mixed one. While Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection in the pond, Eve *is* the reflection of Adam. While Narcissus is both himself and his lover, Echo—a verbal “mirror” of Narcissus dependent for her very existence upon the repetition of his voice—is both herself and Narcissus. Eve, on the other hand, is both herself and Adam—visually as his reflection, and corporeally as part of his body. In either case, the woman’s own voice is unheard, hers being dependent on that of her mate. Being both the Eve and the Echo of Louis, Shirley however struggles to retain her sense of self while still reflecting the desire of Louis. She is no traditional Eve, whose existence depends entirely upon the existence of Adam. Thus she asks Louis to recite the “First Blue-Stocking,” which he remembers word by word, and to produce a painting that represents the landscape that she describes in a French *devoir* (387). Thus he *copies* her written words, both through spoken language and through painting. In the case of Shirley and Louis, a mutual narcissism takes the place of the regular active-passive dichotomy.

For Shirley, Eve is not the gullible woman who Milton writes of. She is Nature, from whom sprang the Titans, the “first men of the earth”:

The first woman’s breast that heaved with life on this world yielded the daring which could contend with Omnipotence: the strength which could bear a thousand years of bondage,—the vitality which could feed that vulture death through uncounted ages,—the unexhausted life and uncorrupted excellence, sisters of immortality, which, after millenniums of crimes, struggles, and woes, could conceive and bring forth a Messiah. The first woman was heaven-born: vast was the heart whence gushed the well-spring of the blood of nations; and grand the undegenerate head where rested the consort-crown of creation. (270)

Her Eve is the mother of all greatness, even of the Messiah. The pitiful little woman that Milton writes of is for her far from the real Eve. Shirley embraces her Eve, the Mother Nature, who is not responsible for the fall of mankind, but is instead a creator of mankind. Again, in “The First Blue-Stocking,” another Eve that Shirley identifies with is clearly depicted. Eva is her name, and, though raised by none but wild Nature, she grows fair and fine. She is thoughtful, “though of what one so untaught can think, it is not easy to divine” (406). Her forehead is “a clear, candid page, whereon knowledge, should knowledge ever come, might write a golden record” (406). One day, as the young savage sits desolately and wonders whether she—a “small, forgotten atom of life, a spark of soul, emitted inadvertent from the great creative

source”—shall be “burning unmarked to waste in the heart of a black hollow” (407), a bodiless voice comes, the voice of the Son of God. She drinks from his cup, with which knowledge surges within her, and her vision and her world has changed. “I take from thy vision, darkness: I loosen from thy faculties, fetters: I level in thy path, obstacles: I, with my presence, fill vacancy,” says the voice (408). For Shirley, although Eva is still an empty page at the time she partakes of the drink of knowledge, it does not corrupt her. Contrarily, she is freed from all earthly fetters and wedded to Genius, the Son of God. Eva, the daughter and counterpart of Eve, is what Shirley identifies with—a spontaneous woman of intellect, not driven to degradation by knowledge but freed by it. Most of Brontë’s heroines are as such; they have an intellectual light that comes from within, a quality that makes them thoughtful and prudent. Unlike the conventional Eve, they are never ignorantly innocent—knowledge does not corrupt them but sets them free—yet they are never really fallen either. As the times change and the concept of innocence and happiness as represented by Eden becomes complicated, so Brontë’s Eves struggle to metamorphose into a more modern version of their ancestors.

### **III. The Wardian Case and Perpetual Babyism**

Indoor gardens are no less symbolical than outdoor gardens. In 1829, Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward, a doctor living in Whitechapel, London, created by accident a horticultural innovation that was to become an overwhelming fashion among the middle and upper classes, a commercial and imperial success, and a popular symbol in the Victorian imagination. In order to observe the metamorphosis and growth of a sphinx moth, Ward buried a chrysalis in a little soil in a shut glass bottle. To his surprise, a fern and a few blades of grass burgeoned from the soil and kept growing despite the sealed environment and the lack of additional water. Living among the industrial fumes of 1820s, 30s, and 40s London, where the lives of plants and human beings were jeopardized by the very air they breathed, Ward found himself discovering a way to sustain a miniature garden without the worries of exterior pollution. He writes of the self-sustaining world in his 1842 book, *On the Growth of Plants in Closely Glazed Cases*:

In watching the bottle from day to day, I observed that the moisture which during the heat of the day arose from the mould, became condensed on the internal surface of the glass, and returned from whence it came; thus keeping the mould always in the same degree of humidity.



About a week prior to the final change of the insect, a seedling fern and a grass made their appearance on the surface of the mould. I could not but be struck with the circumstance of one of that very tribe of plants, which I had for years fruitlessly attempted to cultivate, coming up sponte sua in such a situation. . . (Ward 26)

The plants within the bottle lived for more than three years, and in the meantime no water was added, nor was the lid removed. Thus after several experimental attempts the “Wardian Case,” as it was called and is still called, soon became popular.

Containing its own atmosphere and weather, this case differs from regular green houses. Due to its convenience, the Wardian case became an important means of transporting exotic plants through long voyages. The salty air, strong wind, and lack of fresh water on ships would have destroyed most plants, yet not only did the Wardian cases shelter the plants from detrimental environments, it constituted a self-sustaining atmosphere that functioned in lieu of constant care and fresh water. The general mortality of the plants transported was thus greatly lowered. According to Dr. W. Stanger, on a voyage in 1840 one of the cases was left open for frequent inspection and cultivation, and none but one of the plants within that case survived, whereas in a case kept closed and left unattended, all of the plants arrived at land in perfect health (Ward Appendix 83). In 1851, *The Illustrated London News* also noted:

Some years ago we remember to have seen the vessel about to start to survey the settlement of Adelaide, in Australia, and we were much delighted to see two or three of these cases filled with small gooseberry and currant trees, in order that the emigrants might enjoy those delicious fruits which we have in such perfection in this county; and now not a week passes but that ships arrive bringing plants from the remotest habitable regions in these Wardian cases, which have thus conferred upon us a power of procuring exotic vegetable productions, which before their introduction was never possessed. (qtd in Carter 172)

Thus, used to “bring tea from China to India, rubber from South America to Malaya, and dwarf banana from Derbyshire to Somoa” (639), the Wardian case both facilitated commercial development and “support[ed] the nation’s ability to imagine and reproduce exotic locales from around the globe” (Darby 641), thus proving “vital to Britain’s imperial interests” (Darby 639).<sup>37</sup>

In the 1840s, some manufacturers began to produce these Wardian cases as decorative objects, and they were so successful that they soon became very popular in middle- and upper-class households. Not only were they a fashionable table-top

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<sup>37</sup> See Also David Elliston Allen, *The Victorian Fern Craze: A history of pteridomania* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 67-8 and Lynn Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History 1820-1870* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 112.

decoration, more often than not they were used as a window-side ornament. In his book, Ward considers the case a superior kind of blind when situated upon the window pane—it provides privacy without blocking the light, and it keeps out both the noise and the unseemly sight of the city:

These cases form the most beautiful blinds that can be imagined, as there is not a window in London which cannot command throughout the year the most luxuriant verdure. The condensation of the moisture upon the colder surface of the glass effectually obscures the view from without, and at the same time admits far more light than is allowed to enter by ordinary blinds. Nothing can be conceived of more cheerful than the appearance of rooms thus furnished. (Ward 60)

The tiny gardens sitting upon the windows and on the tables in Victorian drawing-rooms thus create a miniature paradise within the Victorian house. The space that these cases create differs drastically from that of a green-house, whose main function lies in proliferation and cultivation. I agree with Darby when she points out that the popularity of Wardian cases among the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie reveals “a longing for a shortcut on the much more arduous journey back to what might be the original, universal destination of the imagination—to paradise” (641). It is precisely because the acquisition and maintenance of such a verdant space seemed so effortless, the petite world within it so wondrously self-sufficient, that the middle and upper classes found it so intriguing. Even Ward himself referred to Eden when he described the interior space of his cases:

[W]hen we reflect upon their independent state, we may, without any great stretch of imagination, carry our minds back to the primaeval condition of vegetation, when “the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground.” (Ward 28)

The seemingly *laissez-faire* nurturing method is for Ward a perfect manifestation of God’s Will.

Although these small conservatories seemed to defy nature with their almost magical tiny spaces in which plants grew spontaneously, they were nonetheless a perfect example of the power of Nature. Ward had realized through many experiments that the space within must be controlled carefully in order to maintain the appropriate condition for plants to grow: after planting and the watering for the first and last time, the soil must be drained, and the case “closely glazed,” but not sealed hermetically, as the public had erroneously surmised; air exchange is minimal, but not entirely absent, and the heat, light, moisture and air must be balanced carefully. In 1847, Ward had to explain to the British Association that only when sufficient light

and the right amount of moisture is given to the plants will they stay healthy (Carter 175-76). Thus while many at the time saw the Wardian case as a symbol of man's power over Nature, Ward himself understood perfectly that "the power of man over Nature is limited only by the one condition that it must be exercised in conformity with the laws of Nature" (Ward 17). Ultimately, the gardener's power is a submission to natural laws. However, popular misunderstandings about the Wardian case illustrates that, in the mid-nineteenth century, when industrialization and urbanization changed the environment drastically, Victorians chose to believe in a paradise constructed by human power, despite Ward's insights.

Another common nineteenth-century misunderstanding concerning the Wardian case was its perceived ability to stop time. One of the cases that Ward created was for spring flowers, and within the case they miraculously bloomed for months:

It is not, I believe, possible to see these plants to such advantage in any ordinary garden. Here, undisturbed either by wind or rain, their flowers are developed in the greatest luxuriance; and most of them continue for two or three months, realizing the beautiful description of Catullus: "a flower blooming in a secret place is like children's souls developing without violence or disturbance from the outside." (Ward 34)<sup>38</sup>

In the still air, free of disturbances, time seems to stop. However, contrary to common belief, the natural cycle could not be stopped thus. "A lady once called upon me," records Ward laughingly in his book, "imagining that I had invented a case in which half-blown Roses or other flowers would remain *in statu quo* for an indefinite period" (Ward 38). In the nineteenth-century imagination, the Wardian case became simultaneously a manifestation of man's power over even space and time and an illustration of the anxiety over change, modernization, and the loss of innocence.

The Wardian case as a metaphor of "static time" was not uncommon: critics read in many nineteenth-century literary representations such an image. Yoshiaki Shirai, for example, reads in *Jane Eyre* Jane and Rochester's final home in Ferndean as "an ideal space like a Wardian case," which "encloses Jane and Rochester" and prevents them from the "noise" of the exterior world (Shirai 129). Although Shirai concentrates mostly on the imagery of fern—the mid-nineteenth century was, according to Shirai, the "age of pteridomania"—instead of on the imagery of the Wardian case itself, I find the analogy apposite. Jane approaches the estate, finding

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<sup>38</sup> Qtd. In Darby 643-44, with the translation of Catullus by Margherita Azzi Visentini.

that “all was interwoven stem, columnar trunk, dense summer foliage—no opening anywhere” (497). The completeness of the sense of closure is here conspicuous. Furthermore, their married life in Ferndean is self-sufficient, just like that in a Wardian case: “I know no weariness of my Edward’s society: he knows none of mine. . . . To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. . . .” (519). The Wardian-case metaphor does not stop here. Indeed, spaces reminiscent of the Wardian case abound throughout Brontë’s works, serving as a timeless space of preservation. In *Villette*, for example, the adolescent Lucy finds Bretton a space of serenity, with “green trees on each bank, and meadows beautified with lilies all the year round,” where “the charm of variety there was not, nor the excitement of incident” (6). For Lucy, the eventless-ness of the space gives it an almost paradisaical charm. Years later, when Lucy is employed as Miss Marchmont’s nurse, she again finds the sick chambers a space of protection: “two hot, close rooms thus became my world,” says Lucy, “I forgot that there were fields, woods, rivers, seas, an ever-changing sky outside the steam-dimmed lattice of this sick chamber; I was almost content to forget it” (45). Though seemingly unhealthy, the enclosed space keeps out the mutability of the exterior world, becoming almost a shelter for Lucy. In *Shirley*, another sick-chamber, the room where Robert stays after his injury, becomes for both him and Caroline a space of enclosure:

They sat down. Caroline drew her chair up to his. The air was now dark with snow: an Iceland blast was driving it wildly. This pair neither heard the long “wuthering” rush, nor saw the white burden it drifted: each seemed conscious but of one thing—the presence of the other. (487)

Keeping out the storm, the room becomes a Wardian case where the couple is preserved in a seemingly timeless moment, a self-sufficient universe.

Whether Brontë intended such a metaphor or not, the horticultural culture could not have been too unfamiliar to her. In both the Clergy Daughters’ School and the Roe Head School, Charlotte as a pupil was given plots of land—a way for the schools to teach their pupils the feminine art of gardening (Barker 121, 170). Studying in Brussels, Charlotte and Emily spent their recreational hours in the school garden (Gaskell 177). According to Juliet Barker, the school garden in Brussels became Charlotte’s favorite place, and the garden described in *Villette* was inspired by this very garden (Barker 379-80). As a grown woman, when visiting friends or even in unfamiliar environments Charlotte would “retreat to the garden away from the daily round of visitors” just like Lucy Snowe would (Barker 187). For Charlotte

Brontë, the garden was a space of serenity and protection, and it is only natural that she seeks inspiration from images within the garden space.

A specific aspect of the symbolism associated with the Wardian case—the image of a space in which time is stopped and beauty, youth, and innocence can be preserved—is deeply rooted in the nineteenth-century imagination, and such a myth can be found embodied in much nineteenth-century literature, including Brontë’s works. However, before probing into Brontë’s representation of a sense of “preservation” in Wardian-case-like spaces, a couple of fairy tales popular at the time, also incorporating such ideas, should first be considered in order to illustrate further the shape in which myths of static preservation and protection were received. Similar to the Wardian case as a metaphorical space in which time is frozen and the life within is preserved in a suspended state, the stories of Snow White and The Sleeping Beauty, occupying the Victorian imagination with the image of hibernating beauties—young women trapped in sleep and preserved thus—were also popular topics of adaptation in nineteenth-century literature. Perrault’s *Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé, avec des Moralités: Contes de Ma Mère l’Oye* (1697) and the Brothers Grimm’s *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (1812-15) attained great popularity in nineteenth-century England. The first English version of the *Contes, Histories or Tales of Past Times, Told by Mother Goose*, was published in 1729 by Robert Samber, and the first English version of the Grimms’ fairy tales was Edgar Taylor’s two-volume *German Popular Stories* (1823-6) and a third volume, *Gammer Grethel, or German Fairy Tales and Popular Stories* (1839). These stories soon became quite popular in nineteenth-century nurseries. It is apparent that, for those of Charlotte Brontë’s generation, these tales had been an essential part of childhood, and a quintessential element in their imagination.

Appearing to English readers for the first time in 1697 and 1826, respectively, “Sleeping Beauty” and “Snow White” both tell stories of death and resurrection: the loss and restoration of a kingdom, the exile from and return to a paradisaical life. Snow White (or “Snowdrop,” as in Taylor’s translation) takes of the “forbidden fruit” and “dies” for the third time in the story—this time the seven dwarfs are unable to resuscitate her. They consider burying her, but are unable to do so:

[H]er cheeks were still rosy; and her face looked just as it did while she was alive; so they said, “We will never bury her in the cold ground.” And they made a coffin of glass, so that they might still look at her, and

wrote upon it in golden letters what her name was, and that she was a king's daughter. (E. Taylor, "Snowdrop")

She is thus casketed in a glass coffin which, like a Wardian case, preserves her body in a state of blooming beauty. Like the plants in Wardian cases, she is preserved and displayed with a label explaining her breed. Sheltered by glass, she is able to stay young and beautiful:

[T]hus Snowdrop lay for a long, long time, and still only looked as though she was asleep; for she was even now as white as snow, and as red as blood, and as black as ebony. (E. Taylor, "Snowdrop")

It is worth noticing that when the Prince comes, he sees Snowdrop and "read[s] what was written in golden letters" (E. Taylor, "Snowdrop") before he makes up his mind to carry the glass case, with Snowdrop inside, home. He even ventures as far as offering money to the seven dwarfs. For him, she is a displayed piece and is readily portable and purchasable like the Wardian case.

Likewise, in the story of "Sleeping Beauty" (or "Briar Rose," as in the Brother Grimms' version), it is not only the Princess herself, but the entire kingdom, which is frozen in time:

[S]he was not dead, but had only fallen into a deep sleep; and the king and the queen, who had just come home, and all their court, fell asleep too; and the horses slept in the stables, and the dogs in the court, the pigeons on the house-top, and the very flies slept upon the walls. Even the fire on the hearth left off blazing, and went to sleep; the jack stopped, and the spit that was turning about with a goose upon it for the king's dinner stood still; and the cook, who was at that moment pulling the kitchen-boy by the hair to give him a box on the ear for something he had done amiss, let him go, and both fell asleep; the butler, who was slyly tasting the ale, fell asleep with the jug at his lips: and thus everything stood still, and slept soundly. (E. Taylor, "Briar Rose")<sup>39</sup>

Even such natural elements as fire fall asleep; not only is each thing asleep, it "stood still" as if frozen. Soon, the palace is covered by "a large hedge of thorns," which grows thicker and thicker round the palace until the whole palace is hidden. Unlike Snowdrop, the Princess here is hidden instead of displayed, but still she is far from invisible, for "there went a report through all the land of the beautiful sleeping Briar Rose (for so the king's daughter was called)." A hundred years later, when the destined Prince hears her story from an old man, who tells not merely the beauty of the Princess but also the danger of the forest of thorns, he exclaims, "All this shall not frighten me; I will go and *see* this Briar Rose" (*italics mine*). Though sleeping in

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<sup>39</sup> Both the texts of "Snow White" and "Sleeping Beauty" quoted here are from Edgar Taylor's translation of the Brothers Grimms's collected tales. Considering the time of publication, this is most likely the version that Charlotte Brontë's generation was familiar with.

concealment, the Princess is as much a sight to see as Snowdrop, and the Prince comes for the sake of curiosity.<sup>40</sup>

When the Prince comes, he sees “nothing but beautiful flowering shrubs.” The entire palace has become a giant garden, in which the Princess is the most beautiful rose, her identification with the very plant flourishing throughout the palace further strengthens the association between this space and a Wardian case. Here it is apparent that the sense of enclosure produced by the entwining briar bush—with a “Briar Rose” sleeping within—resonates with the Wardian-case image. Indeed, whether openly displayed or hidden, both Snowdrop’s and Briar Rose’s slumbers are delineated against the backdrop of a garden—or, rather, a paradise-like natural environment. Snowdrop escapes into the forest in order to flee her destiny, and the Briar Rose is preserved in thorns and roses. If Eve is exiled from Eden, both of the princesses are, by contrast, sent into the garden and preserved there.

The theme of “preservation of innocence” is conspicuous in both stories. Snow White is merely seven when her step-mother becomes so jealous that she sends a servant to take her into the forest and kill her; the Sleeping Beauty is fifteen when she is injured by the spindle and falls unconscious. Both are still girls, raised in perfect innocence. They are both threatened with a lethal crisis brought forth by a villainess, and protected by a father-figure or father-figures: Snow White is warned by the seven dwarfs never to let anyone into the house, and the Sleeping Beauty’s father “order[s] that all the spindles in the kingdom should be bought up and burnt,” in order to prevent the prediction from taking place. However, such attempts at protection prove futile, for the heroines are overcome by their own curiosity, which leads directly to their crises. However, it is precisely these crises that protect them from a further danger—the danger of losing their innocence. As soon as they fall asleep, their bodies are preserved in a state of quiet seclusion until the moment when their destined husbands come for them: they move directly from the houses of their fathers to Wardian cases, without having their innocence jeopardized.

When the heroines finally wake up, their purity intact, the entire domestic order is resumed: Snow White marries the prince, and her step-mother dies of jealousy (E. Taylor, “Snowdrop”), which restores her kingdom to her reign; the

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<sup>40</sup> For the discussions of Snow White as a corpse-in-display and a fetishistic icon under the possessive, necrophiliac male gaze, see Elisabeth Bronfen, “Bodies on display,” *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1992), 95-109.

Sleeping Beauty wakes and her kingdom wakes with her. Nina Auerbach argues that “[t]he Sleeping Beauty’s meaning lies in her destined awakening and her attendant power to awake her world. . . . She alone can galvanize an entire society of which . . . she is both the mesmerizing and the animating spirit” (42). Such Christ-like “resurrection” empowers the female sleeper. The Sleeping Beauty is far from merely the victim of evil curses, for she is endowed with a queenly power to “awake” into a sexuality properly directed towards matrimony. The entire *kingdom*, marked by marriage and blood lineage, awakens with her. In medieval versions of the story, the princess is raped by her discoverer in her sleep, and she awakens to find herself either pregnant or already the mother of two children.<sup>41</sup> As the Victorian version sanitizes the awakening with an innocent kiss (Grimms) or even the mere proximity of the approaching prince (Perrault), the princess’ virginity is preserved for a hundred years, and thus the sexual “awakening” of the princess is deferred until her lawful husband-to-be appears. The same can be said about Snow White: too young for marriage yet too beautiful to stay safely inviolate, she is protected by her sleep, as by a Wardian case, from the “pollution” outside.

Similarly, Bronë’s heroines, like plants, are somehow miraculously rescued from crises by being cast into void, into absence—into a space of eventless-ness—until the right moment comes and their sexuality can be channeled to the right direction: to conjugal union with their husbands. In *The Professor*, for example, as the relationship between William and Frances develops, Frances gradually blossoms, both intellectually and physically. Her heart is cheered, her eyes shining with confidence, and even her form becomes rounder and more elegant. She is “thus wakened to life” (123). Not surprisingly, William “watch[es] this change much as a gardener watches the growth of a precious plant” and he himself rejoices in contributing to her growth, “even as the said gardener contributes to the development of his favourite” (123). At this stage, their mutual affection has gradually formed, but a crisis is necessary for such affection to surface eventually. After her disappearance, William interrogates Mdlle. Reuter as to where Frances is, and in this conversation William discovers how truly abominable Mdlle. Reuter is to him, and how determined

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<sup>41</sup> The earliest record of the story is in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in the French prose romance *Perceforest*, which mentions the story of Troylus and Zellandine. In the story Troylus rapes Zellandine in her sleep, and she wakes up finding herself pregnant. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Neapolitan *Pentamerone* delineates a story of Talia (Day 5, tale 5). A king violates Talia in her sleep, and she gives birth to a boy and a girl nine months later, herself still unconscious the meantime. Her final awakening comes one day when one of her children sucks her finger and the splinter comes out of her flesh.



he is not to “lose sight” of his “best pupil” (131). In Frances’ absence, her image persists and grows in William’s mind until he feels how strong his affection is, until he finally realizes, at the moment when he spots her in the cemetery, that he loves her (141). The heroine’s absence is a frequent occurrence in Brontë’s works; while she is away the crisis at home is resolved, and the risk of a premature marriage or love affair is thus avoided. She returns at the “ripe” moment, *preserved* in a quiet state in the meantime.

There is no doubt that Jane Eyre likewise avoids a crisis by fleeing from a “fool’s paradise.” Growing up in a girls’ boarding school with strict discipline—a place by no means resembling a paradise—Jane’s innocence is preserved. However, were she to consent to Rochester’s plan and become his mistress, knowing that he is still married, her integrity and moral conscience would be sacrificed; in other words, she would no longer be innocent. She thus banishes herself and runs away to Marsh End, where an intellectually enriching yet uneventful, abstinent, life keeps her away from the danger of degeneration. Meanwhile, she is found to be the heiress of a large fortune, and the inhabitants of Marsh End turn out to be her family. Thus preserved, she has acquired both wealth and relations, and when she returns to Rochester, she finds all the obstacles between them removed—Bertha is dead, and she has become a more eligible wife to him, being his social and financial equal. Jane is prevented from a premature marriage, and has returned when the time is right. In *Morphology of the Folktale*, Vladimir Propp has analyzed the structure of folklore, wherein the hero disappears from the story and returns years later, but this pattern is quite different from Brontë’s. In the Russian fairy tales that he analyzes, the young girl’s absence is usually the result of her kidnapping, and the storyline centers on the adventure of the “seeker,” the true hero of the story, who also leaves the family to rescue her (Propp 36-8). It is only when no seeker is dispatched to rescue her that the narration follows the girl’s escapade. When the hero returns, he returns unrecognized and usually takes up a lowly profession, perhaps apprenticing to “some sort of artisan.” His identity is later revealed after accomplishing some difficult task, and he can thus get married and ascend to the throne. Although it is quite rare for the heroine of a tale to return thus, Brontë’s heroines do share some traits with the heroes in the Russian folk tales that Propp analyzes. While in Propp’s paradigm “disappearance” from the family leads to adventures through which the hero grows stronger, in Brontë’s world the heroine either returns with more resources and capability to solve her problems or comes

home at a more opportune moment. Either way, like in the Russian folklore, Brontë's heroines return more *marriageable*, and her texts do end mostly in marriages.

In *Shirley*, the motif of preserving young girls from their lovers until the right moment is present in both Caroline and Shirley's stories, though in different ways. Caroline becomes sick as soon as she learns that her love for Robert will not be reciprocated. She grows pale and wasted, her body losing its girlish bloom. In her, "[t]he rose ha[s] dwindled and faded to a mere snowdrop" (162). Indeed, just like Snowdrop, Caroline becomes something very similar to a living corpse. Her life has temporarily left her, and she is surrounded by both the appearance and thoughts of death, until Robert has finally abandoned his pursuit of monetary gains for his own feelings and proposes to her. Preserved, meanwhile, in a state of pseudo-death, Caroline closes the gates on other possibilities. In a way, she has been preserved exclusively for Robert, much like Snowdrop and the Briar Rose are preserved for their Princes.

Shirley, on the other hand, prevents herself from a premature *affaire d'amour* by leaving the man she loves. As a protégée of her uncle, Shirley is unable to accept Louis as her suitor. After a two-year separation, Louis meets Shirley again—this time under her own roof. She becomes an heiress independent from her uncle, a situation that further complicates her relationship with Louis. As the mistress and the employee, the student and the teacher, they now constantly struggle in a battle of power and love, which heightens the sexual / emotional tension between them. Without the separation and the change of situation in the meantime, they might never actually confess their love to each other.

The theme of preservation is also evident in *Villette*. Growing into Paulina, Little Polly's defects have been turned entirely into excellent qualities. As a little girl Little Polly has a vulnerable heart: her every move betrays sentimentality. Lucy admits to her after she grows up:

As a child I feared for you; nothing that has life was ever more susceptible than your nature in infancy: under harshness, or neglect, neither your outward nor your inward self would have ripened to what they now are. Much pain, much fear, much struggle would have troubled the very lines of your features, broken their regularity, would have harassed your nerves into that fever of habitual irritation: you would have lost in health and cheerfulness, in grace and sweetness. (472)

However, her sudden disappearance into the background works in her favor. Unlike her cousin Ginevra, Paulina has not grown into an empty vase, but "a lamp chastely

lucent, guarding from extinction, yet not hiding from worship, a flame vital and vestal,” and her charm glows “from the soul outward” (344). Given the ubiquitous imagery of gardens and the Wardian case, it is not surprising that Lucy eulogizes Paulina’s growth in terms of plants:

To speak truth, reader, there is no excellent beauty, no accomplished grace, no reliable refinement, without strength as excellent, as complete, as trustworthy. As well might you look for good fruit and blossom on a rootless and sapless tree, as for charms that will endure in a feeble and relaxed nature. For a little while, the blooming semblance of beauty may flourish round weakness; but it cannot bear a blast: it soon fades, even in serenest sunshine. . . . I . . . knew, or guessed, by what a good and strong root her graces held to the firm soil of reality. (391)

In infancy, Little Polly, much smaller in stature than is typical of her age, feels and behaves so much like a melancholy grown woman that it seems almost sickening in the eyes of the bystander. However, conveniently cast out of sight, she has been given the opportunity to grow beautiful, wise and interesting. Her precocious attitudes have faded with time, and her strangeness has developed into something interesting, something that makes her unique among other girls. Lucy observes,

Her eyes were the eyes of one who can remember; one whose childhood does not fade like a dream, nor whose youth vanishes like a sunbeam. She would not take life, loosely and incoherently, in parts, and let one season slip as she entered on another: she would retain and add. (345)

The womanly child has been replaced by a young woman who still seems like a little girl. She would “retain and add”—hence she remembers her own childhood with such vividness that even Lucy is fascinated (345). Especially notable here is that she first must be cast into a void, disappear from sight, before she can return a perfect girl. She has disappeared for 18 chapters; in the meantime Lucy has lost her family, moved to Villette, and become a teacher. While Lucy hides her own traumatic childhood throughout the narration, Paulina is preserved in a life outside of the narration, a life unseen and thus relatively uneventful, which is why her childhood seems to be preserved in her along with her childish infatuation for Graham. Indeed, she insists herself that “[t]he child of seven years lives yet in the girl of seventeen” (345), and her father also fondly suggests that she is “pretty nearly as much the child as she was ten years ago” (349).

This suggestion is reinforced in a notably seductive moment. In the small family party between the Brettons and the de Bassompierres, Paulina asks to take a sip of the ale—old October, so it is called—in Graham’s hand, and Graham coyly refuses her, which makes her even more *curious*:

“It must be curious: is it good?”

“Excessively good.”

With this, Graham deliberately takes the forbidden elixir with an expression of contentment:

“I should like a little,” said Paulina, looking up; “I never had any ‘old October:’ is it sweet?”

“Perilously sweet,” said Graham.

At last Graham “indulged himself in the ratification of letting her taste from his hand,” and he “prolonged it by so regulating the position of the cup that only a drop at a time could reach the rosy, sipping lips by which its brim was courted”:

“A little more—a little more,” said she, petulantly touching his hand with her forefinger, to make him incline the cup more generously and yieldingly. “It smells of spice and sugar, but I can’t taste it; your wrist is so stiff, and you are so stingy.”

Finally acquiring a full taste of the drink, Paulina complains of the bitter and hot tang, “[y]our old October was only desirable while forbidden,” says she (351-352). The interaction here is so sensual that it is difficult not to interpret it as a seduction. However, by taking the forbidden drink, the drink that Mrs. Bretton and Lucy wouldn’t approve of (352), Paulina does not sacrifice her innocence. She turns back to her father after tasting the drink, careless though still graceful, and at the moment Lucy can’t help but comment, “I think she had spoken truth: the child of seven was in the girl of seventeen” (352). Her innocence has made her invulnerable in the face of seduction. As Lucy suggests later, “Providence has protected and cultured” Paulina, “not only for [her] own sake, but. . . for Graham’s” (472), a remark that clearly corresponds to the theme of preserving young girls until the appropriate moment for them to marry. Like the Sleeping Beauty, Paulina has been invisible until her destined husband discovers her.

Nor are Brontë’s heroines unlike either plants in a Wardian case or the dormant princesses in fairy tales in that they are in a way fetishized when they are kept in a frozen space. When Frances is nowhere to be found, William looks for her, or fragments of her, everywhere. Indeed, wherever he goes, he pines to see parts of her body in other girls:

I saw girlish figures pass me, drawing their black scarves over their sloping shoulders, but none of them had the exact turn and air of Mdlle. Henri’s; I saw pale and thoughtful faces “encadrées” in bands of brown hair but I never found her forehead, her eyes, her eyebrows. All the features of all the faces I met seemed frittered away, because my eye failed to recognize the peculiarities it was bent upon; an ample space of

brow and a large, dark and serious eye with a fine but decided line of eye-brow traced above. (137)

In her absence, Frances is remembered as body parts and desired as such. In Jane Eyre, a similar theme emerges when Jane returns to Rochester. He says to her, “Do you know, Jane, I have your little pearl necklace at this moment fastened round my bronze scrag under my cravat? I have worn it since the day I lost my only treasure, as a memento of her” (514). Here Jane is turned into his possession, which he wears everyday as a way to remember her. Just as he said earlier, before their failed wedding, “I’ll just—*figuratively* speaking—attach you to a chain like this. . . . I’ll wear you in my bosom, lest my jewel I should tyne” (312, italics mine). Now he *literally* wears a symbol of her; when Jane is gone and kept in emptiness, she becomes further objectified in Rochester’s reminiscence of her. Likewise, in *Shirley*, after not seeing Caroline for a while, Robert observes her now-emaciated features and says to her that he has seen visions of her. One day he comes home and sees her there:

You were dressed in white, as I have seen you dressed at an evening party. For half a second, your fresh, living face seemed turned towards me, looking at me; for half a second, my idea was to go and take your hand, to chide you for your long absence, and welcome your present visit. Two steps forward broke the spell: the drapery of the dress changed outline; the tints of the complexion dissolved, and were formless: positively, as I reached the spot, there was nothing left but the sweep of a white muslin curtain, and a balsam plant in a flower-pot, covered with a flush of bloom. (215)

He has missed her so much as to have mistaken a *plant* in bloom for her “fresh, living face.” When she is absent, he preserves her in his memory like keeping a potted plant in a Wardian case. As for *Shirley*, it is not a surprise that Louis has termed her “a stainless virgin” (436) and worshipped her as Juno. With these descriptions of men fetishizing absent women, as if keeping them—and their memories—fresh in a hibernating state, Brontë’s works participate in the cultural myth of the Wardian case.

For mid-nineteenth-century parents, the story of a young princess protected from all evils of the world and preserved in innocence was precisely an ideal example of the way they wished to raise their own daughters. As mentioned in the first chapter, in nineteenth-century medical discourses women were considered vulnerable to temptations and corruptions. It was only the woman whose body was likely to be subject to tarnish, and thus bring shame to her family; a man could fall prey to dissipation or debauchery, but even so he was never so much a threat to the name—and purity of blood—of his family as a woman. Thus, Victorians attempted to

preserve women in what Mary Hays censures, in *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798), as the state of “perpetual babyism,” an imagined state in which, as in a Wardian case, women can stay innocent forever. This tendency continued well into the late nineteenth century. Around 1890, Emily Lytton (later Lady Lutyens) wrote to a confidante complaining that “it is assumed that innocence will be preserved by an impossible ignorance” of anything associated with sexuality (Lytton 229). She was at the time lucky enough to escape the pre-marital sexual enticement of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, with whom she had fallen in love. Blessed with prudence, she realized the foolishness of her own infatuation in time, but the censure in her voice concerning the society as whole is unmistakable. She blames “the folly of the conventional protection which is relied on for shielding women from corruption,” for such protection had rendered women ignorant and thus vulnerable to physical temptations. “What sort of safety can there be in a fictitious barrier that has rarely any existence?” Asks Lytton with contempt, “[a]nd it is a little short of madness when people keep up the hollow pretence, and trust to it” (229). Around the same time, Annie Besant published her autobiography, in which she gave an account of the painful and traumatic experience of her wedding night decades ago: “Eve should have the knowledge of good and evil ere she wanders forth from the paradise of a mother’s love,” comments Besant, for “perfect innocence” would be “perilous” to a bride-to-be (Besant 70). Victorian girls were kept in such careful innocence that they were in no way prepared for the actual (sexual) consummation of marriage. According to Peter Gay, in the nineteenth century, which he calls “an age of factitious innocence” (278), sexual knowledge was conveyed to young girls through a specific delicate discourse filled with innuendo. The popularity of both the Wardian case and stories of princesses sleeping in absolute purity is merely a reflection of a more pervasive desire to monitor the woman’s body in order to channel female sexuality and energy in the “right” direction—to her future husband and to the family they together are to establish. As in Paulina’s case with the Old October, female sexuality should not even be directed towards the husband-to-be *prior to* their actual engagement or even marriage. The image of Eden might have been gradually replaced by accomplishments of human glory, and the figure of Eve may have become more complex, but her potential to fall remained a threat to society.

In this social atmosphere, educational methods for young girls became a popular and much-debated issue. Though decades prior to Brontë’s time, in the early

nineteenth century, one of the most literal literary examples of preserving young girls in a state of “perpetual babyism” was the project of Clarence Hervey delineated in Maria Edgeworth’s 1801 novel *Belinda*. Here I intend to introduce this case with the purpose of illuminating the early-nineteenth-century cultural milieu concerning the upbringing of girls, a myth of perpetual babyism which had gradually evolved—but had by no means been resolved—throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. *Belinda* is a valuable example in part because it integrates Rousseau’s theories on education, which influenced Brontë’s delineation of master-pupil relationships. Such influences will be further explored in chapter three, on waxworks. In *Belinda*, the well-to-do young man Hervey travels around Europe. Witnessing French society just prior to the Revolution, where “a universal spirit of licentious gallantry prevail[s],” he develops a disdain for “Parisian belles,” who he describes as “full of vanity, affectation, and artifice” (362). Thus, when he happens to read the works of Rousseau, he is “charmed with the picture of Sophia,” the companion of Émile, the hero in Rousseau’s renowned educational fiction. Sophia “interests and charms” without “being very striking”; she has great sartorial taste; and her clothes “always combine simplicity with elegance,” and are “modest in appearance but coquettish in effect” (*Émile* 148). She is fond of needlework and has mastered housekeeping skills. She learns to read and write only as far as such abilities help her in housekeeping affairs. Her mind is “pleasing but not brilliant, solid but not deep” (149), and “she has taste without study, talents without art, judgment without knowledge. Her mind is still vacant but has been trained to learn” (152). According to Rousseau, Sophia embodies the result of a successful education. Thus, upon returning to England, Hervey embarks on a “romantic project” of “educating a wife for himself” (*Belinda* 362). He seeks everywhere for a fit object for the project yet in vain, for

It was easy to meet with beauty in distress, and ignorance in poverty; but it was difficult to find simplicity without vulgarity, ingenuity without cunning, or even ignorance without prejudice; it was difficult to meet with an understanding totally uncultivated, yet likely to reward the labour of late instruction; a heart wholly unpractised, yet full of sensibility, capable of all the enthusiasm of passion, the delicacy of sentiment, and the firmness of rational constancy. (362)

The anticipated “raw material” for his project, his imagined Sophia, is so difficult to find because too idealistic.

One day, on a ride through a forest, he gets lost and encounters a little girl and her grandmother in front of their small cottage, which is “surrounded by a profusion

of *rose* trees, which were in full blow” (363, italics mine). The girl sees him and, with an innocent sweet smile, offers him one of the roses. The association with the Briar Rose is here too conspicuous to overlook. Hervey sees in the girl’s face “an expression of artless sensibility” (363), which strikes him as unusual. He later finds out from the vigilant grandmother, who sends the girl inside immediately, that because the girl’s mother was seduced by, secretly married to, and then abandoned by a young man at the young age of sixteen, she is determined to raise her granddaughter in the forest in order to keep her from the corrupting influence of the wider world. When Hervey visits the cottage again, he finds the old woman in her deathbed, and, as soon as she passes away, Hervey decides to adopt the little girl and educate her to become her future wife. He keeps her within the tall walls of a house, with only a nurse/governess to accompany her, allowing her to see almost no one else, in order to protect her from the exterior world. Besides himself and a clergyman, she should neither receive nor pay any visits. She is removed from the protective forest, amid the rose trees, to another garden in which she, although treated with tenderness and affection, is kept captive. Like the plants in a Wardian case, she is incredibly isolated and, thus, innocent. Although she does grow up according to Hervey’s wishes, her dependence and fondness for Hervey are emotions appropriate for a daughter towards her father; and although Hervey imagines a simple, innocent girl and ideal wife, he gradually finds her stupid and dull in comparison to the reserved yet intelligent Belinda. As neither of them finds the other the object of his/her romantic love, the project proves in the end a failure.

Incredible as the story is, it is inspired by the real-life project of Thomas Day, a close friend of Maria Edgeworth’s father Richard Edgeworth, and an author famous for his educational stories for children based on Rousseauian theories. Rousseau’s description of Sophia served as the model as well as the ultimate objective for Day’s project to “create” an ideal wife. He “selected two girls from the Shrewsbury and London foundling hospitals to be raised by his own ‘natural’ methods and create a model wife for himself” (Chapple 137). Richard Lovell Edgeworth writes about the project of his old friend Day, “[s]implicity, perfect innocence, and attachment to himself, were at that time the only qualifications which he desired in a wife” (qtd. in Chapple 137-138). Such a project, however, involves a serious class issue: by adopting orphans from the foundling hospital, Day actually becomes the master of the two girls, who came from lower-class backgrounds. Such adoption is arguably a form



of exploitation of the lower classes by the upper. Furthermore, in order to “dip the child in the waters of Styx,” as Rousseau analogizes, Day pushes his method to the extreme: his education of a potential wife included ordeals to test the girl’s “fortitude”: pistols were fired by her ears and melted sealing wax was dropped on her arms (Chapple 138). In the end, such cruel education proved a failure, and Day married someone else: Miss Esther Milnes, an heiress.

Although written much earlier than Mary Hays and Brontë’s generation, *Belinda* delineates a story ridiculing the impossibility of “perpetual babyism.” Written in the late Romantic period, *Belinda* not only contests the Romantic notion of innocence, but marks a paradox already becoming evident at the turn of the eighteenth century: as mentioned earlier, according to Gail Finney, the longing for Eden gradually changed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and for the Romantics, who considered descriptions of Nature to be manifestations of the development of the mind, creating a chance to re-enter Paradise was more valuable and laudable than simply being in the Prelapsarian state of innocence (109), for such “re-entry,” painstakingly earned through human effort, is the result of “the interchange between Nature and the human mind” (109). The Fall itself was valued more than the life prior to the Fall. In this light, that *Belinda*’s critical narrative took aim at the impossibility of preserving innocence is not surprising.

By the mid-nineteenth century, as Finney points out, a dialectical tension emerged in the novel between “nostalgic longing for a primitive realm of spontaneous feelings and natural rural virtue, on the one hand, and the endeavor, in the face of the inevitability of urban progress, to recreate paradise internally, on the other” (112). This tension points to the problem of “naturalness.” Like a plant growing in a glass case, a girl brought up in utter seclusion in hopes of preserving her innocence is unnatural, and such preservation is bound to end, for even in a Wardian case the plant is not able to live for eternity. Indeed, the craze for Wardian cases highlights the specific Victorian paradox of “naturalness.” Ward himself criticized florists and the “unnaturalness” of their work:

So far from the love of God, and the good of his fellow creatures, being the end aim of the fancy florist, he values everything in proportion as it is removed from nature, and unattainable by the rest of mankind. “A long time must elapse ere the world can hope to see a perfect Pansy!!” says one of these fancy writers. (Ward 61)

Indeed, floristry was quite popular in the nineteenth century, a phenomenon Tom Carter calls “floromania.”<sup>42</sup> The unnaturalness condemned by Ward stems from the florists’ attempt to perfect Nature. George Glenny, the author of *Hand-Book to the Flower-Garden & Greenhouse* (1855) and many other horticultural handbooks,<sup>43</sup> writes of the flora-culture in the mid-nineteenth century:

Now, The difference between the authorities that preceded us, and ourselves, is this—our predecessors looked at the nature of a flower, and estimated the best as perfection. . . we, on the contrary, simply consider what would look the best if we could produce it. (qtd. in Carter 154-5)

As human technology progressed, the desire to over-power Nature gradually surfaced. Floristry is merely one aspect of the mid-nineteenth-century vaunting of human progress. If Ward considers his own work to “promote the glory of God, or the good of man,” by paying attention to the “innumerable plants . . . created with latent powers of usefulness for the purpose of exercising the mind” (Ward 61-62), and if he sees the purpose of floristry in opposition to such an end, then the question emerges: exactly how natural is the plant within the Wardian case, removed from its natural habitat and turned into an adornment for bourgeois windows and drawing-rooms?

The justification of Ward’s work is similar to the educational theories of Rousseau, which, though pre-Victorian, evidently influenced the way Victorians regarded “naturalness”: In *Émile*, Rousseau points out that “[e]verything is good as it comes from the hands of the Maker of the world but degenerates once it gets into the hands of man” (11), and the prospect of the book is to bring up the “natural man” by “prevent[ing] anything being done” to him: the education of the natural man must follow the rules of Nature; every means must be taken in order to prevent his being influenced by the habits of human society (14). As a matter of fact, “[t]he only habit the child should be allowed to acquire is to contract none” (22). Since Nature “keeps on disciplining the children all the time” (17), the mother should not make an idol of her child and over-protect him, but should instead “[d]ip [him] in the waters of Styx” (18). These rules can be applied to the education of both sexes. For Rousseau, in order for the “natural man” to be created, children must be kept deliberately in a “natural” state, yet such an attempt is paradoxically far from natural. Likewise, no matter how Ward insists that the atmosphere within the case must adhere to the law of

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<sup>42</sup> See Tom Carter, “Floromania,” *The Victorian Garden* (Bell & Hyman: London, 1984), 151-70.

<sup>43</sup> Among others *The Culture of Flowers and Plants* (Houlston and Wright: London, 1861), *The Hand-Book of Gardening* (Cassell, Peter and Galpin: London, 1865), and *Glenny’s Hand-Book of Practical Gardening* (C. Cox: London, 1855).

Nature, that the power of the gardener can only be exercised to its uttermost when he submits to Nature, the Victorians see the Wardian case as a symbol of man's power over Nature. While being close to Nature and being "natural" were essential Victorian tenets of educational philosophy, aesthetics, and morality, and were reflected in more ways than merely architecture and horticulture, the ability to manipulate and surpass Nature/nature was equally significant. Given the nineteenth century's paradoxical leanings towards both nostalgia for the pastoral past and pride in human achievements at mid century, the common vision constantly struggled between the "natural" and the "super-natural." In this vein, although Hervey—and the little girl's grandmother before him—insist on keeping the girl away from human vices so that she may grow into an "inexperienced" woman, it is by no means "natural" to keep her away from all social experiences. Like the Wardian case, the "create-your-own-wife" project of both Thomas Day and his literary counterpart foretold how unnatural the Victorian "natural" could be.

Another Victorian example of the convoluted, seemingly antithetical, relationship between "nature" and "nurture" is hinted at towards the ending of *Villette*. M. Paul is to leave for the New World on a ship called "Antigua," but decides to delay his trip and take "Paul et Virginie" instead. The name of the ship oddly foreshadows the impossibility of his return: Abandoning the "Antigua," a representative of the business in the West Indies which Madame Walravens, Madame Beck, and Père Silas—the "secret junta" (575), as Lucy calls them—have conspired to use to separate M. Paul and Lucy, he throws off the burdens of his age-long relationship with the "secret junta" and in turn his relationship with his deceased lover, his culture and values, and his religion, which stand as obstacles to his union with Lucy. M. Paul delays his trip for Lucy's sake and thus eventually takes a ship strangely named after a story ending with a shipwreck. M. Paul turns out to be the "Virginie" instead of the "Paul," sunk in the water just off the shore, so close to home.

Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint Pierre's *Paul and Virginia* (c. 1787) was so popular in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that, inauspicious as it seems, a ship named after the tale was not unlikely at the time. In his 1989 introduction to *Paul and Virginia*, John Donovan details the popularity of this romance *par excellence* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

Paul and Virginia inspired songs and poems, plays, ballets, operas, and musical entertainments. One of the most richly and variously illustrated

of novels, it also provided the material for numerous sets of engravings and lithographs produced independently of the text, as well as paintings. . . . throughout the nineteenth century. (Donovan 9)

According to Lieve Spaas' research on *Paul and Virginia*, between 1788, the year of its publication, and 1799, fifty-six different editions were issued, and twenty of them were translations (Spaas 317). The publication of the English translation provided British culture with an example of the "ideas of primitivism, childhood love, natural education and sexual innocence, and as such, exercised an unusually rich and varied influence on literary creation" (Donovan 10). Following the educational theories of Rousseau, his mentor and idol, Saint-Pierre advocated the education by nature so eulogized by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European culture. Paul Toinet also illustrates in "*Paul et Virginie*": *Repertoire Bibliographique et Iconographique* how, in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, the book became an iconic volume. Parents named their children after the protagonists, and objects such as stamps, plates, prints, wallpaper, fans, buckles, clocks, and ornate boxes, which carried illustrations of the book, were profusely produced and sold (Toinet 5). Published on the eve of the French Revolution, it became one of the favorites of Napoleon, who praised the book by saying that "sa plume est un pinceau" (*Correspondance* 479). However, the popularity of the book was accompanied by an almost equal amount of criticism. Flaubert saw the novel as "one of the worst products of romanticism that were read in the convents" (Spaas 317), and Albert Camus "rated it as pathetic" (Spaas 317). The attributes of romance as exemplified by the book, attributes which were venerated by many as instigating the appropriate sentiments and virtues in adolescent girls, were also read by many critics as a corrupting influence to the yet inexperienced minds of young girls.

The controversial reception of the book reflected an inherent conflict between what was deemed "natural" and what was regarded as the correct way to "nurture" a child. The story tells of Paul and Virginie, or Virginia, two children born and raised on an islet by their abandoned or widowed mothers alone. Escaping from their miserable destinies and histories on the European mainland, these mothers decide to establish a paradise on the deserted islet and to raise their children in the most natural and innocent way possible. Thus, like Adam and Eve, Paul and Virginia are designated different tasks: while Virginia prepares the meals for the family and tends the flowers in an Eve-like manner, her Adam-like Paul tills the ground and provides the family with food and shelter. Their innocence is clearly demonstrated by the

description of Virginia: “[Her] mind is pleasing but not brilliant, solid but not deep. . . . She is too sensitive to preserve a perfect evenness of temper, but too sweet to allow this to be troublesome to other people. It is only herself that is hurt. . . . The love of virtue is her ruling passion. . . .” (149-50) “She has taste without study, talents without art, judgment without knowledge. Her mind is still vacant but has been trained to learn. . . . What a pleasing ignorance!” (152) The delineation here is too strikingly similar to that of Rousseau’s Sophie to be overlooked. It is not a surprise that Mr. Hervey, the character who practices Rousseau’s theory in *Belinda*, renames the girl he adopts from the woods “Virginia St. Pierre,” a name that foreshadows the failure of his project.

Though living in perfect innocence and protected from the corruption of civilization, it is inevitable that, at puberty, Paul and Virginia start to feel the fearful power of their sexual awakening. Again, the burgeoning of sexuality is emphasized in the girl rather than the boy. In the otherworldly Eden described in *Paul and Virginia*, the “most charming spot of this enclosure was that which was called the Repose of Virginia” (42), a miniature paradise composed of a fountain and two Indian cocoa trees, planted in celebration of the births of Paul and Virginia. It is thus not surprising that Virginia’s sexual awakening dawns upon her at this very spot, while, kept awake one night by her own reflection upon Paul, she decides to take a bath by the fountain:

She saw, reflected through the water upon her naked arms and bosom, the two cocoa trees which were planted at her birth and that of her brother, and which interwove about her head their green branches and young fruit. She thought of Paul’s friendship, sweeter than the odors, purer than the waters of the fountains, stronger than the intertwining palm trees, and she sighed. Reflecting upon the hour of the night, and the profound solitude, her imagination again grew disordered. Suddenly she flew affrighted from those dangerous shades, and those waters which she fancied hotter than the torrid sunbeam, and ran to her mother, in order to find a refuge from herself. (56)

As natural as the environment is, it becomes inevitable that human nature has demonstrated its own power. Worried on the one hand that such strong sexual attraction between the children will lead to a premature sexual consummation, when Paul and Virginia are yet neither of the right age nor capable of the responsibilities of a family, and on the other hand that there is too great a difference in the social classes of the two families for the children to marry, the mothers decide to send Virginia to her rich aunt in Paris to acquire the necessary qualities of a lady, and to keep her away

from Paul temporarily, her social inferior. Not accustomed to the sophisticated decadence of life in Paris, the homesick girl perishes day by day, until her aunt finally agrees to send her back to the islet. However, as her ship approaches the shore, a storm strikes and Virginia finally dies in the sea. She is taken away from the natural environment that she had grown up in, and after experiencing the most highly cultivated human society, she returns, only to be consumed by Nature itself.

It is only apposite that, in *Belinda*, Hervey names the little girl he takes home “Virginia St. Pierre.” As if preserved in a Wardian case, she is artificially kept in a pseudo-natural environment, with the real world only a thin wall away—a plant living in a tiny garden sitting on the window-pane, barely protected from the polluted air. Although Virginia de la Tour, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s heroine, seems to reside in an entirely natural environment, her very presence there is artificial. Her sexuality is not allowed to develop naturally, lest the social boundaries that seem to have disappeared on the Eden-like, regulation-free islet should be violated. European culture seems to be separated from her by seas, but it holds sway so long as her identity is still recognized by her friends. Virginia’s innocence is artificially preserved, first in a natural environment, and then in a deliberately highly embellished society. The paradox here is apparent: so that her virginity might be reserved, she is sent into a culture in which no woman is expected to stay sexually ignorant, a society in which girls might be virgins, yet are never entirely exempt from games of flirtation. Virginia’s tragedy highlights the consequences of an extreme approach to education, an artificial means to thwart the natural development of a child and to keep her safe from her inevitable fall into knowledge and mutability, a concept which became important as a symbol of human effort and development.

Although M. Paul’s watery return does not signify as much the consequences of an unnatural approach to childrearing as Virginia’s, it does highlight the influence of the story on Brontë. In fact, in her possession was a complete edition of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s writings, which M. Heger had given her (*Shirley* n. 404). Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s writing is so inseparable from Charlotte Brontë’s memories of M. Heger that, when she writes of Shirley’s reconciliation with Louis, it is inevitable that the book he chooses to be read by Shirley is “Fragments de l’Amazone,” St. Pierre’s account of a utopia (404). The theme of the prevention of premature sexual consummation is evident not only in “Paul et Virginie,” but also throughout Brontë’s works, a theme that is intrinsic to the equally popular stories of Snow White and

Sleeping Beauty, and quintessential to the set of symbols created by a general misunderstanding of the principles behind the Wardian case. This theme, combined with imagery of the foreignness or curiousness of the exotic plants living upon the windows and tables of Victorian drawing-rooms, characterizes the quirkiness of Brontë's heroines.

Indeed, the preservation of the heroine in a certain state until the right time—a theme which appears and reappears in fairy tales and in nineteenth-century symbolism associated with the Wardian case—is not strange to Brontë's works. The heroines are frozen in time lest their innocence should be sacrificed in a premature consummation of love. Although it would be farfetched to say that Brontë agrees with the “perpetual babyism” in which it was thought suitable to keep women, it is quite evident that, for Brontë, as well as for the cultural atmosphere at her time, preserving the heroine in innocence and delaying conjugal union until the right moment is essential. In *The Professor*, as well as in *Villette*, the narrator notices that the girls in the boarding school have “all been carefully brought up, yet [i]s the mass of them mentally depraved,” and they are characterized by “precocious impurity,” unable to “look a man in the face with modesty and propriety” (*Professor* 82). The fact that Brontë mentions this over and over again indicates her caution towards “precocious impurity.”

Brontë nonetheless shares, though without directly supporting, the ideology of “perpetual babyism”; in the very last of her works, in which the heroine fails to find her Eden, and in which the tragic ending of “Paul and Virginie” lurks behind the story line, wherein the impossibility of such a belief becomes apparent. For Lucy, like Virginia de la Tour in *Paul and Virginia*, virginity is still preserved at the end of the story, and, likewise, it is ultimately preserved by a shipwreck. However, the ending of *Villette* betrays a pessimistic reading of *Paul and Virginia*. In the mid-nineteenth century, when the concept of Eden was changing, the return—or rather the failure of return—of M. Paul as Virginia becomes a breaking point by which the repercussions of forcibly preserving the innocence (virginity) of a girl are illustrated. Lucy first buries her love for Dr. John, and then literally buries, or lets the sea bury, M. Paul. Her virginity, like that of Virginia's, is to be preserved forever. Her final happiness, like Virginia's, seems so close at hand that the sudden extinguishing of hope comes to the reader as a shock.

As the theme of “preservation of innocence” shows, the nineteenth-century symbolism of Eden/garden, especially the symbols associated with the Wardian case, play an essential role in literary renderings of the image of girls, including the Brontëan heroine. Indeed, more often than not women are associated with the garden—or the plant within the garden—itsself. Frances is the plantation of which William sees himself as the gardener; Caroline, who loves to attend to Robert’s favorite flowers, is constantly described in terms of plant imagery; Rochester calls Adèle a “French floweret” (163) which he “took. . . out of the slime and mud of Paris, and transplanted. . . here, to grow up clean in the wholesome soil of an English country garden” (170). Even Lucy is directly associated with the garden that M. Paul is tending: waiting for M. Paul to commence the lesson one day, Lucy watches him jealously in the garden from the school-room:

There were many plants, and as the amateur gardener fetched all the water from the well in the court, with his own active hands, his work spun out to some strength. The great school-clock ticked on. Another hour struck. The carré and the youthful group lost the illusion of sunset. Day was drooping. My lesson, I perceived, must to-night be very short; but the orange-trees, the cacti, the camellias were all served now. *Was it my turn?* (516, italics mine)

Like a plant among others, Lucy awaits the attention of M. Paul. These women-as-plants exemplify and illustrate the complication of the nineteenth-century attitude towards “innocence,” an attitude that Brontë’s works embody and also help to represent and construct. The Wardian case marks a point in history in which the survival of nature must begin to rely on artificial means, and the preservation of girls in perfect innocence—as if in a Wardian case—in turn reflects such unnaturalness. On the other hand, as the restoration of Eden becomes less and less hopeful in the endings of Brontë’s works, the narrating voice becomes more and more passive in accepting cruel reality, and as the paradise of domestic bliss is found in Wardian-case-like spaces more than anywhere else, it becomes obvious that in this changing society, paradisaical happiness and innocence can be yearned for, but not necessarily attained.

The nineteenth-century garden as a means of public entertainment was a space dominated by the visual: curious eyes wandered as much upon the spectacles as on other spectators, composed of citizens from all walks of life. These pleasure gardens, along with private and indoor gardens, cultivated a nostalgic atmosphere within the hustle and bustle of city life, reminding Victorians not merely of the “good old days,” but ultimately of the Eden-like state of spiritual and moral purity. In the mid-century,



however, as swift changes in lifestyle affected the way Eden was considered and represented, these allegorical associations became more convoluted. While celebrating human glory over Nature, the mid-century imagination was still ready to aspire to an Eden that was achievable, though not necessarily in the same way aspired to by earlier generations. Surrounded by such spaces, women, directly associated either with Eve or with the garden itself—thus becoming a symbol of everlasting innocence—are essential when considering the nineteenth-century concept of innocence. As represented in Brontë's works, mid-nineteenth-century Eves were not so much ignorant victims or initiators of the Fall as individuals with real fears and feelings. On the other hand, with the myth of "perpetual babyism" implicit in the metaphors surrounding the Wardian case, it is not difficult to see that innocence, as illustrated by the impossibility and unnaturalness of perpetual babyism, was no longer so easily defined. In Brontë's texts, women are represented as blurring the fine boundary between what was considered innocent and what was considered corrupted, and such representations reflect mid-century shifts in the concept of innocence itself.

## Illustrations

Angelico, Fra. *The Annunciation*. 1430

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. 1849-50.

da Vinci, Leonardo. *The Annunciation*. 1472



Fig. 1↑ Fra Angelico *The Annunciation* 1430



Fig. 2↑ Leonardo da Vinci *The Annunciation* 1472



Fig. 3↑ Dante Gabriel Rossetti *Ecce Ancilla Domini* 1849-50

### Chapter Three Waxwork

The previous chapters consider the cabinets of curiosities in Charlotte Brontë's novels wherein the "hidden fire" of Brontëan heroines can be explicated, and the curious garden themes and Wardian-case imagery in which Victorian England's unstable notion of innocence is reflected. Continuing the exploration of the "curious," this chapter will explore how, against the backdrop of nineteenth-century exhibitions of waxworks, women are presented in Brontë's works as attractive to men *because of* their "curiousness": they are constantly delineated as breaking the boundaries between the living and the dead, between the animate human body and the inanimate object. This curiousness is what distinguishes Brontëan heroines from other women: their versatility, unpredictability, and ability to develop are literalized in their variable physical bodies. Such curiousness is counterbalanced by the Pygmalion theme throughout Brontë's works, which functions to keep the heroines within standards of femininity.

As cabinets of curiosity evolved into nineteenth-century exhibitions, the element of curiosity involved in the optic experience remained. Spectators were willing to pay for any display that promised to be visually pungent: freak shows, waxworks, automata, monstrous hybrids, and so on. Such hunger for curiosities also influenced the way human bodies were presented and looked at. This chapter intends to explore how, in her four major novels, Charlotte Brontë presents her heroines as attractive by rendering them curious to men. I will argue that such curiousness comes from the Brontëan heroines' ability to develop and change, and such transformations are especially embodied by the alterations in physical shape. It has been established in my former arguments that something is considered "curious" when it is either defamiliarized or both-one-thing-and-the-other. The curiousness of Brontëan heroines, as I will discuss in this chapter, lies in their versatility, which is in turn represented by their ability to transform their bodies between the living and the non-living, between the animate and the inanimate.

According to Lynda Nead, the shape and margin of a body—as represented in art—generates not only cultural and social meaning, but also the discourse on "meaning" as such. Nead points out that

The forms, conventions and poses of art have worked metaphorically to shore up the female body—to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body and the outside, the self from the space of the other. Clearly, the

relevance of this analytical model goes far beyond the examination of art.  
(Nead 6)

Nead adopts the argument put forth by Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* that it is wrong to consider bodily margins as separate from all other margins, for “[t]here is no reason to assume any primacy for the individual’s attitude to his own bodily and emotional experience, any more than for his cultural and social experience” (Douglas 121). Thus, argues Nead, “bodily transgression is also an image of social deviation” (Nead 7), and the “definition of limits and frames” is thus the ultimate discourse on meaning (7), an argument recalling Jacques Derrida’s *The Truth in Painting*.<sup>44</sup> Although delineating the object in words instead of strokes and colors, as a form of representation novels can indeed be regarded in the same light. Thus, by examining the transgressions of bodily margins in Brontëan heroines, I wish to explore further the “margins” of Victorian culture—wherein lies the sense of “curiosity” created by a blurring of boundaries.

The body shape of Charlotte Brontë’s heroines has long been contemplated by critics. Sally Shuttleworth, for example, weighs the bodies of Brontë’s heroines against the Victorian standards of womanhood, and argues that not only have they “broken the social prescriptions for femininity” by entering the labour market, but “in making them small, slight, and nervous, Brontë places them. . . further outside the charmed circle of acceptable womanhood” (Shuttleworth 82), for the most “womanly” Victorian woman should be tall, plump and beautiful. As Shuttleworth points out, medical texts “warned men to select their wives carefully, avoiding those who are pale or slight” (82), while “pale” and “slight” are exactly the phrases used to characterize Brontë’s heroines. While concurring with Shuttleworth’s observation, I will further argue that, although Brontë’s heroines seem to be physically incapable of conforming to the ideal Victorian female image, they are nonetheless the very embodiment of Victorian womanhood. Brontë’s heroines are situated upon the boundary-line between the living and the non-living, the animate and the inanimate, so that they are both/neither at the same time; not only does such uncertainty correspond to the uxoricide theme which so fascinated the nineteenth-century society, but it also recalls the eroticism of the Pygmalion story, which was deeply rooted in the

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<sup>44</sup> See p.45. When it comes to the object represented in art, Derrida observes that “this permanent requirement—to distinguish between the internal or proper sense and the circumstance of the object being talked about—organizes all philosophical discourses on art, the meaning of art and meaning as such . . . This requirement presupposes a discourse on the limit between the inside and outside of the art object, here a *discourse on the frame*.”

Victorian imagination. One of Brontë's central themes throughout her works is the master-pupil relationship, and I will further discuss the power mechanism involved in such a relationship via the metaphor of the Pygmalion myth. I will argue that, while the slender bodies of Brontë's heroines seem to lack sexual appeal, they gain flesh and become more alive as they develop under the guiding hands of their masters, a phenomenon recalling the metamorphosis of Pygmalion's statue. More intriguing for men than any regular, living woman, the "living marble" is both demure and sexual, aloof and docile, and is animated only by the man to whom she belongs. Thus, with the potential to transform from a pallid, passive, and seemingly pulse-less body to a thriving body—and the other way around—Brontë's heroines are able to fix the curious gazes of men. To render the Pygmalion metaphor more historically accurate and effective, I will bring into discussion the exhibitions of waxworks, a spectacle that was so familiar to the British visual experience since the wide popularity of Madame Tussaud. I will argue that, by metaphorically substituting the ivory/marble of Pygmalion's statue with wax, a material more versatile, it becomes easier to explicate the female ideal behind the emaciated bodies of Brontë's heroines. The themes and presentation formats in waxworks exhibitions reflect Victorian preferences in visual experiences; as I will discuss in detail, the way that these exhibitions appealed to spectators illustrates the eroticism involved not only in spectatorship, but in the way women were presented. Such tendencies can be illustrated most directly in exhibitions of anatomical waxworks. This chapter first introduces how Brontë created her unique heroines by contrasting them to other Victorian female stereotypes, and then it brings into discussion the Pygmalion myth, and how the bodies of Brontë's heroines resemble statues in their ability to "come alive"; finally, it contemplates the heroine's bodies via the metaphor of waxworks, as well as the necrophilic erotica and uxoricidal drives involved, ultimately explaining how the seemingly imperfect bodies of Brontë's heroines actually adhere to the Victorian criteria for ideal womanhood.

### **I. Bodies of Brontëan Heroines**

Laura Mulvey points out in her groundbreaking discussions of female images in cinema that there are two ways for the male spectator to elude the castration anxiety brought forth by beholding a female body represented on film: voyeurism and fetishistic scopophilia (Mulvey 21). These two avenues of escape are thus

adopted in narrative cinema in order to guarantee the visual pleasure of the (male) viewing experience. Voyeurism here involves a “preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object” (21). In other words, women are represented as enigmatic objects for men to unravel gradually, and are saved or punished according to the secrets that they keep. Fetishistic scopophilia, on the other hand, works with the “complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous” (21). Thus, women are objectified as beautiful spectacles. While agreeing with such arguments, I will extend these observations to the visual imagery in Brontë’s novels. It is my contention that, in Brontë, the heroines are represented in both ways: on the one hand, they are so versatile, their intellectual development so impressive, that men cannot help but feel curious about them and yearn to “draw them out,” as Rochester would say (*JE* 156); on the other hand such versatility is embodied in the mutability of their bodies, which serve as spectacles in and of themselves as they metamorphose according to the will of men, like the Pygmalion statue.

According to Sally Shuttleworth’s survey of the construction of nineteenth-century femininity, “[t]he social and medical emphasis on woman as reproductive vehicle heavily influenced social perceptions of female beauty and marriageability” (Shuttleworth 82). Thus not only should the ideal Victorian beauty be tall, symmetrical in features and fair-skinned, but she should also have “a well developed bust and hips, set off by a narrow waist” (Shuttleworth 83), for these traits entail well-developed reproductive ability. Her body is voluptuous, but her attitude is demure as a statue. For Brontë, however, the seemingly perfect female body—the body that either resembles a perfectly-proportioned statue or is endowed with the physical beauty of a waxwork—is usually accompanied by a rather empty mind.

Under the social and medical discourse of wholesome female bodies, it is worth noticing that the tall, plump beauty certainly cannot be applied universally to *all* Victorians. However, Brontë was indeed one among many who were obsessed with such beauty. Her heroines are almost always contrasted to the the statuesque or waxwork-like types. From the very beginning, William Crimsworth finds repulsive the women who seem physically flawless. When his uncle asks him to consider a career as clergyman and offers him the hand of one of his daughters, William feels



repulsed by the thought of “passing the winter-evenings by the parlour-fireside of Seacombe Rectory—alone—with one of them, for instance the large and well-modelled statue, Sarah” (6). For him, to be “bound for life” to one of those statue-like ladies would be “a nightmare” (6). His philosophy of marriage clearly explicates his fear of those statue-like women:

I know that a pretty doll, a fair fool might do well enough for the honeymoon—but when passion cooled, how dreadful to find a lump of wax and wood laid in my bosom, a half idiot clasped in my arms, and to remember that I had made of this my equal—nay my idol, to know that I must pass the rest of my dreary life with a creature incapable of understanding what I said, of appreciating what I thought or of sympathizing with what I felt! (90)

To make an idol out of mere superficial beauty would be self-degrading, and to be forever bound to the companionship of such an empty mind would be a wretched fate. Even his students, whom he observes with much enthusiasm at first, turn out to be soulless dolls. Although each is characterized by her own flaws, they are all pretty, plump, and either look like some “handsome figure, moulded in wax” (71), or have “good red and white complexion, features well-chiselled and regular” (83). Furthermore, they are all restive and blundering, their minds empty and corrupted by their Roman Catholic upbringing. Such an upbringing, as Lucy Snowe observes in *Villette*, is one in which “large sensual indulgence (so to speak) was permitted by way of counterpoise to jealous spiritual restraint,” and “[e]ach mind was being reared in slavery,” so, as the children are brought up “robust in body,” they are at the same time “feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning” (157). For Brontë, a healthy, sanguine body is thus a sign of indulgence and bleakness of spirit.

However, even English ladies, brought up in refined bourgeois or aristocratic British culture, are often targets of ridicule for Brontë. Blanche Ingram, the wealthy beauty whose likeness Jane Eyre paints upon a piece of ivory, later proves to be but hollow. As Jane observes, she is “very showy, but she [i]s not genuine: she ha[s] a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind [i]s poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soul; no unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness” (215-6). Given the importance of fertility in Victorian culture, this metaphor of barrenness seems quite punitive; neither Blanche’s tall, statuesque beauty nor her affluence can salvage the emptiness of her heart. Jane’s cousin Georgiana grows into a “full-blown, very plump damsel, fair as waxwork”

(263), yet she is ignorant and petty. Lucy Snowe describes the truly marble-like lady that she encounters in the concert, whose kind she has never seen in England, first with euphoric expressions, then revealingly disparagements. Hers is a “solid, firm-set, sculptural style” of beauty, whose shapes “have no angles: a caryatid in marble is almost as flexible; a Phidian goddess is not more perfect in a certain still and stately sort” (*Villette* 263). However, she is also so cold and self-centered that “the inert force of the deep, settled love she bore herself, was wonderful; it could only be surpassed by her proud impotency to care for any other living thing” (263).

The most direct ridicule, however, appears in *Shirley*, where the “pattern ladies” of England abound. They first appear as the six Misses Sykes, “with the whole six of whom [Sweeting] is in love” (20). The exchangeability of these girls as objects of desire is here rendered explicit. When Mrs. Sykes brings three of her daughters to visit the Briarfield Rectory, the flatness of their character and the homogeneity of their appearance are demonstrated even more clearly:

In English country ladies there is this point to be remarked. Whether young or old, pretty or plain, dull or sprightly, they all (or almost all) have a certain expression stamped on their features, which seems to say, “I know—I do not boast of it—but I *know* that I am the standard of what is proper; let every one therefore whom I approach, or who approaches me, keep a sharp look-out, for wherein they differ from me—be the same in dress, manner, opinion, principle, or practice—therein they are wrong. (93-94, original italics)

Shirley’s cousins, the Misses Sympson, are also “pattern young ladies” dressed in “pattern attire, with pattern deportment,” and among them Shirley seems to be turned into “a black swan” or “a white crow” (327). The Misses Nunnely, sisters of Shirley’s suitor Sir Philip Nunnely, also look at Shirley with queer perplexity when she sings: “What made her sing so? *They* never sang so. Was it *proper* to sing with such expression, with such originality—so unlike a school-girl? Decidedly not: it was strange; it was unusual. What was *strange* must be *wrong*; what was *unusual* must be *improper*” (455, original italics). These ladies are like the Princess of Labassecour, whose profile Lucy observes as reminiscent of “remembered effigies, where similar lines appeared, under phase ignoble; feeble, or sensual, or cunning, as the case might be” (*Villette* 267). They are without any distinguishing character, and were their bodies to be positioned otherwise, they would conveniently fit right into their roles as quickly and blankly as an effigy would.

If the bodies of Brontë's heroines are so thin that they seem to be far removed from George Eliot's beautiful, blooming Dorothea Brooke, whose form is "not shamed by" the sculpture of the voluptuous Ariadne when she stands next to it (*Middlemarch* 182), or the classic Victorian beauty of the plump, blonde, and blushing Rosamond Vincy, they are even further from the Victorian ideal by being changeable and thus uncontrollable. These bodies constitute for the heroines a precondition for their "metamorphoses" to take place. The slightness of these bodies insinuates a potential to change, to gain flesh as they develop in mind. Such changeability seems to contradict Brontë's intention to create "plain and homely" (*Professor* 3) heroes/heroines with the capacity for self-control and self-denial. According to Sally Shuttleworth, Brontë "returns again and again to the neatness and inner cleanliness of her heroines," so her heroines are delineated by an "insistent representation of female neatness and control" (Shuttleworth 74), for, as established in the previous chapter, the image of female bodies at the time was dominated by discourse that rendered the woman's body vulnerable to pollution and emphasized the importance of keeping female bodies under control. However, as I will discuss later, although the Brontëan heroine's inner "neatness and inner cleanliness" is emphasized, her *body* seems to intimate otherwise, for it is not so easily controlled. Lynda Nead also observes in "Theorizing the Female Nude" that, in art, "one of the principal goals of the female nude has been the containment and regulation of the female sexual body" (Nead 6). Through the forms and representations of art, female sexuality is kept within bounds—it is trapped within a homogenized standard of aesthetics. I will argue that, although the changeable bodies of Brontëan heroines seem to break the boundaries delimited for them, they still adhere to the Victorian discourse of womanhood, for such changes are representations of personal growth and developments as inspired by the instruction of a male mentor. Such "uncontrollability within bounds" is what makes Brontë's heroines "curious" without being dismissed as disruptive.

For William Crimsworth in *The Professor*, Frances Henri at first seems almost a shadow, fading into the background. She always sits in the carré with "some dozen of the elder pupils about her," so William has no chance of observing her much. For him, she seems to "possess but little" character (87). By contrast, the Directress not only seems "sensible, sagacious affable," but also shines "like a steady star over a marsh-full of Jack o'lanthorns" in his eyes (87). When he finally has his spectacles

on and is able to study Frances' features, he compares her meagerness to the buoyancy of the Belgian school-girls:

[H]er features were dissimilar to any there, not so rounded, more defined yet scarcely regular. . . I felt assured at first sight that she was not a Belgian, her complexion, her countenance, her lineaments, her figure were all distinct from theirs and evidently the type of another race—of a race less gifted with fullness of flesh and plenitude of blood, less jocund, material, unthinking. When I first cast my eyes on her, she sat looking fixedly down, her chin resting on her hand and she did not change her attitude till I commenced the lesson—none of the Belgian girls would have retained one position and that a reflective one for the same length of time. (102)

It is obvious that Frances is far from beautiful. Her features are “scarcely regular,” and she is less “rounded” and fleshy than the others. Middle. Reuter's body, on the other hand, is “as graceful as it [i]s plump,” and her shape is “compact, round.” Both curvy and well-defined, her body adheres to the Victorian ideal perfectly (68).

The most “reduced” bodies, however, appear in *Jane Eyre*, in which literal hunger haunts both Jane's childhood and her escape to Whitcross. At Lowood, the girls are raised according to self-negating evangelical rules, and their bodies are honed down to their extreme minimum. When Mr. Brocklehurst inspects the school-girls, he is dissatisfied with the “abundance” of their hair. He insists that their hair must be arranged “closely, modestly, plainly,” and he insists that the naturally curly hair of the girls “must be cut off entirely.” “[T]hese, I repeat, must be cut off,” he reiterates three times on the same page (76). It is in such an environment that Jane Eyre is to be raised into the “little” woman that she is. When Bessie comes to visit her the night before her departure for Thornfield, she observes Jane and concludes that she has “not grown so very tall. . . nor very stout.” Her cousins are both bigger than her in physique: “Miss Reed is the head and shoulders taller than you are; and Miss Georgiana would make two of you in breadth,” says Bessie (107). Not only is Jane Eyre “assez mince et un peu pâle” (140), but she is educated to dress in such an ascetic fashion that she is constantly described as “Quaker-like” or “nun-like.” Without any excessive adornments, Jane's body is minimized in every possible way, until she comes to adapt herself to the comfortable life in Thornfield, where she feels almost at home. After the destructive disclosure of Rochester's secret, however, she runs away from Thornfield and wanders homeless in the fields for days, during which she is stricken by hunger and her body is again diminished. When she recuperates

from extreme exhaustion and hunger in Moor House, she finds her clothes “h[a]ng loose on [her], for [she] [i]s much wasted” (391).

In *Shirley*, Caroline Helstone’s body changes drastically from a sanguine, blooming body to a morbid body. At the beginning, she seems to be a physically attractive heroine very rare in Brontë’s works: “To her had not been denied the gift of beauty,” describes the narrator, “it was not absolutely necessary to know her in order to like her; she was fair enough to please, even at the first view” (64). Her every curve is “neat,” and every limb “proportionate”—she is almost as perfect and symmetrical as a statue. At the prime of her life, her hair is a perfect representation of her blossoming sexuality, which she possesses “in picturesque profusion” (64). After a pleasant evening with the Moores and a long walk home with the companionship of Robert Moore, she locks herself in her bed-room, and her hair is “loosened and falling thick, soft, and wavy to her waist; and, as, resting from the task of combing it out, she leaned her cheek on her hand and fixed her eyes on the carpet, before her rose, and close around her drew, the visions we see at eighteen years” (84). It is quite obvious that here the narrator adopts the voice of what Laura Mulvey terms “fetishistic scopophilia”: the voice of a (usually) male viewer that emphasizes—and thus keeps within bounds and objectifies—the physical beauty of the woman-as-spectacle. Here, Caroline is undoubtedly turned into a spectacle and thus rendered passive, flat, and two-dimensional, just like the other statuesque ladies.

However, her body is less “in control.” As Caroline loosens her hair, so her sexuality is unleashed, and she ponders the pleasure that the evening has brought her. The fullness of her body corresponds to her brimming sexuality and the hopefulness of her romantic expectations. Furthermore, her body is unlike those of the horde of beautiful, empty women that abound in Brontë’s works, for, after she is bereaved of her hope to become Robert’s wife, the outline of her body changes. Before, when she looked into the mirror she “could not choose but derive from the spectacle confirmation to her hopes” (85), but now she literally sees her own alteration: she could easily see that “she was altered within the last month; that the hues of her complexion were paler, her eyes changed—a wan shade seemed to circle them, her countenance was dejected: she was not, in short, so pretty or so fresh as she used to be” (151). Even her uncle, the man who is noted for his neglect of female family members, notices her change:

Without his being aware of it, the rose had dwindled and faded to a mere snowdrop: bloom had vanished, flesh wasted; she sat before him drooping, colourless, and thin. But for the soft expression of her brown eyes, the delicate lines of her features, and the flowing abundance of her hair, she would no longer have possessed a claim to the epithet—pretty. (162)

From a rose to a snowdrop, Caroline becomes lifeless, colourless, and fleshless, yet still pretty. As discussed in the last chapter, the metaphor of plant is here appropriate, for as she loses the hope of establishing a family, she is also deprived of the possibility of procreation. Her flower is “drooping,” and she is as “effete as dead weeds, blanched and broken” now as she used to be “bouncing, buxom, red as cherries, and round as apples” (162). Her body is reduced, and so is her spirit: she is aware of the fact that she is to live perpetually in suppression. Indeed, when she is prevented by Shirley from running towards Robert on the night of the riot, she finally exclaims the question that has been lingering on her mind thus far: “Am I always to be curbed and *kept down*?” (292, my italics)

Brontë’s heroines are always “curbed and kept down,” both mentally and physically. They are not merely slender and small (as in the case of Paulina), but also “colourless,” that is, both in the sense of lacking sanguine color and of being unable to draw attention. Even Caroline, the originally beautiful heroine, is merely a “graceful pencil-sketch” compared to the “vivid painting” of Shirley (*Shirley* 210). Jane Eyre sees herself as a rough sketch drawn in chalk, whilst Blanche Ingram is a colorful painting on the smooth surface of ivory (*JE* 187). Lucy Snowe describes herself as gaining as much attention as “unobtrusive articles of furniture, chairs of ordinary joiner’s work, and carpets of no striking pattern” (*Villette* 119). Reduced in both flesh and color, their bodies are almost unseen. They are as pallid as Pygmalion’s sculpture prior to its metamorphosis, and their presence seems to invite a transforming hand, a hand to fashion their bodies and bring them to life. The Pygmalions in Brontë’s works do not sculpt the bodies of their statues from scratch, but “refashion” them by adding flesh to their wasted bodies, much like a wax figure is able to transform with the application of melted wax.

## II. Pygmalion Myth

In order to discuss how the Brontëan heroines eventually “come alive,” the Pygmalion myth must first be discussed. In *Waxworks: A Cultural Obsession*, an exploration of wax and wax figures as a motif in both European and American

literature and visual art, Michelle E. Bloom chronicles the origins and vicissitudes of the legend of Pygmalion. The earliest known written account of the myth was composed by the Hellenistic writer Philostephanus in *Cypriaca*, and later mentioned in the works of Clement of Alexandria's *Protrepticus* (4.51) and Arnobius' *Adversus Gentes* (6.22) (Reinhold 316), two Christian apologists. In Philostephanus' version, Pygmalion, the king of Cyprus, "embraces an ivory statue of Venus" (Bloom 41). Another Hellenic writer, Posidippus, chronicles the story of an anonymous nobleman who not only embraces the marble statue of Aphrodite, but "also has sexual intercourse with it" (Bloom 41). The most well-known and widely adapted version is that in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, wherein Pygmalion prays to Venus for a wife "like the ivory maid" (232), for the ivory maid is "lovelier than any woman born" and he is "revolted by the many faults which Nature has implanted in the female sex" (231). In order to reward Pygmalion for making an offering at her altar during the festival of Venus, the Goddess turns the ivory statue into a real woman.

The nineteenth century was quite fascinated by Ovid's Pygmalion story. As "conduct books" for young women abounded in the publishing industry and the transformation of girls into marriageable women became the primary task of domestic education, Pygmalion's success in "creating" the woman of his dreams became quite a popular theme. Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1916) was merely the last of many Victorian iterations of the Pygmalion story. In 1871, *Pygmalion and Galatea, an Original Mythological Comedy*, a blank verse "mythological comedy" written by W. S. Gilbert, opened at the Haymarket Theatre in London. In 1881, Thomas Woolner composed *Pygmalion*, a poem in twelve books, in which the theme of the artist's predicament—his struggle to bring "life" to his artwork—is delineated. Richard Jenkyns points out that the Victorian male's "ideal of womanhood" is

at once oppressive and fantastic. She was to be the angel in the house. . . ; at the same time she must offer the more substantial delights of solid, compliant flesh. Angel and mistress, vision and reality—surely only a statue come to life could perform all these functions. Consciously or unconsciously, many Victorians realized this. (Jenkyns 143)

A similar theme can also be found in Charlotte Brontë's works, wherein the narratives more often than not center on intrigue and love-making between masters and their favorite pupils—between a man and the woman that he tries to mold into being.

This desire to create, or rather to shape, an ideal woman finds theoretical justification in Jean-Jaques Rousseau's *Émile ou de l'Éducation* (1762), which had

great influence on many nineteenth-century conduct books. *Émile* delineates the breeding and education of a “natural man” and his fitting spouse. According to Rousseau, man is by nature “active and strong,” while woman is “passive and weak,” and she is “intended to please man” (Rousseau 131). Given such “natural” difference of the sexes, it follows that “the stronger may appear to be master, and yet actually be dependent on the weaker,” and thus “[b]y giving woman the capacity to stimulate desires greater than can be satisfied, Nature has made man dependent on woman’s good will and constrained him to seek to please her as a condition of her submission” (132). Thus, according to Rousseau, the rule of nature requires that a woman be educated to be coy and inaccessible in appearance in order for the conjugal relationship to work. As the discussion of perpetual babyism in the previous chapter highlights, Sophie (or Sophia), destined to become Emile’s companion and wife, represents the outcome of the “correct” education. She “interests and charms” without “being very striking”; she has great taste in dressing, and her clothes “always combine simplicity with elegance,” and are “modest in appearance but coquettish in effect” (148). She is fond of needlework and has mastered housekeeping skills. She learns to read and write only in so far as such abilities help her in housekeeping affairs. Her mind is “pleasing but not brilliant, solid but not deep” (149), and “she has taste without study, talents without art, judgment without knowledge. Her mind is still vacant but has been trained to learn” (152). There are indeed similarities between Rousseau’s Sophie and the Pygmalion statue: like a blank canvas, she is full of potential, waiting to come alive for her future mate; her mind will be “activated” and filled with what he inculcates into it.

It is, however, in another of Rousseau’s works that Brontë’s master-versus-pupil theme finds its origin. In her discussion of *Shirley*, Elizabeth Gargano initiates her interrogation of how the relationship between Shirley and Louis echoes that between Julie and Saint-Preux in Rousseau’s 1761 *Julie, ou, La nouvelle Héloïse* (*Julie, or the New Heloise*) by pointing out the influences of Rousseauian discourse on Charlotte Brontë’s letters and novels. Indeed, given proof of Brontë’s exposure to Rousseauian discourses,<sup>45</sup> it is quite conspicuous that the romantic/erotic relationship between teacher and student that is central to almost all Brontë’s major works can be traced back to *The New Heloise*. Gargano insists that

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<sup>45</sup> See Elizabeth Gargano, “The Education of Brontë’s New Nouvelle Heloise in Shirley,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 44.4 (2004): 781-2.



[t]he vigorous power struggle in which Shirley and Louis engage throughout the novel recapitulates the dynamic shifts—and to a degree even the stages—of the extended lovers’ battle in *Nouvelle Héloïse*, in which Julie and Saint-Preux vie for mastery, spurning each other between passionate kisses, ritualistically testing each others’ love and finding it wanting. (Gargano 798-9)

This analysis is applicable far beyond *Shirley*. Though without the element of a lower social status on the teacher’s part, the tug-of-war between lovers, the tender mastery of the teacher against the teasing submission of the student, appear in almost all of Brontë’s major novels.

Thus, in Charlotte Brontë’s works, although the Pygmalion myth still reverberates in the theme of a male master and his female student, these young women are less “created” by their masters than developed under their instruction, through a process in which the domination/submission dichotomy is problematized—though not completely disrupted—and in which the inborn benevolent faculties of the heroines are allowed to flourish. Thus, William Crimsworth finds in Frances Henri’s “devoirs” the proof of her “taste and fancy” (*Professor* 114), which, he admits, with proper training in reading and writing should “rather to have been denominated Judgment and Imagination” with capital letters (122). With Louis Moore’s inspiration, Shirley creates the story of “The First Blue-Stocking,” which is a perfect illustration of her ability. As for Lucy Snowe, although M. Paul fails to force recondite learning upon Lucy without her escaping from the schoolroom (*Villette* 449), his recognition of her capabilities does motivate her development. It is worthy of note that, like the story of Pygmalion, the influence of these men over their women is “inspirational,” and is realized in the most physical way: the shaping of the female body.

The most “Pygmalionesque” element in the master-pupil relationships that Brontë so eagerly includes in almost all her major novelistic works is the ability for the master to influence the intellectual development of his pupil and in turn alter the shape of her body and bring her bloodless, colourless, and lifeless form to life.

William’s observation of Frances changes as she advances in her studies: her figure has changed for the better, becoming

rounder and as the harmony of her form was *complete*. . . one did not regret. . . the absence of confirmed fullness, in contours, still slight, though compact, elegant, flexible—the exquisite turning of waist, wrist, hand, foot and ankle [sic] satisfied completely my notions of symmetry, and allowed a lightness and freedom of movement which corresponded with my ideas of grace. Thus improved, thus *wakened to life*. . . (123, italics mine)

Where she was “less gifted with fullness of flesh and plenitude of blood,” now she is “rounder;” while her features were “more defined yet scarcely regular,” now her body is in perfect “symmetry.” Her body is at once formulated into statue-like beauty and wakened to life. Here, William sees Frances as “waist, wrist, hand, foot and ankle,” despite his claim that her form is now “complete”—while she had seemed like a shadow when he first saw her, here her body becomes fragmented, objectified and fetishized. If, as Laura Mulvey argues, such fetishistic scopophilia helps to erase the threat posed by an uncontrollable female sexual body, here Frances’ metamorphoses—her ability to change and develop—is rendered curious but unthreatening. Furthermore, she is “wakened to life” according to his wish. From the very beginning, Frances exhibits a tendency to be animated by him. She remains in the same posture for a long time in the schoolroom, almost like a statue, *until he begins the lessons* (102).

After weeks of searching, William finally finds his favorite pupil in the cemetery. Driven by the heavy rain, they return to Frances’ abode, and after taking off her bonnet and coat Frances comes out as “a model of frugal neatness,” her black dress “accurately defining her elegant bust and taper waist” (144). Frances’ body is now well-defined—a perfect model of physical beauty, with an elegant bust contrasted to the tapered waist, delimited by a very specific shape and thus enclosed within clear boundaries. Like a statue, her body is curvaceous, though not too fleshy. “[O]rnaments she has none,” observes William, and “she did well enough without them” (144). Such an observation certainly echoes the description in Ovid’s version of the Pygmalion myth: Pygmalion “dressed the limbs of his statue in woman’s robes, and put rings on its fingers, long necklaces round its neck. Pearls hung from its ears, and chains were looped upon its breast. All this finery became the image well, but it was no less lovely unadorned” (Ovid 232). The resemblance between the corporeal beauty of Frances and the Pygmalion statue is quite conspicuous.

William’s control over the animation and inanimation of his statue continues. Under William’s gaze, Frances gradually becomes self-conscious, and, made shy by such paralyzing stare, she “subside[s] to stillness” (146). His gaze momentarily becomes like Medusa’s, and she is again turned statue-like. He thus realizes that it is under his sway that she may come to life:

[H]er eyes remain[ed] downcast, though I kept waiting for the lids to be raised that I might drink a ray of the light I loved. . . this expectation not

being gratified, I began at last to suspect that I had probably myself to blame for the disappointment; I must cease gazing and begin talking if I wished to break the spell under which she now sat motionless. . . . (146)

With an authoritative tone, William announces the commencement of a lesson and commands Frances to fetch her book, and thus the spell is broken. Her timely choice is Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a story first and foremost of the myth of Creation, of "how in the womb of chaos, the conception of a world had originated and ripened" (*Professor* 147)—a story, that is, about how humankind is created and brought to life from a cluster of clay.

By the time Frances accepts William's proposal, she has turned entirely into a sanguine woman with a face full of "smile, dimple and rosy tint" (189), and as much as he had earlier insisted that she would be "charmless" for a "sensualist" (141), now he realizes that "[he] too [i]s a sensualist," and he "derived a pleasure purely material from contemplating" her form (190). Frances is at this moment alive with physical beauty, a transformation effected by William's influence. Besides such master-pupil relationships in which the student "comes alive" as her personal development advances, in Brontë's works, the heroine's body changes as her romantic relationship with a man develops; this motif also corresponds to the matrimonial theme embedded in the Pygmalion story. Jane Eyre, probably the most emaciated Brontëan heroine, is transformed after she moves into Thornfield and falls in love with Rochester. She now has "more colour and more flesh, more life, more vivacity," since with Rochester she has "brighter hopes and keener enjoyments" (*JE* 182). The day after Rochester proposes to her, she wakes up feeling hopeful and excited, and when she looks in the mirror she feels her face "no longer plain" (297). Her appearance changes as her relationship with Rochester develops. As the hope of marriage increases, so the bodies of women gain flesh and curve, as if the female body is instinctively preparing itself for the cause of procreation.

In the same vein, in *Shirley*, Caroline's body drastically changes several times, and each time the shift corresponds to her hope of getting married and establishing a family. Analogies of sterility and reproduction abound in the description of her wasted body: her bloom has vanished, and she sits "drooping, colourless, and thin" (162), like a decaying flower without the possibility of bearing a fruit. Seeing her change, Mr. Helstone complains that girls "have the strangest knack of startling you with unpleasant surprises. To-day you see them bouncing, buxom, red as cherries, and round as apples; tomorrow they exhibit themselves effete as dead weeds, blanched

and broken down” (162). Winter seems to be “conquering her spring: the mind’s soil and its treasures [a]re freezing gradually to barren stagnation” (158). Caroline imagines herself trapped in the fate of an old maid, and her body likewise becomes bleak and barren.

However, if her body is turned from a rose to a snowdrop (162), and if her mind’s “soil and its treasures” are frozen (158), the frost is merely temporary. Caroline is the only one of Brontë’s heroines who is confined to her own bed by sickness for a long period of time, yet her inactivity and invalidity do not last long. She gradually recovers after finding out that Mrs. Pryor is her mother, but the more crucial reason for her resuscitation is her renewed relationship with Robert Moore (502). It is only when her body is situated in the domestic domain, either as a daughter or as a future wife, that it regains strength. Now her “colour and her plump cheeks [a]re returning,” and she “look[s] brightly; move[s] buoyantly; speak[s] musically” (501). When Moore asks her what has caused such a change, what is “the source of this sunshine” he perceives about her, she answers that “for one thing,” she is “happy in mama,” and when he pursues the question, she answers that “the other thing” is her delight in their rehabilitated friendship (502). However, on the next page it is revealed that Caroline has already found out about Moore’s failed proposal to Shirley, which is obviously the real cause of her recuperation (503). Her sickness seems to be a frozen state in which she is temporarily preserved, awaiting Moore’s return from the wrong marital choices he has made.

In the chapter titled “The Winding-up,” Moore finally proposes to Caroline, and the proposal takes place in the garden, where Caroline stands on a stone watering her rose. With a body no longer barren, a body that has changed from a snowdrop back to a rose, she delightedly waters the plant; the procreational and sexual overtone is obvious. Then Moore walks into the garden and stands behind her, his hands circling her waist. When she turns around and sees him, she is so surprised that she drops the watering-pot and “step[s] down from the pedestal” (535). No longer inanimate and lifeless, she leaves the pedestal upon which her body had been situated like a statue, and steps down into matrimony. Brontë’s heroines might not be the creations of their men, as the sculpture is the creation of Pygmalion, yet the shape of their bodies is invariably controlled by their relationships with men, and their “metamorphoses” into life are governed by men, or rather by the possibility of a marriage with them.

In previous sections, I have generally enumerated the statuesque women and pattern ladies in Brontë, and, in order to discuss further the Pygmalion metaphor, here an extreme example of a statue-like woman should be examined. Mary Cave in *Shirley*, the deceased wife of Mr. Helstone and the woman to whom Mr. Yorke was a suitor, is precisely such an example. In his youth, Mr. Yorke had been known for his taste in “sprightly and dashing women,” yet he fell seriously in love with this “girl with the face of a Madonna; a girl of living marble; stillness personified” (45). She treated Yorke with marble-coldness: when he spoke to her, she “only answered him in monosyllables,” and “his glances were unreturned.” Furthermore, she “never responded to his opinions, rarely smiled at his jests, paid him no respect and no attention”—she seemed “the opposite of everything feminine he had ever. . . been known to admire,” and *therefore* she was “perfect” to him (45). She is so indifferent, so unresponsive that men cannot see her return their enthusiasm. However, according to Richard Jenkyns, it is precisely such a lack of response that appeals to the imagination of men. In “The Consequences of Sculpture,” Jenkyns elaborates upon the eroticism involved in the Pygmalion story and its influences in the Victorian culture. Jenkyns explains that the reason why Greek sculpture is “at once mathematical, expressionless, ‘soulless,’ and yet instinct with sexuality” is because its “blank, characterless expressions provided a vacant space for men and women to project their dreams and fantasies upon” (Jenkyns 143). Marble-like, Mary Cave’s body becomes a surface onto which men are able to project their own desires. She is rendered empty, a vessel for the passions and fantasies of men rather than her own. Thus, after she marries Mr. Helstone, he treats her precisely as if she is not a living person with needs and emotions of her own. For him,

so long as a woman was silent, nothing ailed her, and she wanted nothing. If she did not complain of solitude, solitude, however continued, could not be irksome to her. If she did not talk and put herself forward, express a partiality for this, an aversion to that, she had no partialities or aversions, and it was useless to consult her tastes. (45)

It is no coincidence that a marble-woman like Mary Cave is married off to a man who treats all women as mere ornaments. After merely a couple of years into their marriage, the ignored Mary silently takes “her leave of him and of life,” and there is “only a still beautiful-featured mould of clay left, cold and white, on the conjugal couch” (46). From the “girl of living marble” to a “mould of clay,” she conveniently

slips from an object of desire into a mere object, with very little alteration. Unlike the Brontëan heroines, Mary Cave thus remains a statue throughout her life.

It is worth noting that, while a Greek statue seems a perfect medium to reflect and project desire, the feelings that it inspires are never really sexual: there is a difference between the emotional reaction aroused by works of high art and such sexual desire as provoked by, say, pornography. Jenkyns also observes that the Greek sculptures so popular in Victorian households were “curiously frigid, curiously calm in a way that cannot be attributed to pusillanimity or technical incapacity on the sculptor’s part” (136), and they were so “impossibly perfect, unnaturally pure” that

sags and bulges, moles and wrinkles were eliminated, in many cases not to make the works more arousing, but rather to make them less so. Grecian sculpture was attractive not because the Greeks were so frank about the display of the body but for the very opposite reason: the female genitals, for example, were always represented in a formalized manner. So much the better: it was not naked women that the public wanted to see but nudes—not quite the same thing. (137)

The statue is always the center of appreciation, yet it is only Pygmalion’s statue—the statue that turns into a real woman—that is charged with sexuality. Thus Mary Cave’s tragedy lies not in her resemblance to a statue, but rather in her inability to come alive.

Brontë’s heroines are set off against these statuesque women for a reason. As mentioned in the “hidden fire” section of the first chapter on cabinets of curiosities, according to Sally Shuttleworth, the nineteenth-century “condition of femininity was dependent on the woman retaining her impenetrability” (72). She was only deemed feminine if she was “sexually responsive to a man,” yet “should she disclose that responsiveness before the requisite time she would also forfeit her feminine status,” so Victorian femininity was “predicated on a condition of concealment, on a disjunction between surface control and inner sexuality” (72). The demure yet innocently alluring feminine ideal was an embodiment of such impenetrability, and it was precisely under such common presumptions that those “pattern ladies” or statuesque women behaved as they did. In Brontë’s works, however, the seamless surfaces of female bodies are lacking in attraction precisely because they are presented as nothing more than their surfaces. Their impenetrability conceals nothing, and thus they fall flat, shallow, and uninteresting. For Brontë, what they lack is a sense of mystery, a “disjunction between surface control and inner sexuality,” the one thing that makes them curiously interesting for men. Brontë’s physically flawed

heroines, on the other hand, though deprived of the advantage of appearance, are able to conceal their “sexual responsiveness” by cultivating a sense of unpredictability and mystery that protects them from being fixed by the curious gazes of men, thus appealing further to the male desire to “penetrate.”

As one of the few physically attractive heroines in Brontë, Shirley keeps Louis interested with her ability to elude his efforts to keep her in check. At very crucial moments of their relationship, Shirley and Louis squabble playfully over a statuesque image. After reciting “La Première Femme Savante,” Shirley’s old *devoir* when she was still Louis’ pupil, and after reminiscing for a few moments about the old days, Louis, finding Shirley again turned from the condescending heiress to his submissive student, inquires of her teasingly,

“there have been moments since my arrival here, when I have been tempted to inquire of the lady of Fieldhead if she knew what had become of my former pupil.”

“She is here now.”

“I see her, and humble enough; but I would neither advise Harry, nor others, to believe too implicitly in the humility which one moment can hide its blushing face like a modest little child, and the next lift it pale and lofty as a marble Juno.”

“One man in times of old, it is said, imparted vitality to the statue he had chiseled. Others may have the contrary gift of turning life to stone.” (411-2)

With this answer, Shirley “raise[s] her head, lofty in look, and statue-like in hue,” and Louis exclaims, “[b]ehold the metamorphosis!” He says that he “scarce imagined ere it is realized: a lowly nymph develops to an inaccessible goddess” (412). Gifted with social status, beauty and intelligence, Shirley is unable to compromise her pride when Louis, who is poor and thus “must be proud” (517), treats her haughtily. Thus, when they meet again after years of separation, when Shirley is no longer the “modest little child” but a woman with social standing much superior to Louis’, they are unable to establish a relationship in which either of them can candidly admit his / her feelings. If Shirley sometimes seems like a marble Juno, it is her defense mechanism, and it is—as she implies—the patronizing attitude of Louis that has “the contrary gift of turning life to stone.” As Shirley is a former pupil of Louis, the Pygmalion analogy is quite appropriate here. However, as Louis later writes in his little book, it is the Juno transforming into a mortal woman, instead of the nymph who repeats his words during the French lessons and whistles the tune that she learns from him (519), that is truly appealing to him. What Shirley does here, on the other hand, is to demonstrate

her uncontrollability—and thus impenetrability—by deliberately reversing the process of metamorphosis.

Louis writes in his little book of his observation of Sir Philip Nunnely's love-making to Shirley, and he "never witness[es] these things" without "think[ing] of the fable of Semele reversed." He compares Sir Philip to the priest of Juno, who "loves the idol he serves, and prays day and night that his frenzy may be fed, and that the Ox-eyed may smile on her votary" (440). One day, she answers to his prayer and appears before him in all her glamour, and he is consumed by her thunderbolt (440). However, as Louis recounts the story, he himself slips into the role of the priest, as illustrated by a telling grammatical shift:

A shock of heaven and earth is felt—not by the slumbering city; only by the lonely watcher, brave and unshaken in his fanaticism. In the midst of silence, with no preluding sound, he is wrapt in sudden light. . . He has, what he asked: withdraw—forebear to look—I am blinded. I hear in that fane an unspeakable sound—would that I could not hear it! I see an insufferable glory burning terribly between the pillars. Gods be merciful and quench it! (440)

From "he" to "I," Louis too is the vehement priest, dazzled by the power of Juno.

However lethal the revelation may be, it takes place according to his will—as Pygmalion's statue comes alive upon his wish, so Juno reveals herself after his prayer. While men, as mentioned in the "cabinets of curiosities" chapter, remain idols throughout the texts, women are never so inaccessible—neither are they so immutable. It is the continuous transformation of Shirley from the "chaste, grand, untouched" statue of Juno, to the actual Goddess, to the mortal woman who is a "stainless virgin" (436), to the "leopardess" and "tigress," and to the submissive yet selfless nymph, that so attracts Louis. However, as Shuttleworth points out, although female sexuality must be concealed, a woman still has to be "sexually responsive" at "the requisite time." Thus, difficult as Shirley is to pin down, Louis still manages to capture her with his words. His final conquest of this half-goddess, half-mortal is recorded in his little booklet; the readers are never to learn of their final union through any voice but his own. His words trap the Goddess in the body of her statue, yet her potential to come alive remains. It must be so for their mutual attraction to continue, and for their marriage to last. Such a dynamic in their relationship is evident in her proviso: "You name me leopardess: remember, the leopardess is tameless," says Shirley at his proposal. "Tame or fierce, wild or subdued, you are *mine*," replies Louis (522,



original italics). It is evident that she would stay *both* tame and fierce, wild and subdued.

Similar situations appear in *Jane Eyre*. For Rochester, Jane is always a fairy, appearing suddenly in his life and fading away just as abruptly. His attraction to her lies in her unpredictability, her almost supernatural ability to dazzle him with her personality, a personality that seems all the more interesting when contrasted with her homely body. From a very early stage of their friendship Rochester has recognized Jane's potential beyond the seemingly restricted and restrictive body formed by her upbringing in Lowood:

“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. . . but, in time, I think you will learn to be natural with me. . . I see at intervals the glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage: a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there; were it but free, it would soar cloud-high.” (162)

So says Rochester affirmatively. Jane's body has been “controlled,” first by imprisonment and emotional negligence in the Reed estate, then by hunger and rules of evangelical austerity in Lowood, and later, by the missionary responsibilities in the “iron shroud” with which St. John cloaks her (465). However, Rochester is right in his observation: however restricted her body has been, Jane remains “a *curious* sort of bird” to the end. Even after she flees to Marsh End, and St. John admonishes her against the peril of looking back and exposing herself to the fate of “Lot's wife” (416), she still flies back to Rochester, risking the danger of transforming into a pillar of salt. It is her own decisions that initiate each of her journeys—her mobility and changeability cannot be predicted by others. Even the threat of becoming trapped in an ossified body cannot confine her will.

Later in their relationship, when Jane does learn to be natural with him, and her body changes by gaining more flesh, she becomes even more *curious* to him. She develops a way to interest Rochester by keeping him at bay, for she knows that Rochester “is an amateur of the decided and eccentric” (182), and that in their relationship there is a fine line she should not cross: “I knew the pleasure of vexing and soothing him by turns; it was one I chiefly delighted in, and a sure instinct always prevented me from going too far; beyond the verge of provocation I never ventured; on the extreme brink I liked well to try my skill” (183). She knows exactly how to pique his curiosity without either provoking his anger or becoming overtly flirtatious.

She walks the line skillfully, and it is this jeopardy, this danger of accidentally transgressing, that gives their relationship the piquancy necessary.

If Jane remains unpredictable throughout the narrative, and her body reflects such unpredictability by waxing and waning, even more so is Frances in *The Professor*. “As to this same Mrs. Crimsworth,” says William with ardor after their marriage, “in one sense she was become another woman, though in another she remained unchanged. So different was she under different circumstances I seemed to possess two wives” (209). Indeed it is the moment of metamorphosis in the Pygmalion myth, eternalized and repeated again and again. Furthermore, the advent of this changeability takes place only after their marriage; it is his influences that inspire such constant change. Frances’ development under William’s instruction seems like the blossoming of a flower in his eyes, and he “watched this change much as a gardener watches the growth of a precious plant” (123). After their marriage the plant grows even stronger:

The faculties of her nature, already disclosed when I married her, remained fresh and fair; but other faculties shot up strong, branched out broad, and quite altered the external character of the plant. Firmness, activity and enterprise covered with grave foliage poetic feeling and fervour; but these flowers were still there, preserved pure and dewy under the umbrage of later growth and hardier nature: perhaps I only in the world knew the secret of their existence, but to me they were ever ready to yield an exquisite fragrance and present a beauty, as chaste as radiant. (209)

Not only is William the gardener who takes credit for nourishing her growth, he is the only one in the world who knows the existence of those “flowers” of her “poetic feeling and fervour,” whose fragrance and beauty is reserved only for him—much like Pygmalion’s relationship with his statue. In the daytime, Frances is “Madame the Directress,” yet at night “the lady-directress vanished from before [William’s] eyes, and Frances Henri, [his] own little lace-mender, was magically restored to [his] arms” (211). The eroticism lies as much in Frances’ uprightness to others as her submissiveness to him. Like Jane Eyre, Frances would “shew. . . some stores of raillery, of ‘malice,’ and would vex, tease, pique [William]. . . with a wild and witty wickedness that made a perfect white demon of her whilst it lasted” (211). However, as soon as William “arrest[s] bodily the sprite that tease[s] [him],” then “the elf [is] gone,” and he “ha[s] seized a mere vexing fairy and found a submissive and supplicating little mortal woman in [his] arms” (211-12, italics mine). However changeable Frances is, by “arresting her bodily” William is able to turn her mortal

according to his wish. Throughout Brontë's works, it is the heroine's changing body that marks her femininity, the progress of her personal development, and ultimately the stage of her marriageability.

While Ovid's Pygmalion myth chronicles the metamorphosis of a statue, the transformations of Brontë's heroines are constant and recurring. While the shape of the Pygmalion statue does not really change as it comes alive, the bodies of Brontëan heroines do. Thus I would like to introduce another metaphor, which, when juxtaposed with the Pygmalion myth, further illuminates the power relations involved in the Victorian discourse of womanhood. In order to find such a metaphor, one detail in Ovid's Pygmalion myth must not be overlooked. In Michelle Bloom's survey, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* seems to depict a Pygmalion story that is quite different from its pre-Ovidian versions, for the older versions lack the elements of "creation" and "animation" (Bloom 41). Unlike the protagonists in these stories, Ovid's Pygmalion not only sculpts the statue from ivory, but also brings it to life. Ovid's is a story of the male creator and his female creation. Furthermore, there is an essential element that is often neglected by those evoking the Pygmalion motif: the intervention of Venus herself. The power of creation comes from Venus, not Pygmalion, and thus the dichotomy between the male creator and the female creation is complicated and rendered problematic. However, according to Bloom, the patriarchal order is here strengthened instead of disrupted, for

[t]he female adoption of the male role provides no solution, because such inversions can be reversed too easily, as demonstrated by Ovid's obscuring of Venus' creative power. Even if a female appropriates the male position, another female may occupy the female position. This scenario may, for instance, take the form of the female exploitation of another female, as in the case of Venus with respect to Pygmalion's statue. (Bloom 46)

Bloom explicates Pygmalion's "obscuring of Venus' creative power" by highlighting the significance of wax at the moment of the transformation: when Pygmalion returns home from the festival,

he made straight for the statue of the girl he loved, leaned over the couch, and kissed her. She seemed warm: he laid his lips on her again, and touched her breast with his hands—at this touch the ivory lost its hardness, and grew soft: his fingers made an imprint on the yielding surface, just as wax of Hymettus melts in the sun and, worked by men's fingers, is fashioned into many different shapes, and made fit for use by being used. (Ovid 232)

With the simile of the wax on the mountain of Hymettus, which is “worked by men’s fingers” and “fashioned into many different shapes,” male creative power is retained: Venus’ influence is an external force rather than the creative work of a specific female hand. It may be the sun that melts the wax, but it is the man who “uses” the wax and thus makes it “fit for use.”

The metaphor of wax is echoed by Rochester’s delineation of an ideal companion. After their engagement, Rochester points out the difference between Jane and all his former mistresses:

“To women who please me only by their faces, I am the very devil when I find out they have neither souls nor hearts—when they open to me a perspective of flatness, triviality, and perhaps imbecility, coarseness, and ill-temper: but to the clear eye and eloquent tongue, to the soul made of fire, and the character that bends but does not break—at once supple and stable, tractable and consistent—I am ever tender and true.” (300)

The women who “please only by their faces” are those “pattern ladies” and statuesque women, beautiful outside and empty inside. However, if, like William Crimsworth, Rochester refuses to be wed to a “pretty doll,” a “lump of wax and wood” (*Professor* 90), his description of a character that appeals to him nonetheless reads like the description of a wax figure: the malleability of the melted wax, its steadiness once cooled, and its capacity to be melted and softened again and again, all make it “at once supple and stable, tractable and consistent.” For Rochester, as well as for other men, it is the wax-like figure, with the ability to transform and adapt to the situation—or, rather, adapt to the desire of men—that they seek in a woman.

### III. Statuesque Men and Waxwork-like Women

In order to discuss the waxworks metaphor in Brontë’s works, the attraction’s general history, its popularity in the nineteenth century, and the denotations behind it must first be considered. From their very beginning, wax figures have forged a connection between life and death, representing both with their uncanny capacity for facsimile. Ever since about 3000 BC, when wax models appeared in the Indian subcontinent (Pilbeam 1), wax has been indispensable in funeral processions of royalty as well as in religious ceremonies. Ancient civilizations—Persians, Egyptians, Greeks—included wax simulations of the dead in either their funeral or burial rituals. The Roman Catholic Church adopted wax effigies in ceremonies and as church embellishments. Even after the Reformation, the use of “voluptuous and colourful full-size wax models” persisted in Roman Catholic churches (Pilbeam 1). This

ancient custom of including wax effigies in funerals was adopted by later European civilizations. For example, according to Pamela Pilbeam, in France “from the thirteenth to the end of the seventeenth century models of kings were displayed dressed in their usual clothes, with a wax face and hands and a wood-framed body” (Pilbeam 1). In England, from the fourteenth century well into the eighteenth century, wax models of royalty were kept, after their funerals, in Westminster Abbey, the “great monument of monarchy and the national spirit, the coronation and burial place of its kings and queens, a pantheon of heroes and poets” (Altick 89). However, by the eighteenth century, due to poor preservation conditions and lack of supervision, these effigies had become so tattered by age as well as by the vigorous Westminster School boys that they came to be called the “Ragged Regiments” (Altick 91). Another collection of waxworks in the Abbey, preserved under better conditions, were called the “Abbey waxworks”; these were effigies of later kings and queens as well as ordinary wax figures. As the Abbey was considered both the monument of national spirit and a popular tourist destination, these wax figures became a well-known spectacle in eighteenth-century England.

Although in the seventeenth century wax models were used in the funerals of both royalty and distinguished commoners, it was not until the eighteenth century that waxworks were incorporated into the part of show business that was to grow into modern museums. The burgeoning industry of exhibitions at the time ranged from such natural visual oddities as exotic objects, specimens of foreign fauna and flora, and freak shows, to such novel creations as mechanical inventions and panoramas. Philippe Curtius (1737-1794), a native of Switzerland and the teacher of the renowned Madame Tussaud, established a successful career as a wax entrepreneur in Paris in the years before the French Revolution. His exhibitions were called “Curtius’ Cabinet of Curiosities,” which included not only wax models and heads he made, but also his collection of “oddities of Nature” and other unusual objects (Pilbeam 18). Later, he grasped the business opportunity and organized his exhibitions to include two major sections: one called the “wax salon,” which was peopled by wax models of the “famous and glamorous,” and the other, the *Caverne des Grands Voleurs*, made up of wax simulations of villains in murder or execution scenes (Pilbeam 18). This was to be the predecessor of the notorious Chamber of Horrors. Like most early exhibitions, the targeted spectatorship of his “salon” was the elite, the affluent few who could afford to pay the entrance fee.

Inheriting Curtius' skills, commercial concepts and entrepreneurship—even his blood, so some said—Madame Tussaud began her career as a show-woman and traveled with her works from France to England, finally settling in London in the 1830s. Throughout the Victorian age, her wax “museum,” as she preferred it to be categorized, was so popular that it became, along with the Abbey, the Tower, and St. Paul's, a symbol of London (Altick 335). Up to this day Madame-Tussaud-branded wax exhibitions are still the most famous in England. Her exhibitions included two different kinds of figures. The first was a permanent collection. It was a much more lifelike and better-preserved version of the effigies in Westminster Abbey, composed of deceased royalty and other notabilities. These models were dressed in resplendent garments, many of which were the clothes actually worn by the subjects of the sculptures, either when they were still alive or at their funerals. Also aiming at aristocratic spectatorship, Madame Tussaud took pains to keep her exhibitions “authentic” and enjoyable. Thus not only were the outfits of the models as genuine as could be, but the showplace itself was adorned with actual funeral ornaments purchased from the descendants of these celebrities.

Figures of the second class were those from current events, which were constantly changed in order to cater to the vacillating taste of spectators. Although Madame Tussaud “cut out much that other waxworks retained” (Pilbeam 131) when she moved to England, and thus left behind the “freak trappings,” “the piebald children,” “the improbably and grotesquely fat man,” and the “anatomical ladies” so prominent in Curtius' “Cabinet of Curiosities” (Pilbeam 131), she nevertheless saw the potential in retaining elements of horror and sensation, and hence the “Adjoining Room,” later termed the “Chamber of Horrors” by *Punch*, became an indispensable part of her exhibition. Again, besides the death masks taken directly from the heads of criminals, these wax figures were also dressed in the clothes actually worn by those villains. Sometimes the Tussauds—Madame Tussaud and her son, who later took over the business—purchased the “entire contents of a room where a particularly memorable murder had occurred” (Pilbeam 108) and reconstructed the crime scene in the “Adjoining Room.” Madame Tussaud's target audiences were those of the upper and middle classes, and, as more and more families could secure the extra funds for entertainment, her business thrived along with other nineteenth-century shows. By the mid-nineteenth century, the popularity of her exhibitions had reached national and international levels.

Among the “curiosities” that Curtius had included in his *salon*, and which Madame Tussaud had left behind, were anatomical ladies whose popularity was nonetheless rejuvenated in the mid-nineteenth century. According to Richard Altick, this renewed public attention was due to the fact that, in 1828, “the revelation of Burke and Hare’s illicit manufacture of cadavers at Edinburgh” endowed these wax models with “delectably horrid connotations” (Altick 339), and thus these wax women provided a juicy dose of sensation for the thirsty public curiosity. Furthermore, the incident of the Edinburgh Resurrectionists disclosed the urgency of anatomical demands for cadavers, either as teaching aids or as materials for research. As dead bodies were not merely difficult to acquire—especially after the incident—but also difficult to preserve, the anatomical models became an acceptable substitute. Back in the eighteenth century these dismantlable wax female bodies had been quite commonplace. Theirs were “idealized though accurate” bodies, the “appearance of which was delightful, even erotic” (Pilbeam 4).

These anatomical “Venuses,” as they were called, had eyelashes and beautiful long hair, and were “displayed lying invitingly on silk or velvet cushions,” with pearl necklaces on their necks (Pilbeam 4). Their heads were slightly tilted to one side as if dead, yet their facial expressions often simulated, though in a rather demure and quiet way, sexual orgasm<sup>46</sup>. Their torsos could be opened and interior organs exposed, especially the genitalia. These corpse-like bodies were supposedly a combination of art and science, yet the erotic element is not to be overlooked. According to Pamela Pilbeam, a wax model, however lifelike and delicately produced, “will always resemble a corpse,” and thus the spectator is “put mentally off balance looking at a model which is obviously also designed to be erotic” (5). In fact the interior organs of the Venuses were “modeled directly from cadavers in a technique also used to recreate relics of saints and martyrs” and are thus related to corpses in more ways than mere appearance (Bronfen 99). Though towards the end of the eighteenth century the popularity of these anatomical waxworks seemed to have dwindled, in 1825, they reentered London with a series of “Florentine Venuses” (Altick 339), which was followed by many other series. The advertisement of an 1844 exhibition of a “Parisian” Venus illustrates how such exhibitions were organized, and what awaited the spectator entering the exhibition space; he would see:

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<sup>46</sup> See Figures 1-3.

[W]hat seems to be the corpse of a handsome female who has just expired. It is moulded in wax; the face is removed like a mask, and the exterior of the limbs and bosom being lifted, representations of what would appear in a real subject are pointed out. Anatomical explanations are supplied with great clearness by the gentleman who attends. . . . Young medical students would be likely to derive considerable benefit from the inspection. (qtd. in Altick 339-40)<sup>47</sup>

Despite the apparently pedagogical purpose, a hint of eroticism can be detected: the dead female body is dismembered, dissected, its organs fondled and inspected by the hands and eyes of men. Such necro-eroticism can further explain the fact that there were some, though few, male anatomical models. In the eighteenth century, when the anatomical “Venuses” abounded in Europe, there were also several male wax models in exhibition, yet they “had no wax ‘flesh’ or clothes and were always shown upright to demonstrate the position of muscles and bones,” whereas the female wax bodies were made beautiful with fair skin, long hair, and pearl necklaces (Pilbeam 4). In 1839, an anatomical “Adonis” became the companion of his Venus in the exhibition operated by Sarti, a Florentine. However, while the Venus was still lying down and taken apart from the front, Adonis was taken apart from behind (Altick 340). While the beauty, fragility, and passivity of the Venus was emphasized by her frontal dismemberment and horizontal position, the exhibited male body of the Adonis seemed merely functional. Facing the spectator with her eyes closed, the Venus acquiescently allowed the ordeal. Her body visually invited the touch of the hand that would mutilate and ravish her.

While Freud insists in his definition of “scopophilia” that seeing leads to touching—that in the case of scopophilia seeing is always already the prelude of sexual appropriation—<sup>49</sup> here seeing is one with touching, or rather “functions as a form of touching,” as Elisabeth Bronfen comments on the Prince’s desire when he beholds the corpse-like Snow White (Bronfen 102). The spectator’s eyes acknowledge and anticipate the fragmenting of the waxen female body, and thus the visual merges with the tactile ravishment. As Michelle E. Bloom indicates in *Waxworks*, the “‘gynomorphic’ effigies should not be subsumed under the all-encompassing category of anthropomorphic figures” (Bloom 4). The anatomical

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<sup>47</sup> *Mirror*, n.s. 5 (1844), 231.

<sup>49</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works* (London: Penguin, 1991).



Venus is not merely another category of waxworks, but a specific, gender-oriented phenomenon. Although many of these exhibitions were opened to both men and women—though with different entrance hours—it is quite obvious that the Venuses appealed more to male audiences, as their advertisements were usually addressed to curious men and “young medical students,” a category which was at the time composed of men only. Thus it is no surprise that it was the female body which was opened, examined, and “consumed” by the paying spectator. It was only the female (wax) body that was seen as erotic as it was dead.

In Brontë’s works, power relations between the sexes can be further illustrated by the metaphors of statue and waxwork. As discussed in the first chapter on cabinets of curiosities, the relationship between the heroines and their men can be explicated as idolatry. Such idolatry is further actualized in statue metaphors used to describe the bodies of men. Although the women are often sexualized with language about their ability to “come alive” like Pygmalion’s statue, it is Brontë’s men that are more often described as Greek-statue-like in features and physique. While the heroines are often endowed with “irregular” or “marked” features, skinny and petite bodies, and unhealthy complexions, men are represented as having “chiseled” features, Greek faces, and statuesque forms. Thus, St. John, when sitting reading a book, becomes very easy for Jane Eyre to examine: “[h]ad he been a statue instead of a man, he could not have been easier” for her to study (*JE* 396). He is “tall, slender,” and his face is a “Greek face, very pure in outline”; he has “quite a straight, classic nose; quite an Athenian mouth and chin” (396). Robert Moore’s features are “fine,” having a “southern symmetry, clearness, regularity in their chiseling” (*Shirley* 24), and John Graham Bretton has a “firm, marble chin,” and “straight Greek features” (*Villette* 532). If women are described as statues coming to life, men are demarcated with much more explicit similes of sculpture.

While women-as-statues or women-as-waxworks are pliable and shaped by a male hand, men stand hard, erect, and impenetrable. As mentioned in the chapter on gardens, William Crimsworth is from the very beginning characterized by his tendency to enjoy scrutinizing others’ faces and looking into others’ eyes, searching for the interior of their minds without himself being seen through and penetrated. When his brother endeavors to observe his character, William feels “as secure” against the scrutiny as if he “had on a casque with the visor down” (17), and when he realizes that Edward tries to pique him with deliberate sarcasm, he manages to

“receive the Millowner’s blasphemous sarcasms, when next leveled at [him], on a buckler of impenetrable indifference,” and eventually Edward grows tired of “wasting his ammunition on a statue” (20). Indeed, it is only with Mdlle. Reuter that William’s “impenetrability” is temporarily dissolved. Learning of Mdlle. Reuter’s encounter with William, M. Pelet teases William by questioning him with metaphors of penetration:

“Did she find out your weak point?”

“What is my weak point?”

“Why the sentimental. Any woman, sinking her shaft deep enough, will at last reach a fathomless spring of sensibility in thy breast, Crimsworth.” (77)

Indeed, somehow Mdlle. Reuter’s perseverance pays off, and William confesses so, again with metaphors of penetration: “her finger,” he admits, “essaying, proving every atom of the casket—touched its secret spring and for a moment—the lid sprung open, she laid her hand on the jewel within” (88). However, this very edge of penetration—this instant when her finger is about to reach the jewel within—is merely transient. After William discovers her real character, he is again cold as a statue, and, despite her efforts, he feels that “[t]he very circumstance of her hovering round me like a fascinated bird, seemed to transform me into a rigid pillar of stone” (107). As to his next and final lover, Frances Henri, she is never to come as close to penetrating William as Mdlle. Reuter.

While men often observed women with “penetrating” gazes, women were discouraged from doing so for the sake of etiquette. Thus when Dr. John realizes that Lucy Snowe is inspecting his face, he becomes ill at ease and turns around to express his annoyance (*Villette* 120); when Rochester discovers that Jane Eyre is staring at him, he turns around and inquires bluntly if she thinks him handsome. When Jane answers a laconic no, he pursues the question by lifting up his hair and tauntingly shows her his forehead (*JE* 154). Likewise, for Caroline, as for Shirley, Robert Moore is always “secret” (265), and “you can’t fix your eyes on him but his presently flash on you” (232). Whenever he shows any affection towards Caroline, “he [i]s sure to be frozen up again” (67) by the next morning. He is an enigma to her throughout. Women are unable to gaze and “penetrate” men without meeting with a rebuttal, either with defensive language to rebuke the gaze, deliberate taunting, or a more penetrating gaze intended to overcome the female gaze. It is with such impenetrability that St. John remains “hard and cold” (453) for Jane throughout the

story. In his presence she falls under “a freezing spell” (459). Even his cousinly kisses are “marble kisses or ice kisses,” with which Jane is “turned a little pale” (459). After realizing his impervious character, Jane feels him “no longer flesh, but marble” (473). For Jane, he is always unfathomable, cold, and impenetrable.

The most idol-like, and thus impenetrable, male body, however, is that of Graham Bretton. When Graham recalls how little Polly had used to play with him, he remembers with tactile precision the contact of their bodies:

At this day he said he could recall the sensation of her little hands smoothing his cheek, or burying themselves in his thick mane. He remembered the touch of her small forefinger, placed half tremblingly, half curiously, in the cleft in his chin, the lisp, the look with which she would name it “a pretty dimple,” then seek his eyes and question why they pierced so, telling him he had a “nice, strange face; far nicer, far stranger, than either his mama or Lucy Snowe. (*Villette* 531-32)

If little Polly seems to see Graham curiously as a collection of body parts, the grown-up Paulina is no longer able to do so. She tells Lucy that she “wonder[s] how [she] dared be so venturous” as a child, and for her Graham “seems now all sacred, his locks are inaccessible,” and she feels “a sort of fear” when she beholds his features (532). As a young woman who is well-educated and marriageable—and thus engaged in the game of visual penetration and the defense mechanism against such penetration—Paulina is unable to look directly at Graham and examine his face as she used to. While Graham unabashedly recalls in detail the touch of her hands, she is unable to reciprocate. His portrait, upon which Lucy used to ponder in her youth, is so perplexingly charming that it causes pain, and even Little Polly is able to feel the pain as a mere child (214). The hint of idolatry is quite obvious. Just as Caroline always watches Robert from afar as if he is an unattainable deity, Paulina watches and worships Graham, and after Lucy decides to bury her infatuation for Graham, which is “half marble and half life” (454), she tells Paulina, “*I never see him. I looked at him twice or thrice about a year ago, before he recognized me, and then I shut my eyes. . . . I value vision, and dread being struck stone blind*” (532, original italics). Lucy is fully aware that attempting to penetrate Graham with her gaze would only lead to “being struck stone blind.” Giving up her hope in Graham, she no longer wishes to indulge herself in idolatry.

Indeed, almost all the main male characters in Brontë’s works are considered by their female-admirers as idol-like, inaccessible, enigmatic, and impenetrable. Even the dark, unattractive-looking Rochester is at moments described as a statue. When

Jane Eyre is called in to see him for the first time after he arrives, injured, at Thornfield, he sits motionless on a couch, and he “[goes] on as a statue would, that is, he neither sp[eaks] nor move[s]” (142). However, a few days later, he describes himself as “hard and tough as an India-rubber ball; pervious, though, through a chink or two still, and with one sentient point in the middle of the lump,” and, thus, he still has hope for “a final re-transformation from India-rubber back to flesh” (155). His transformation into flesh obviously depends upon his permeability. Yet he “dare[s] not show [Jane] where [he] [is] vulnerable,” for she has power over him and might “transfix” him (251): a verb indicating both a sense of penetration and “fixation.” Towards the end, he becomes blind and amputated; his mortality and thus “fleshliness” is illustrated through physical pain and injury, and his humanity is demonstrated in the incompleteness of his body. This transformation takes place after Rochester loses his penetrating gaze and Jane is able to see him without being seen—that is, when Rochester is at the receiving end of the gaze. His body becomes human and falls apart, whereas the unfathomable St. John remains marble-like and intact throughout. Indeed, throughout Brontë’s major novelistic works, Rochester is the only male protagonist who goes through a transformation into flesh, and this transformation process is seen as castrating to a man. While women are liable to transform and are made erotic thus, the bodies of men are endangered, instead of “engendered” like women, by metamorphoses.

While men’s bodies resemble Greek statues, the changeable and thus uncontrollable bodies of Brontëan heroines resemble not merely the Pygmalion statue coming to life, but also waxworks. As already illustrated, their bodies gain and lose flesh constantly—only figures made of such pliable material as wax enjoy such versatility. Furthermore, the nineteenth-century metaphors surrounding waxworks cater more to the death motif in Brontë’s works. Unlike the idealized figures of Greek statues, waxworks are supposedly life-like, yet they look lifeless at the same time. Maurice Blanchot considers the resemblance between waxworks and dead bodies, for they share a sense of “strangeness”; both are alluring because they are “neither the same as the one who was alive, nor another, nor another thing” (Blanchot 81-85, qtd. in Bronfen 104). Furthermore, waxworks represented in nineteenth-century literary works, especially those of Charles Dickens, clearly emphasize this curious co-existence of life and death. He writes in his 1840 novel, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, of the imagination and curiosity that waxworks were able to provoke due to their

vapidity, which is obviously quite the opposite of their purpose to replicate living people. The effigies of celebrated characters are

Clad in glittering dresses of various climes and times, and standing more or less unsteadily upon their legs, with their eyes very wide open, and their nostrils very much inflated, and the muscles of their legs and arms very strongly developed, and all their countenances expressing great surprise. All the gentlemen were very pigeon-breasted and very blue about the beards; and all the ladies were miraculous figures; and all the ladies and all the gentlemen were looking intently nowhere, and staring with extraordinary earnestness at nothing. (213-14)

Seemingly frozen in the moment of surprise, these figures are gaped at by curious spectators while they themselves “look intently nowhere.” The unilateral gaze—the impossibility of actual eye-contact and reciprocation of gazes—intensifies curiosity and hence optical craving on the part of the spectator. Such an optic system is very similar to that between Brontëan heroines and men: curiosity is retained with a skirting-around of the gaze. The Brontëan heroine is able to defend herself from men’s penetrating, deciphering gazes by being visually changeable, which is a physical embodiment of her unpredictability.

Furthermore, while wax figures are presented as humanlike yet without any spirit, in *The Old Curiosity Shop* human beings are portrayed as similar to waxworks, as Mrs. Jarley, the fictional counterpart of Madame Tussaud, says herself, “I won’t go so far as to say, that, as it is, I’ve seen waxwork quite like life, but I’ve certainly seen some life that was exactly like waxwork” (203). With Little Nell working as the central attraction in Mrs. Jarley’s wax shows, the world Dickens sees is one in which human beings are likened to waxworks, which are in turn somewhat similar to corpses. Indeed, as Steven Marcus points out in “The Myth of Nell,” the England in Dickens’ novel is “nothing less than a vast necropolis. Those who are not yet in their graves soon will be—they are merely the living dead” (Marcus 145), for the world in *The Old Curiosity Shop* is one behind which death always looms—a world in which, when Little Nell watches casually from behind the shop window, she would “perhaps see a man passing with a coffin on his back, and two or three others silently following him to a house where somebody lay dead” (69). According to Michelle E. Bloom, Dickens makes little distinction between corpses and wax figures,<sup>50</sup> which have “death-like faces” and look “so like living creatures, and yet so unlike in their grim

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<sup>50</sup> See Bloom 204; also see John Carey, “Corpses and Effigies,” *Here Comes Dickens: The Imagination of a Novelist* (NY: Schocken, 1974), p. 84.

stillness and silence” (OCS 217). While wax figures are indistinguishable from the corpses that they resemble, human beings are connected with both, as Bloom explains that wax figures “provide analogues for Dickens’ characters in that they are temporarily silent and immobile or on the verge of the more permanent state of death” (Bloom 204).

Disquieting as it seems today, the ready analogy between living and dead bodies in these texts actually reflects a general tendency of the social milieu. It is worthy of note that in nineteenth-century culture, the corpse was viewed with much less discomfort than it is today. Death was considered a common sight, not unsuitable to be seen by the young, and the execution of criminals was watched with excitement instead of terror. Thus,

Warders at Newgate would show visitors plaster casts of the heads of criminals hanged at the prison, and as one contemporary illustration shows, respectable parents brought their young daughters, perhaps no older than eight, to participate in this entertainment. (Gay 339)

According to Peter Gay’s survey, nineteenth-century England was familiar with sights of corporeal reality, and in manuals such as *The Book of Household Management*,<sup>51</sup> housewives were taught, via pages of blood and bones, to kill and dissect animals (Gay 345). In this context, death became a part of life, blended naturally into the domestic order. Wordsworth writes in “Essay Upon Epitaphs” (1810) that a village churchyard is “a visible centre of a community of the living and the dead,” where “the graves of kindred and friends” are “gathered together in that general home towards which the thoughtful yet happy spectators themselves are journeying” (Wordsworth 55). In *The Art of Death*, Nigel Llewellyn also discusses the internalized function of funeral effigies in post-Reformation English homes:

To make concrete the ephemeral impressions of the funeral ceremony images were shaped in particular styles and materials, and effigies replaced the decaying natural body on funeral monuments to create permanent histories of the deceased. Those who remained – the bereaved – surrounded themselves with visual signs in their homes, in their costume and on their persons to sustain the memory and the very presence of the dead. This practice was not morbid but therapeutic. (Llewellyn 134)

The effigies, most of which were made of wax, became an emotional compensation for the dead in the hearts of the bereaved; the inanimate yet lifelike wax-and-wooden bodies were visual substitutes for the decaying bodies now lying six feet under. They

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<sup>51</sup> Isabella Beeton, *The Book of Household Management* (1861).

stood as symbols of both death and life, representing and reminding of the fact of death but also creating an illusion of immortality. It was at such a time, when effigies abounded on funeral monuments and the dead thus existed as waxen visual symbols, that Charlotte Brontë created her works.

Besides their associations with death, nineteenth-century waxworks were often ridiculed for their failure to simulate the living. As waxworks exhibitions flourished in the nineteenth century, it became inevitable that some of them were operated under a limited budget, and as a result some wax figures were reused over and over again. Dickens writes humorously of Mrs. Jarley's wax figures, which are reused as different characters with only the slightest alteration. In 1846 Albert Smith writes about his visit to an exhibition near Greenwich Fair:

In the recess of a window were placed two figures, evidently intended, originally, for Amy Robsart and the Earl of Leicester, but which represented, we were informed, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, enjoying the retirement of private life, apart from the pomp of royalty. Why they should have chosen to enjoy retirement in fancy dresses of the Elizabethan period, those best acquainted with the habits of those august personages can possibly inform us. All the characters of the exhibition were, however, old friends. . . . At all events, if they were not the identical ones, the artist had cast two in the same mould whilst he was about it. We do not think he had been happy in the likenesses. Sir Robert Peel was, unmistakeably, Mr. Buckstone grown a foot taller, and wearing a light flaxen wig. Lady Sale we once knew as Queen Adelaide; and Oxford had transmigrated into Wix, the eyes having been manifestly wrenched violently round to form the squint of the latter miserable culprit. In one point the artist had excelled Nature. He had preserved the apparent dryness and coolness of the skin, whilst the folks looking on were melting with the heat. (Smith 130-31)

Nineteenth-century spectators were used to such recycling of wax figures, and it is no surprise that the hilarity involved in this lackluster aspect of show business finds its expression in literary works. Instead of being the ideal object of desire, Brontë's handsome pattern women are as vacant, monotonous and comical as wax figures "cast in the same mould."

Keeping in mind the ubiquity of waxworks in the nineteenth-century imagination, Dickens' association of waxworks and death, and the nineteenth-century reignited fascination with the corpse-like yet erotic anatomical Venuses, I will examine the metaphor of death surrounding the Brontëan heroines, which not only fits into my comparison of their bodies to the waxworks but also further explicates the phenomenon of necrophilia, which was quite popular at Brontë's time. Throughout

Charlotte Brontë's works, juxtapositions of the thriving and the decaying, the sanguine and the pallid, and even the living and the dead, predominated. This predilection has its origin in Brontë's painful loss of family members, who perished one by one throughout her career as a writer, but it also reflects an aspect of the nineteenth-century obsession with the dead body. Indeed, some of the most memorable moments in Brontë's texts bespeak the proximity and even the interchangeability between the living female body and the dead. Just like the curious gazes gathering around death-like and erotic anatomical Venuses, in the eye of some male beholders the seemingly dead female body is sensualized.

The moment of William Crimsworth's realization of his love for Frances Henri takes place in the cemetery, where William finds her brooding in front of her aunt's grave, herself quiet and still as a statue. Surrounded by dead bodies, she becomes lovable in William's eyes: "I loved her, as she stood there, penniless and parentless, for a sensualist—charmless, for me a treasure. . . ." says William to himself (*Professor* 141). The sensuality is there, despite William's insistent denial. The idea of Frances being the only living being amidst the graves, helpless and possessing neither wealth nor family, indeed arouses William's corporeal interest in her, for he puts his hand on her shoulders, a physical touch he has hitherto never ventured (140). As the "personification" of "self-denial and self-control" (141)—that is, without too much of a "self" in his eyes—Frances lacks the assertiveness and vitality that, when seen in a woman, often threatens men. Quiet and self-denying, she becomes inseparable from the marble monuments, grave-stones, and dead bodies around her. In her discussion of Thomas Hardy's "The Well-Beloved," Sophie Gilmartin discusses the therapeutic function of the grave-stone or monument and the sense of regeneration that is enabled. Such regeneration is not only "that of the surrounding trees and wildlife, with its spiritual analogy of the regeneration of the resurrected soul," but also in the sense of "the continuing generations of the living souls who claim the same lineage with the deceased" (Gilmartin 226), for

The grave or monument is. . . the site of a therapeutic, cathartic process of mourning. It replaces the decayed natural body with its sign in stone, in the form of epitaph or effigy, of what that person was in life. . . This catharsis may allow regeneration to occur; the living may purge themselves of grief through mourning, and go on to live their lives, and to carry on the family line. (Gilmartin 226-27)



Bending over the grave of her kin, Frances is placed within a circle of domestic life centering on marriage and blood lineage; thus the mourner suddenly becomes, in William's eyes, the mother of their future generations.

In *Shirley*, Caroline is likewise surrounded by graves, though symbolically. When she loses hope of being loved by Robert Moore, she is "haunted and harassed" by a "funereal inward cry" (158), and thenceforth her mind forever lingers fearfully upon the graves under the Rectory where she dwells with her uncle (202). She repetitively muses about "remnants of shrouds, and fragments of coffins, and human bones and mould" (206). Her life in Briarfield Rectory is, as the young Rose Yorke says, a "long, slow death" (335). Living not far above the graves, she is losing her youthful buoyancy and growing more and more similar to the cadavers lying below, as she becomes less and less lifelike. Juxtaposed with her physical beauty, which is repeatedly emphasized by the narrator, this perishing of the flesh, caused by her uncontrollable passion for a man who does not love her in return, insinuates sensuality if not actual eroticism. Such sensuality is further reinforced and complicated by the juxtaposition of her youthful body with the shrunken body of old maids—especially when such comparison is made in the eyes of the man she loves. Once, after seeing the hideous-looking Miss Mann, who happens to come by and visit his sister, Robert comes out of the house and watches Caroline tending "some of his favorite flowers." He amuses himself by "comparing fair youth—delicate and attractive—with shriveled old, livid and loveless," and by "jestingly repeating to a smiling girl the vinegar discourse of a cankered old maid" (152). Juxtaposed with the old maid, the physical attractiveness of Caroline's body is emphasized, yet, as later she loses her hope of ever establishing a home through matrimony, her path becomes that of an old maid, and her body also transforms towards that end. Still youthful and beautiful, yet threatened by the danger of turning withered, repulsive, and "impenetrable" as a fossil, her body allures with a physical beauty so transient that it is reminder of death.

The eroticism of entangling the youthful body with death is well illustrated in the tale of the nun in *Villette*. Buried alive when she was still in the prime of her youth, the girl had sinned against her vow, probably the vow of celibacy. Her body, alive and fleshly when buried, is now lying wasted underneath the garden of the girl's school, where youthful laughter lingers and blooming bodies frolic. Having committed a worldly and possibly sexual sin, the nun haunts the school with a blurring of the boundary between youth and death, the sacred and the secular, a romantic yet

dismal tale that greatly appeals to the imagination of the young girls. The tale is sensual, and the appearance and disappearance of the vaporous black-and-white image signifies an ineluctable invasion of the space of “surveillance” by an uncontainable, ubiquitous, sensuous being. Although the nun that Lucy sees is in fact Alfred de Hamal in disguise, its appearance corresponds to every turn of Lucy’s passion. It appears in front of Lucy for the first time when she is absorbed in reading her cherished letter from Dr. John, and its second appearance takes place before Lucy is going to the theatre with him. It appears for the third time after Lucy buries the letters, and along with them her passion for Dr. John, in the very pear tree under which the nun is said to be buried. Finally, it appears before Lucy and M. Paul when they stand side by side in “l’allée défendue.” The phantom of the nun who is buried alive for her passion thus marks the milestones of Lucy’s lovelife, a sensual correlation of the spiritual and the corporeal.

Freud’s theories of the “uncanny” are helpful in a consideration of the significance of the nun in Brontë’s *Villette*. Although Freud avoids bringing the themes of death, dead bodies, and ghosts into his discussions of the uncanny lest “the gruesome” should “overlay” the uncanny, his definition of the uncanny—a feeling that emerges when one faces the return of something repressed, something “that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed” (*Uncanny* 148)—seems pertinent in Lucy’s encounter with the nun. Although Lucy intends to be as emotionally frigid as her name, the appearance and reappearance of the ghost highlights her repressed feelings, emerging repeatedly in a form of uncanny sight. In the narration of her childhood memory with the Brettons, Lucy’s feeling towards Graham is never divulged. It is only after she wakes up surrounded by the once-familiar furniture, the “auld lang syne” that reappears in front of her—yet in a space she does not recognize—that a feeling of the uncanny comes accompanied by her recognition of her own feelings, awakened by a portrait of Graham (214). This haunting by a once-familiar past, this uncanny feeling, seems at first glance to diverge from the eroticism I have discussed thus far; feelings of terror and awe seem to be the opposite of erotic pleasure. Yet they are different aspects of the same thing, as an example from *Wuthering Heights* will illustrate.

Published in the same year as *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) follows the entangling of love, hatred, violence and death between Heathcliff and Catherine. Writing with a much more intensely emotional language than her

sister, Emily Brontë nonetheless expresses a mixture of eroticism and death not unlike the themes expressed in Charlotte Brontë's much more conservative and subtle writings. When Heathcliff enters Catherine's sick chamber, where she struggles on the verge of perishing, she clasps Heathcliff bitterly, uttering venomous words:

“I wish I could hold you. . . till we were both dead! I shouldn't care what you suffered. I care nothing for your sufferings. Why shouldn't you suffer? I do! Will you forget me—will you be happy when I am in the earth? Will you say twenty years since, ‘That's the grave of Catherine Earnshaw. I loved her long ago, and was wretched to lose her; but it is past. I've loved many others since—my children are dearer to me than she was, and, at death, I shall not rejoice that I am going to her, I shall be sorry that I must leave them?’ Will you say so, Heathcliff?” (*Wuthering* 124)

After torturing each other with words of passionate hatred and love, they are “locked in an embrace” from which Nelly thinks that Catherine will “never be released alive” (125). Later that night, Catherine dies in perfect peace, “[h]er brow smooth, her lids closed, her lips wearing the expression of a smile. No angel in heaven could be more beautiful than she appear[s]” (128). The body of the dying Catherine is vigorous with a fierce passion; it is curious how animated her body becomes when she is so close to death. Although Catherine's actual corpse is peaceful and beautiful, it has already been divulged that her spirit still haunts *Wuthering Heights* with a grudge, a passion for Heathcliff that does not decay with her body. It is that moment when life and death draw so close to one another—as well as the reappearance of her spirit after death—that seems both uncanny and erotic.

Besides the necro-erotic implications of both Brontëan heroines and anatomical Venuses, I will further strengthen the analogy between Brontëan heroines and waxworks by bringing into discussion the Bluebeard motif, which appears time and again in Brontë's texts. Through the Bluebeard motif, the notion of the *doppelgänger* can be highlighted, along with a recurring theme of uxoricide. As waxworks are indeed the lifeless doubles of things alive, the images and themes introduced in the following paragraphs further expand upon my proposed association between Brontëan heroines and waxworks. As already discussed, Brontë's heroines are often haunted by uncanny beings: while the terrifying ghost of the nun punctuates Lucy's life, Bertha's corpse-like body infiltrates *Jane Eyre's*. Behind such horror is the theme of Bluebeard, wherein the dead bodies of the former wives display themselves in front of the newly wedded woman. The Bluebeard motif can be found

in many literary works and theatrical performances in the nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup> This popularity exemplifies the joining together of what Elisabeth Bronfen calls the “two enigmas of western culture” (Bronfen 99): death and female sexuality. As far as psychoanalytical discourse is concerned, the very nature of desire lies in its unsatisfiability, and the death of the wife as a desired object results in the “eternalizaion of desire” (Lacan, *Écrits* 104), for thus the “satisfaction” of desire is forever deferred. The death of the wife is thus charged with eroticism.

Furthermore, like a cabinet of curiosity, Bluebeard’s closet is a small room inviting voyeuristic pleasure, inviting a hand to unlock and disclose the secret; within, the dead bodies of his former wives are “ranged against the walls” like objects in exhibitions (*Bluebeard*). In Brontë, confrontations of the new brides by dead precursors is ubiquitous. The legend of the nun, which Lucy thinks must have taken place centuries ago (*Villette* 130), is reincarnated in her life into the story of Justine Marie, a poor girl to whom M. Paul was a devoted suitor. Her death in the convent had resulted in his vow of celibacy. In a similar vein, the petrifying laughter that Jane Eyre hears, and the monster that she beholds the night before her wedding, turn out to be the former wife of Rochester. Indeed, when Jane Eyre first comes to Thornfield, she wanders in the house, feeling herself walking through “a corridor in some Bluebeard’s castle” (*JE* 126), and, after locking Lucy up in the attic for hours to practice her lines, M. Paul realizes his mistake and jocosely refers to himself as Bluebeard, who “starv[es] women in a garret” (*Villette* 169). Brontë’s female protagonists find themselves standing in front of Bluebeard’s cabinet of curiosity, where the dead bodies of their predecessors flamboyantly assert their existence. Whether actually dead or not, these former wives, and the physical existence of their bodies, stand in the way of the new wife, threatening her with their deadness as well as with the similarity between their positions and hers. Thus, Rochester’s accounts of his former mistresses haunt Jane Eyre, and Lucy cannot help but assess the woman in the set of paintings, “La vie d’une femme,” that M. Paul forces her to look at, paintings which obviously represent, for him, ideal womanhood. It is worth noting that these portraits are painted in a “flat, dead, pale and formal” style (*Villette* 252).

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<sup>52</sup> See, for example, William Makepeace Thackeray’s 1843 *Bluebeard’s Ghost*. For examples of performance see George Colman’s 1798 play *Blue-Beard; or, Female Curiosity!*. See also Jacques Offenbach’s 1866 opera *Barbe-bleue*, and various other Victorian burlesques and pantomimes. For an example of late-nineteenth-century adaptation see Belgian symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck’s 1899 libretto *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*, performed in Paris in 1907 with music by Paul Dukas.

These memories of former wives/mistresses who no longer exist, whose images the heroines can neither equal nor escape, forever haunt them. It is through a voyeuristic desire that Bluebeard's wife opens the door forbidden to her, and it is a similar voyeurism that prompts Jane Eyre to seek that source of the laughter and that drew Victorian audiences to waxworks in droves. Furthermore, as in the case of waxworks, the relationship between Bluebeard's new bride and her predecessors is one of double-ness; one duplicates the other, despite the stark difference between the living body and the dead / lifeless body preserved and displayed.

It is these fraught similarities that make the differences between the new bride and the dead wives so essential. The difference between Jane Eyre and Bertha, for example, is emphasized throughout *Jane Eyre*. While Blanche Ingram, the woman to whom Rochester is said to be engaged, and whom he playfully marries in the game of charades, is described as similar in stature to Bertha: Both are tall, majestic, olive-complexioned, and have raven-black hair; Jane Eyre differs from both of Rochester's "wives," and the contrast is made explicit when Jane draws her self-portrait in chalk and Blanche's with delicate tints on a piece of smooth ivory (187). When Rochester opens the door to the attic and exposes his own misery to the eyes of the people attending his almost-accomplished wedding, he emphatically pronounces the disparity between Jane and Bertha. "Look at the difference!" he exclaims, "Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder – this face with that mask – this form with that bulk" (339). Clearly, in comparison with Jane Eyre, Bertha's body is referred to in non-human terms: red balls, mask, and bulk. Out of her senses, she is here described as an animate being composed of inanimate objects. However, such a strenuous attempt to differentiate Jane from Bertha inadvertently reveals how dangerously similar they actually are. As Rochester's former wife, whose position is about to be filled by Jane, Bertha is a doppelgänger of Jane; when Jane wakes up from her nightmare, she sees in the mirror not a reflection of her own youthful face, but a "discoloured face," a "savage face," with purple lineaments, "swelled and dark" lips, and "bloodshot eyes" (327). This, as Jane says, is the face of a vampire (327). The threat of vampirism, of a dead body "corpse-izing"—that is, turning into corpse—a living body by contagion, is strikingly conspicuous. The new bride is never exempted from the threat of becoming, like the former wives, a corpse. Indeed, even Rochester himself hints thus, via a metaphor of contamination, when he explains his position to the devastated Jane after their unsuccessful wedding: "Concealing the madwoman's

neighbourhood from you,” he says, “was something like covering a child with a cloak, and laying it down near a upas-tree: that demon’s vicinage is poisoned, and always was” (347). The contamination, the deathly poison—whether borne by blood or by air—forever threatens the new wife. Furthermore, although Rochester keeps promising Jane that she is different from Bertha and that he loves her differently, he cannot help but put Jane in the same position as Bertha, and muse on how he would treat Jane with tenderness if she too goes mad:

Every atom of your flesh is as dear to me as my own: in pain and sickness it would still be dear. Your mind is my treasure, and if it were broken, it would be my treasure still: if you raved, my arms should confine you, and not a strait waistcoat—your grasp, even in fury, would have a charm for me: if you flew at me as wildly as that woman did this morning, I should receive you in an embrace, at least as fond as it would be restrictive. I should not shrink from you with disgust as I did from her: in your quiet moments you should have no watcher and no nurse but me; and I could hang over you with untiring tenderness, though you gave me no smile in return; and never weary of gazing into your eyes, though they had no longer a ray of recognition for me.—But why do I follow that train of ideas? (347-48)

Why *does* he follow that train of ideas? Jane Eyre’s body is much closer to that of Bertha’s than apparently indicated by Rochester or Jane herself. Jane is, after all, merely another of Bluebeard’s wives, and is ineluctably threatened with the same doom. It is precisely this possibility of doom that Jane attempts to escape throughout the story.

The uncanny feeling evoked by the sight of Bluebeard’s former wives can be further explicated with Freud’s discussion of “the Uncanny.” He describes the uncanny as something once familiar, yet repressed, that reemerges. This notion can be extended to the concept of “the double,” or “the doppelgänger”—when one meets the visual “reemergence” of himself, the uncanny feeling occurs. The double renders the self vulnerable, for it must thus be “duplicated, divided and interchanged” (*Uncanny* 142). Freud discusses the uncanniness of the double in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s novels, in which the doppelgänger often appears. In extreme cases, the one meeting his double experiences the “constant recurrence of the same thing, the repetition of the same facial features, the same characters, the same destinies, the same misdeeds, even the same names, through successive generations” (*Uncanny* 142). It is precisely this kind of uncanny feeling that Bluebeard’s newest wife feels when she sees his ex-wives, and, to be sure, that Jane undergoes when she sees Bertha, and that Lucy experiences when haunted by the nun. The notion of the “uncanny

double” can also be applied to the curious feeling brought forth by waxworks: as the inanimate, soulless double of a supposedly (once) living person, posed in positions intended to simulate life, the waxwork threatens the boundary between the living and the lifeless, the animate and the inanimate; spectators experience an uncanny sensation, watching the lifeless replicas of their own species displayed thus. Here, Lucy Snowe’s comments on bouquets of flowers seem appropriate: she likes seeing flowers growing, but as a bouquet they cease to please, for “their likeness to life makes [her] sad” (*Villette* 424).

It is noteworthy that in Brontë, such doppelgängers are necessary, for they keep the bodily imagery of the Brontëan heroine intact, clean, and proper in comparison. Given their unpredictability and changeable body shapes, it is requisite that their bodies are somehow kept within the bounds of the Victorian discourse of the feminine. Thus besides the statue-like, cold-blooded women, Brontë contrasts her heroines to another type of women, whose bodies are fleshy, sensuous, and impossible to control. Bertha first makes herself known in *Jane Eyre* with a sound, a laugh that “str[ikes]” Jane’s ear (126). It appears right at the moment when Jane realizes that she stands in a house resembling the castle of Bluebeard, and its impact is thrilling for Jane: “the sound ceased, only for an instant. It began again, louder – for at first, though distinct, it was very low. It passed off in a clamorous peal that seemed to wake an echo in every lonely chamber, though it originated but in one” (126). Without a body, Bertha is everywhere, echoing throughout the house. When her real body is finally revealed, it is however no more definite than her laugh:

What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, 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. (338)

Bertha’s body is difficult to define, and her grizzled hair further blurs her body-boundary. When Rochester first met her, she appeared “in the style of Blanche Ingram: tall, dark, and majestic” (352), yet it is the unnameable body that she now is that demonstrates perfectly how she is “at once intemperate and unchaste” (353). Her body has been transformed from that of a statuesque woman to that of a monster, and it is the latter, bulkier, indomitable shape that seems to become her. Even in death, her body is never to be controlled and pinned down: “her brain and blood were scattered” on the stones. Likewise, Rochester’s mistress Céline Varens manifests as

smell on the day when Rochester finds out about her betrayal. Coming into the empty boudoir, Rochester sits waiting for her, breathing in the air “consecrated so lately by her presence.” Later Rochester rephrases his own euphemism by pointing out that it is actually “a sort of pastille perfume she had left; a scent of musk and amber, than an odour of sanctity” (165). In her absence her presence is felt in the room in a form of odour, shapeless and thus pervasive and uncontrollable. It is such omnipresence, the impossibility of containment, that reflects her treacherous person.

The most voluptuous female body in Brontë, however, appears in *Villette*. Lucy Snowe describes the portrait of Cleopatra as: “extremely well fed: very much butcher’s meat—to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids—must she have consumed to attain that breadth and height, that wealth of muscle, that affluence of flesh.” She lies “half-reclined on a couch,” and her cluttered garments can hardly cover the affluence of her flesh: “out of abundance of material—seven-and-twenty yards, I should say, of drapery—she managed to make inefficient raiment,” and to match the sloppiness of herself she is surrounded by “wretched untidiness” (250). Such flamboyancy of flesh Lucy has never seen, yet she gazes at the painting with such ease that it appears unseemly to M. Paul. Unlike the bodies of statues, these female bodies resemble meltable and moldable waxen figures in their mutability, fluidity, and unruliness. These uncontrollable female bodies seem far from the bodies of Brontë’s heroines, and yet Bertha’s face is mirrored by Jane’s, and Lucy clearly identifies with the mysterious nun, whose appearances coincide with and underscore her own feelings. Furthermore, the changeability of the bodies of Brontëan heroines suggests a similarity to these other women. However, Bertha is locked up in the attic and Cleopatra is trapped within the frame of the painting, just as Vashti merely appears on-stage. These unruly female bodies are enclosed and restricted, and it is with such qualifications that Brontë is able to keep her heroines within normative bounds. With their evil twins banished and imprisoned, and with the Pygmalion theme shaping the changes of their bodies, Brontë’s heroines are rendered within control, though still changeable.

Thus, through discussions of the Pygmalion motif, waxworks, and the Bluebeard theme, I have endeavored to explore the complexities of the Brontëan heroines: why does Brontë make them small, slim, and thus seemingly far from conforming to standards of beauty, and how does she still manage to render them marriageable and interesting? I argue that the seemingly controversial Brontëan



heroine actually conforms exactly to the Victorian ideal of womanhood, for she has the ability to maintain seemingly contradictory traits: Frances, for example, is respectable and competent in the public arena and subservient in the domestic space; she is a piquant elf who ignites the curiosity of her mate, and yet also a soft little woman who can satisfy other of his needs. Her attractiveness to her husband resembles that of a statue—or rather a waxwork—coming alive: flawless, chaste and innocent, yet also erotic and voluptuous. Her body is impenetrable to the eyes of the world and malleable solely in the hands of her husband. At once statue and real woman, deity/demon and mortal, this first heroine of Brontë's major novels is indeed the forerunner of her later counterparts: Jane Eyre the fairy, Shirley the Juno, and many others are seized by their men and “mortalized”—that is, turned into *flesh*—while maintaining all their fantastic faculties.

Thus this chapter considers the physical properties of wax, as well as the cultural resonances of both Greek statues and waxworks—one being the admirable yet inaccessible and asexual object of desire to which Brontë compares the men; the other the erotic, changeable body, seemingly alive yet readily exposed to the threat of death. I think a wax figure coming alive, at once smooth-surfaced, solid, and potentially changeable, would be the more appropriate analogy for the Brontëan heroine. Furthermore, as far as the process of metamorphosis is concerned, the air of uncertainty surrounding the bodies of Brontëan heroines, the blurring of the boundary between animate and inanimate, align them more with the curious and the uncanny characteristics of waxworks. Although the uncertainty as to whether a body is alive or dead, inanimate or animate, is not as essential as the “return of the repressed” in Freud's definition of “the uncanny,” it is emphasized by E. Jentsch in his discussion of the uncanny. According to Jentsch, the “doubt as to whether an apparently animate object really is alive and, conversely, whether a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate” (qtd. in *Uncanny* 135), and in particular the emotional reactions one experiences when one sees waxwork figures or automata, elicits an uncanny feeling (*Uncanny* 135). Furthermore, Freudian notion of wish-fulfillment is essentially uncanny. Freud observes that, when playing with dolls, children “make no sharp distinction between the animate and the inanimate,” and they are “fond of treating their dolls as if they were alive” (*Uncanny* 141). For them, a doll coming alive does not seem to be frightening, for they may even wish such a thing to happen. Thus, Freud argues, in this case “the sense of the uncanny would derive not from an

infantile fear, but from an infantile wish, or simply from an infantile belief” (141). Contradictory as it sounds, wish-fulfillment is always uncanny. While children do not find the animate dolls uncanny, adults, having surmounted their childhood wishes, would indeed find such an incident frightening. “The uncanny” is born of the return of something once familiar yet repressed or surmounted, and the “omnipotence of thoughts, instantaneous wish-fulfillment, secret harmful forces and the return of the dead” were beliefs familiar to our “primitive” forebears, beyond which we have, supposedly, progressed, as we no longer believe such things to be possible today. Thus, according to Freud, “as soon as something *happens* in our lives that seems to confirm these old, discarded beliefs, we experience a sense of the uncanny” (154, original italics). Hence the possibility of such wish-fulfillment as the coming alive of an inanimate figure is indeed uncanny. It is such a feeling that gives the observer a sense of curiousness; the uncertainty, the blurring of the line between the living and the dead, not only brings forth the morbid and frightening effect of the uncanny, but also constitutes what I call the “curious.” As defined in the introduction, the “curious” is characterized as something that is both one and the other, and indeed a blurring of boundaries between the living and the non-living can be applied to describe both waxworks and the Brontëan heroine. The element of curiousness lies behind the uniqueness of Brontë’s heroines; their versatility explains why they adhere to Victorian standards of ideal womanhood.

This chapter has examined curiousness and curiosity, the characteristics of Brontëan heroines, and the sentiments they thus provoke. The Pygmalion myth and nineteenth-century waxworks discussed in this chapter provide another perspective from which to explore Brontë’s particular and idiosyncratic negotiation of nineteenth-century standards of womanhood. With the concept of womanhood already examined thus far, in the next chapter the concept of domesticity, which is so readily associated with such womanhood, will be discussed via the imagery of a curious space—the dolls’ house.

## Illustrations

All the figures included in this chapter are from the source below.

Ebenstein, Joanna. "Gallery." *Anatomical Theatre*. 2008. 13 May 2008

<<http://www.astropop.com/anatomical/anatomicalgallery/index.htm>>.



Fig. 1 ↑

“La Specola” (Museo di Storia Naturale): Florence, Italy  
"Anatomical Venus"

Wax model with human hair and pearls in rosewood and Venetian glass case;  
Probably modeled by Clemente Susini (around 1790)

Fig. 2 ↓



Fig. 3 ↑

The Josephinum: Vienna, Austria  
"Anatomical Venus"

Wax model with human hair in rosewood and Venetian glass case; Workshop of  
Clemente Susini of Florence, 1781-1786\*

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\* All figures from Joanna Ebenstein, "Gallery," *Anatomical Theatre*. 2008. 13 May 2008

## Chapter Four Dolls' House

In her comprehensive account of English dolls' houses, Vivien Greene contemplates the charms of these miniature structures:

It is the home, the evoked dream. It is architecture itself, reduced and sharpened; its proportions bad or good, its fantasies and fashions are here. Walk round it, peering in at the windows, grey-green glass twelve-paned, or mica archly latticed; in it a half-opened door waits and suddenly we are inside. It is the old human dream of *being small enough*, Thumbelina on the lily leaf, Alice outside the passage that led to the garden. . .  
(Greene 23, original italics)

What Gaston Bachelard calls the "oneiric house, a house of dream-memory," (Bachelard 15) is here embodied by that miniature house we once played with as children; the tiny spaces in which, to borrow Bachelard's description of the oneiric house, we "find ourselves at a pivotal point around which reciprocal interpretations of dreams through thought and thought through dreams, keep turning" (16). Bachelard's oneiric house is by no means a dolls' house, but, just like a dolls' house, it is a space occupied/created by childhood memories, and according to Greene the dolls' house evokes an "old human dream" that answers to Bachelard's "dream" of a house that harbors an infinite space. The "curiouser and curiouser" world that Alice stumbles upon is a world out of proportion: it is curious precisely because size becomes relative (and unstable) instead of absolute. Along these lines, in her short story, "The Doll's House," Katherine Mansfield also explicates the wonder one feels standing in front of a dolls' house:

There you were, gazing at one and the same moment into the drawing-room and dining room, the kitchen and two bedrooms. That is the way for a house to open! . . . Perhaps it is the way God opens houses at the dead of night when he is taking a quiet turn with an angel. (Mansfield 181)

The dolls' house opens up to the viewer, providing a vantage point from which one sees oneself as omniscient and omnipotent. Whether evoking the dream of being "small enough" or the converse dream of being almighty, the dolls' house is a play on size, and thus creates a sense of curiosity by challenging the common perspective. As in Alice's Wonderland, the dolls' house provides the viewer with an opportunity to experience both being too big and too small—or rather big enough and small enough. The spaces created by the dolls' house are curious precisely because, upon entrance, one sees oneself as being both one and the other, both tiny and gigantic. As far as this

thesis is concerned, here again the ambiguous co-existence of two extremes constitutes the sense of curiosity.

In *Material Culture in Miniature: Historic Dolls' Houses Reconsidered* James E. Bryan III points out the social signature of the dolls' house:

From their origins in the great trading cities of sixteenth-century southern Germany, to their appearance in the seventeenth-century Netherlands, then in eighteenth-century England, followed by early nineteenth-century America, their path of development largely parallels that of the rise of modern capitalism. (Bryan 24)

The modern form of the dolls' house, with its emphasis on educational functions for girls to learn about housekeeping, is primarily of interest for the upper and middle class, whose values and ideology, especially their emphasis on the domestic order, played prominent roles in nineteenth-century culture. An emphasis on family values and domesticity, in particular, influenced the overall nineteenth-century ideology, and traces of such ideology can be found manifested in many fictional works. In this chapter, I seek to explore the imagery of the dolls' house in Charlotte Brontë's works in order to explicate further the Victorian concept of "home." I will first examine two sets of dolls' house imagery in Brontë's works: I start with the ideal Victorian domestic settings against which, ironically, the Brontëan heroine is always presented as an outsider. These spaces resemble a clean, delicate, splendid miniature structure, meant only to be looked at: the collector's dolls' house. On the other hand, the endearing tiny spaces occupied by Brontëan heroines, full of the traces of time, resemble the beloved dolls' house played with by children. For Brontë, dolls' house imagery is essential to conveying the concept of "home," for her mother and two sisters died during her childhood, and for the remaining Brontë children "playing house" marked both the end of the mourning period and the beginning of their writing careers. If the Brontëan heroine is depicted as always in search of a home, it is because the threat of death had fragmented Brontë's own family long before she started writing. Thus, this chapter goes on to examine the dolls haunting the dolls'-house-like domestic space. An association between images of little girls, dolls, and ghosts insinuates the danger lurking within the domestic space: Brontë's haunting childhood. The shadow of death was so prominent and inescapable in Brontë's life that, throughout her works, a sense of powerlessness prevails; this chapter hence ends with the observation that, against the backdrop of the domestic space, the Brontëan

hero(in)e often finds herself figuratively falling into a situation of doll-like powerlessness, manipulated by a hand more powerful than his/her own.

### **I. The Curiosity of the Dolls' House: History and Popularity**

I do not see the dolls' house as a metaphorical patriarchal space of the sterilized life from which Ibsen's Nora is determined to escape. Rigid domestic roles, the repression of female energy, and the throttling of the self are not what I see as represented in the nineteenth-century dolls' house. It is my contention that, Ibsen's conspicuously progressive intentions aside, the dolls' house symbolized for the Victorians—as it does for us today—a prototype of home. For women in particular, the experience of playing with a dolls' house was so intimate, the tiny space so infused with their imagination and the traces left by their hands, that the dolls' house became an integral part of their being. Although the nineteenth-century discourse of established connections between women and the domestic space is often interpreted as a form of repression, I would still argue that, given the already fixed social circumstances of divided spaces—the public and the private, and their successive connections with men and women—while playing house, women did find a means by which to exercise their creativity and energy. Meanwhile, it is the sense of intimacy between women and their dolls' houses that this chapter focuses on. At the same time, a dolls' house can be a collector's item and is meant to be looked at; it is then appreciated by the curious eye. I will examine how, through the curious space of the dolls' house—a space at once private and public, both intimate and alienating—Brontë's yearning for a complete family and her anxiety towards homelessness can be explored.

It is not surprising that the popularity of dolls' houses reached its peak in the nineteenth century. Besides the obvious socioeconomic reason that the nineteenth century was practically governed by the bourgeois class, with whom dolls' houses—among other pastimes formerly enjoyed exclusively by the upper-class—were quite popular, the period was also one in which familial relationships, domestic comfort, and the general concept of a “home” were the prevailing social values. As mentioned in the “garden” chapter, the society was then quickly changing; industrialization and urbanization had brought forth drastic changes to lifestyles and interpersonal relationships, and the need to differentiate—or rather to protect—the private domain from the public domain became quite dominant: hence the attentiveness to interior



design, as mentioned in the first chapter. Walter Benjamin draws attention to the nineteenth-century “addiction to dwelling” (Brown’s term, *BI* 14): in the nineteenth century the interior became not only “the universe of the private individual,” but his “étui”—namely cover, case, sheath, or scabbard—that fit him perfectly and protected him from the exterior urban life (*Arcades* 20). For Benjamin, the nineteenth-century bourgeois seeks to “compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city. He tries to do this within the four walls of his apartment. It is as if he had made it a point of honor not to allow the traces of his everyday objects and accessories to get lost” (*Arcades* 20). Although Benjamin’s bourgeois is a “he,” and the history behind him is continental, this framework can also be applied to the interior of a Victorian house, essentially a sphere ruled by women. The “everyday objects” whose traces Benjamin’s bourgeoisie struggle to maintain are here arranged and rearranged by the female hands that make the house a home.

Examining late nineteenth-century paper dolls’ houses—scrapbooks filled with collages of paper furniture and sometimes paper dolls—Beverly Gordon indicates that:

The books played out a kind of domestic drama—both a household theater and a theater *of* the household—and women were its unquestioned stars. While men were given a place in most houses, they were heavily outnumbered and overshadowed. Not only were more pages devoted to women’s activities than to men’s, but most houses included a disproportionate number of female figures (for example, eleven to one), even on a single representative page. (53, original italics)

Like three-dimensional dolls’ houses, paper dolls’ houses are spaces controlled mostly by women or girls, and the dolls play out such sexual differences. While male dolls, if there are any, are usually situated in libraries, female dolls occupy parlours, kitchens, and bedrooms: spaces of domesticity. Furthermore, dolls’ house historian Ann Sizer points out that male dolls tend to be found mislaid or maimed (Sizer 35). For example, in Ann Sharp’s dolls’ house, Sir William Johnson is “lost to posterity”; what is left of his existence is a tiny piece of paper carrying his name (Gwynfryn 712). Frances Armstrong suggests that “[t]he disappearance of male dolls could also reflect antagonism towards men, or simply a child’s desire to mirror more accurately the daytime household as she knew it, with its preponderance of women” (45). The conditions in a paper dolls’ house reflects more directly the girl’s perspective: while a three-dimensional dolls’ house can be played by all the children in a household, girls and boys alike, making paper dolls’ houses was then an activity performed almost

exclusively by girls. Although modern feminists insist on the repressive nature of the differentiated spheres for men and women, it is indisputable that the dolls' house was, and still is, quite gender-specific.

I further intend to argue that, regardless of the gender of the viewer, it is in a dolls' house that one is most likely to be able to find a shelter, a space where traces of everyday objects, down to the earliest memories of childhood, can be well preserved: the enclosed space within the domestic space, the home within the home. It is noteworthy that, as an *étui* of one's formative self, the dolls' house stands between the public and private spaces, for it inevitably opens up to the viewer, any viewer, yet the experience—be it visual or tactile—is personal and intimate. In Charlotte Brontë's works, imagery of dolls' houses and the dolls within appears from time to time, illustrating the essentiality of the concept of "home" in her works. It is worth noticing that, for Brontë, the shadow of death is always looming over the dolls' house, threatening to tear it apart, and this apparent anxiety is a reflection of her own circumstances: the bereavements she had experienced since childhood have great influence on the way "home" is represented in her works. It is unquestionable that such desire and anxiety towards "home" is a response to the quintessentially Victorian bourgeois ideology. While the "cabinet of curiosities" chapter examines the most private spaces in the domestic sphere, spaces "curious" due to the "curiosities" contained within, this chapter explores the innermost space in a house: the home within the home. After discussing images of the garden and the Wardian case in Brontë, with which curious spaces at once public and private, innocent yet worldly, are demarcated, and after contemplating women's bodies as curiosities that stand on the border of the living and the dead, in this chapter I intend to explicate a space in Brontë's works that encompasses all such extremes, a curious space that is, to borrow Kristeva's term of the abject, a "*land of oblivion* that is constantly remembered" (Kristeva 8, original italics).

Before examining the dolls' houses in Brontë's works, the history of dolls' houses must first be established. As historical research demonstrates, the appeal of a tiny structure modeled upon the home with which we are all familiar is widespread. Indeed, dolls' houses, or their prototypes, appeared much earlier than we might imagine. Flora Gill Jacobs argues that forms of dolls' houses can be found as early as

the era of the ancient Egyptians.<sup>53</sup> She then goes on to indicate that, although no Greek or Roman dolls' houses remain, their possibility cannot be denied.<sup>54</sup> It is notable that the ancients were susceptible to the charms of miniature everyday objects. The first recorded dolls' house, as we know them, however, appeared in 1558, when Albrecht V, Duke of Bavaria commissioned a dolls' house for his daughter.<sup>55</sup>

Due to the renowned dolls'-house industry in Germany, Greene claims that, if the English dolls' house of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had an ancestor, "it is the Nuremberg kitchen" (27). The toy kitchens which found the peak of their popularity in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century households, named for the region that would become most renowned for both the quality and quantity of produced dolls' houses, were props used to teach young girls about household chores.<sup>56</sup> Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, playing with dolls' houses gradually became a fashionable hobby for European upper-class ladies (Jacobs 28), and the houses were considered collector's items more than teaching props. However, according to Jacobs, it was not exactly so in England:

[Most of t]he early Dutch and German houses. . . especially those of the Netherlands, with their bits of amber, ivory, gold, and silver, were toys for adults. The baby houses of England are another matter. They were made for children, even though, in most cases, the children were permitted only to look at them—and on state occasions at that. (49)<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Flora Gill Jacobs put much emphasis on the "innumerable little houses and bakeshops and breweries placed in the sarcophagi of departed Egyptians to serve them in the other world" (Jacobs 12). Although these objects that archeologists exhumed near the Nile are made for religious purposes, some historians still consider it possible that "similar models have been used for toys" (12). Jacobs adopts Hendrik Van Loon's article on the "religious purpose but toy-like appearance" of these Egyptian "curiosities" (Jacobs 12) as support for this assumption: "Many times during the history of the last three thousand years," writes Van Loon, "the grown-ups have amused themselves by filling their houses with little objects which became toys the moment a child looked at them" (Van Loon, qtd. in Jacobs 12). Regardless of the original purpose of these miniature houses, the impression they make on a child's imagination is undeniable.

<sup>54</sup> As Karl Gröber records, "They must have existed; for where else could use have been found for the little pieces of bronze furniture which have survived, if not in a doll's room? while the many little utensils belong of a certainty to the furnishing of a doll's kitchen" (qtd. in Jacobs 14).

<sup>55</sup> From this point on, Germany has had "an enormously illuminating dolls' house history. Her Dolls' houses down to modern times have been famous; from the sixteenth century on, her craftsmen have been busy" (Jacobs 27).

<sup>56</sup> The original purpose of the tiny houses, then, was more instructional than entertaining—girls learned about house chores by arranging the tiny objects in the small kitchen.

<sup>57</sup> James E. Bryan III also insists that "almost all of the existing seventeenth-century pieces appear to have belonged to adult collectors. The oldest surviving dolls' house known with certainty to be a child's toy is an English example dating to the 1690s—Ann Sharp's Baby House" (Bryan 8-9). It is thus only apposite that from the beginning British dolls' houses were called "Baby Houses": Jacobs writes of the British dolls' houses,

As "baby houses," they are likely to be recorded in British publications of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Mr. G. Bernard Hughes, in an article in *Country Life* has pointed out that dictionaries of the period define a doll as "a child's

In the mid-nineteenth century, dolls' houses became smaller and simpler, and the furniture more sturdy so as to survive handling and manipulation by young hands. As Bryan sums up, dolls' houses "apparently were primarily adult collector's items in the seventeenth century, then encompassed both types fairly equally in the eighteenth, and finally became almost exclusively children's toys throughout the nineteenth." (9) Queen Victoria's dolls' house, for example, was a very typical child's toy. It is a very modest two-room house—so modest that those writing about it could not help but frown upon it. *Royal Magazine* described the "racketty-packetty" aspects of the house: "the doll's house which now stands in the Osborne nurseries for the use of the children of Princess Beatrice," they complained, "is a much grander affair than that which was the toy of the lonely little girl in Kensington Palace" (qtd. in Jacobs 56). In accordance with the Victorian spirit of domesticity, the house was neither grand nor splendid. It was, in fact, quite *homely*. *St. Nicholas* also points out in 1901:

It has two stories and the furniture is not in the least royal. In fact, the kitchen is better equipped than the other rooms. . . The present caretaker of Kensington Palace shows the visitor a small box where some scraps of time-worn yellowed muslin attested the industry of the child Victoria. There is a deal of laboriously neat stitching on the dolls' house linen and clothes, and there is an apron for the doll cook, which is quite a triumph of dressmaking for the chubby fingers of a four-year-old. (qtd. in Jacobs 55)

Like most Victorian girls, the future Queen did the needlework for her dolls' house. As the embodiment of Victorian domestic values, Victoria was from her childhood a dutiful pupil of household affairs.

Yet, as Victoria's "triumph of dressmaking" illustrates, the interaction between a child and her dolls' house is much more complicated than it at first appears to be: the function of the dolls' house is far more than just educational. Essentially, the typical nineteenth-century dolls' house was a miniature space for girls to utilize their creativity. As Beverly Gordon points out in *The Saturated World*, her study of the "intimate objects" in women's lives, nineteenth-century women

cultivated. . . a "saturated" quality, a kind of heightened experience (state, reality) that was aesthetically and sensually charged and full. These

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baby, a girl's toy baby." (6)

Thus the "baby house" was certainly a child's plaything. Furthermore, according to Greene's research on the English dolls' houses, by the 1800's "the baby house is no longer commissioned and furnished chiefly by adults for adult amusement: it has lost that valuable appearance and a decisive difference in aim is apparent, it has from its inception become a nursery plaything" (33), and "from 1820 or thereabouts dolls' houses. . . have nothing comparable to the pretty and patient work expended on the earlier baby houses" (51).

women created self-contained, enchanted “worlds” that helped feed or sustain them, usually by elaborating on their everyday tasks and responsibilities, “making them special” and transforming them into something playful and socially and emotionally satisfying. The story of their activities is in itself quite compelling, abounding with evocative images that push the imagination into high gear. (Gordon 1)

Although Gordon is here referring to nineteenth-century *American* women, the phrase “saturated world” also applies to English girls, as the often packed English dolls’ houses and the “horror vacuii”<sup>58</sup> style of Victorian interiors apparently illustrates. In the “saturated” world of everyday objects and household chores, nineteenth-century women found means to illustrate their unique visions; they found curiousness in ordinary things. It is in such an atmosphere that Brontë wrote of her dolls’ houses—although there is no known record of the Brontë children playing with dolls’ houses, these tiny structures were indeed deeply rooted in the nineteenth-century imagination.

Among other objects, the dolls’ houses were the most obviously curious in a Victorian girl’s daily life. I see curiousness of the dolls’ house in three aspects: size, distancing effect, and interiority versus exteriority. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, it is my contention that something can be considered “curious” when it is “defamiliarized”—out of context, that is—or when it is “both one and the other.” The dolls’ house is both tiny and gigantic; it constitutes a relatively “surreal” imaginary space within the context of the everyday life; and it complicates the concept of a public sphere without and a private space within. Bryan sums up the appeal of a dolls’ house:

First, dolls' houses present an amusing dissonance with the recognition of familiar things seen in unfamiliarly tiny forms. Second, they evoke through nostalgia or fantasy things not ordinarily practicable such as the recreation of past historical eras or manifestations of notions too fanciful or expensive to be indulged in full size. Third, especially when they are highly detailed, they provoke astonishment at the virtuoso craftsmanship necessary to create fine objects on a greatly reduced scale. (5)

Here, the “unfamiliarity” created by the play of size is precisely what makes the dolls’ house curious. Indeed it is with the appreciation of such curious qualities of the dolls’ house that Charlotte Brontë writes of the “tiny chairs and mirrors, the fairy plates and cups” that belong to Jane Eyre’s cousin Georgiana’s dolls’ house and are thus forbidden to Jane (*JE* 37). Furthermore, the dolls’ house is also characterized by its representation of an enclosed, perfect world. In Didier Maleuvre’s 1999 *Museum*

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<sup>58</sup> “Horror vacuii” is a term coined by Italian scholar Mario Praz to describe suffocating, packed-to-capacity Victorian interior design. Here such style corresponds to the “saturated” world that Gordon refers to.

*Memories: History, Technology, Art*, the escapist quality of such perfection is discussed, and Maleuvre is not alone in his observation. Bryan insists that Maleuvre's remarks on the nature of dolls' houses are "very much informed by Bachelard and Stewart," especially in terms of the "distancing and separating effects of miniatures, which permit viewers a reverie in contemplating an unreal perfection undisturbed by the disruptions and inadequacies of everyday life" (Bryan 22). In the mid-nineteenth century, as society and lifestyle were drastically transforming due to the industrial revolution and urbanization, the need of a temporary escape from reality was to be expected; dolls' houses proffered their viewers just such a transient comfort. Susan Stewart thus terms the dolls' house a "monument against instability, randomness, and vulgarity" (62):

As private property marked by the differentiations of privacy and privatizing functions. . . and characterized by attention to ornaments and detail to the point of excruciation. . . , the dollhouse erases all but the *frontal view*; its appearance is the realization of the self as property, the body as container of objects, perpetual and incontaminable. (62, original italics)

The dolls' house encloses a world both "perpetual" and "incontaminable." In other words, it is always stable, unaffected by changes to time and space on the "outside."

While here Stewart clearly identifies the *distancing* effect of the dolls' house as a collector's item—it is meant only to be looked at—Greene introduces the *defamiliarization* produced by the experience of actually playing with the dolls' house:

Here we have come to pause before our doll's house, to take out the pieces of furniture one by one, turning them in our hands. These, we suddenly realize, are our own household familiars diminished, touching and lovable, not as we have made their counterparts—the taskmasters of fatigue. (23)

While Stewart analyzes the untouched and uncontaminatable space within the dolls' house, Greene evokes precisely the *tactile* experience; whether cold or endearing, appreciated visually or tactilely, the dolls' house undoubtedly encircles a curious space that transports the viewer to another world. It provides an escape from reality, from the fluctuating and imperfect world characterized by triviality and hackneyed daily routine, the same reality that devotees of the Wardian case attempt to block out from their private life. In Brontë's works, "paradise" moments are often associated with tiny spaces, where the protagonists temporarily escape reality. Thus, in *Jane Eyre*, Marsh End becomes an escape for Jane to evade the fate of becoming Rochester's mistress; in *The Professor* Frances' tiny room becomes a paradise for

William; and in *Villette* Lucy's tiny school, promising a means of both her independence and her domestic bliss, saves her from wasting her life away in the Pensionnat.

The appeal of the miniature can indeed be infinitely repeated and multiplied within a dolls' house. Gordon discusses the possibility of a *miniature* dolls' house situated within the tiny nursery of a dolls' house<sup>59</sup> which, in Gordon's words, compounded in its power (48-9). Eloise Kruger argues, in a 1964 article entitled "The Dollhouse Multiplied," that "[e]veryone wants a dollhouse within a dollhouse" (qtd. in Gordon 49, original italics), and Stewart goes even further to state that,

A house within a house, the dollhouse not only presents the house's articulation of the tension between inner and outer spheres, of exteriority and interiority. Occupying a space within an enclosed space, the dollhouse's aptest analogy is the locket or the secret recesses of the heart: center within center, within within within. The dollhouse is a materialized secret; what we look for is the dollhouse within the dollhouse and its promise of an infinitely profound interiority. (61)

Such "mise en abyme" creates layers of signs within the domestic space, each layer mirroring and thus problematizing the other. With the dolls' house within a house, the meaning of domestic happiness and comfort is both highlighted and interrogated. Furthermore, the tension between the interior and exterior spaces of a dolls' house answers to the "oneiric house" that Bachelard describes, the house whose entire being "opens up" to us, "faithful to our own being"—the house that is the "crypt" of the house we were born in (Bachelard 15). Our bodies, insists Bachelard, remember our original homes in a dream-memory—it is "physically inscribed in us": thus we would "push the door that creaks with the same gesture" and "find our way in the dark to the distant attic"—even "the feel of the tiniest latch" has "remained in our hands" (15). While the house is inscribed in us, we are always mentally contained within the house, which is likened to a cradle: its "nooks and corridors" provide "refuges" for our memories (8).

Bachelard's repeated discussions of childhood memories again evoke the image of the dolls' house: the layered interiority, the "within within within" embodied by the dolls' house, is precisely that of the dream-home deeply rooted in our past. With Stewart's and Bachelard's images, it is thus not surprising that, when Lucy

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<sup>59</sup> For discussion of such a dolls' house within a dolls' house—the "most minute of miniature houses"—see Jessie E. Ringwalt, "Fun for the Fireside: A Help to Mothers—The Paper Dolls' House," *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1880, p. 162.

Snowe describes her relationship with Graham, she adopts the metaphor of a tiny room in his heart:

I believe in that goodly mansion, his heart, he kept one little place under the skylights where Lucy might have entertainment, if she chose to call. . . by long and equal kindness, he proved to me that he kept one little closet, over the door of which was written "Lucy's Room." I kept a place for him, too—a place of which I never took the measure, either by rule or compass: I think it was like the tent of Peri-Banou. All my life long I carried it folded in the hollow of my hand—yet, released from that hold and constriction, I know not but its innate capacity for expanse might have magnified it into a tabernacle for a host. (*Villette* 572)

The space which Lucy aspires to inhabit is indeed as endearing as it is tiny. As the "aptest analogy" of the dolls' house, Graham's "secret recess of the heart" manifests Lucy's yearning for a home, a home in the form of a miniature room. On the other hand, the space Graham occupies in her heart is here depicted as a space of infinite size folded into a small mass, a space that can be either tiny or grand, or rather both at the same time: a space that plays with the relativity of size and thus creates a sense of curiosity, just like the dolls' house. The nostalgic feelings that a tiny, enclosed space brings forth—as well as the infinite universe that one imagines a tiny space to be—as mentioned both by Bachelard throughout *The Poetics of Space* and by Benjamin in his *Berlin Childhood*, are here conspicuous.

## II. Brontë and Dolls' House

With the "curiousness" of dolls' house explicated, I now intend to discuss further the imagery of dolls' houses in Brontë. In Brontë's works, the quest for a final home is central to each heroine's growth, yet such yearning for a home is always paired with a set of negative images that seems to render the concept of "home" spurious, illusional, and impossible. Before exploring such complicated metaphors in Brontë's dolls'-house imagery, I will first consider the origin of Brontë's writings, which began, significantly, with the Brontë children playing house.

Charlotte Brontë's 1829 "History of the Year" records,

Once Papa lent my sister Maria a book. It was an old geography-book; she wrote on its blank leaf, "Papa lent me this book." This book is a hundred and twenty years old; it is at this moment lying before me. While I write this I am in the kitchen of the Parsonage, Haworth; Tabby, the servant, is washing up the breakfast-things, and Anne, my youngest sister (Maria was my eldest), is kneeling on a chair, looking at some cakes which Tabby has been baking for us. Emily is in the parlour, brushing the carpet. Papa and Branwell are gone to Keighley. Aunt is up-



stairs in her room, and I am sitting by the table writing this in the kitchen. . . . Our plays were established; “Young Men,” June, 1826; “Our Fellows,” July, 1827; “Islanders,” December, 1827. These are our three great plays, that are not kept secret. Emily's and my best plays were established the 1st of December, 1827; the others March, 1828. Best plays mean secret plays; they are very nice ones. All our plays are very strange ones. Their Nature I need not write on paper, for I think I shall always remember them. The “Young Men's” play took its rise from some wooden soldiers Branwell had: “Our Fellows” from “Aesop's Fables;” and the “Islanders” from several events which happened. I will sketch out the origin of our plays more explicitly if I can. First, “Young Men.” Papa bought Branwell some wooden soldiers at Leeds; when Papa came home it was night, and we were in bed, so next morning Branwell came to our door with a box of soldiers. Emily and I jumped out of bed, and I snatched up one and exclaimed, “This is the Duke of Wellington! This shall be the Duke!” When I had said this, Emily likewise took up one and said it should be hers; when Anne came down, she said one should be hers. Mine was the prettiest of the whole, and the tallest, and the most perfect in every part. Emily's was a grave-looking fellow, and we called him “Gravey.” Anne's was a queer little thing, much like herself, and we called him “Waiting-Boy.” Branwell chose his, and called him “Buonaparte.” (*Life* 116-7)

This “History” chronicles the establishment of the tiny volumes that the Brontë children are famous for. The Brontës’ legend of Angria begins in 1826, one year after the deaths of the two oldest Brontë children, Maria and Elizabeth: the toy soldiers are given to the children “probably to mark the end of the mourning year” (*BO* 395). The link between the trauma of losing Maria and the Angrian legends is the reason why, according to Kate Brown, Charlotte’s writing in “History” seems somewhat broken:

Like all good children's stories, this one begins with “Once,” the word that magically initiates narrative by establishing an event--here, Papa's lending Maria a geography book--as originary. It is thus perhaps all the more striking that a narrative is not what ensues. Indeed, we can only guess at what the event originates, for Charlotte instantly shifts from telling a story to describing the book itself and to setting the scene of writing. . . . Having located herself writing at the kitchen table in March 1829—which we might take as an adequate anchoring of the author in time and space—Charlotte goes on to situate each member of her family. Where this “history” seems to take off, then, is when it moves to geography, no longer seeking to narrate the family's activities over time but choosing instead to map its members across space in the present moment. Yet even this shift to spatial plotting is disrupted, significantly by the name that inaugurates the history: Maria, the parenthetical, past-tense reference to whom (“Maria was my eldest”) intrudes a temporality that, once again, proposes yet fails to issue in narrative. Instead, the reference emphasizes that Maria alone has not been located and suggests that she cannot be. (*BO* 408-9)

For Brown, the discontinuity of the text is caused by the unaccountability of the dead: Maria can no longer be located within the family, nor can she be included in the history of the year. Notably, in this almost stream-of-consciousness narrative, the very origin of the toy soldiers and their miniature texts is, for Charlotte Brontë, inseparable from Maria—or rather from her absence. Here the actual, material size of these tiny texts is essential. The children derived plays from playing with these soldiers, and three years later they began to produce magazines and journals for these characters, texts that Elizabeth Gaskell describes as “an immense amount of manuscript, in an inconceivably small space; . . . written . . . in a hand which it is almost impossible to decipher without the aid of a magnifying glass” (Gaskell, *Life* 112). Brown calls these little books “beloved objects” that compensate, for the remaining Brontë children, for sibling loss (*BO* 413):

Acting out plays and hand-crafting fictions, the children insist on the vitality and usefulness of their bodies. And staking a claim to life, they also assert their connectedness, which they “objectify” in the form of the little books. Thus miniaturizing the Angrians, the children render their own bodies gigantic and powerful, doubly mitigating the distance between the flawed bodies of the living and the imaginatively perfect bodies of the dead. (*BO* 413)

Furthermore, in terms of loss, the little books seem to promise a sense of security, for they “imagine a world larger than Haworth, while in fact functioning to keep that world out, such that Angria becomes a closed system. The never-ending story is at once expansive and secured, permitting excitement and event while repudiating change and flux, immune to reality but suffused with immediacy” (*BO* 413-4). Thus the significance of the books is deeply rooted in their material tininess.

The Brontës’ toy soldiers, and the tiny texts inspired by them, provide a clue to the nostalgia behind the obvious fascination of “the miniature” throughout Charlotte Brontë’s texts. Her interest in *Gulliver’s Travels*, for example, is conspicuous. In the note addressed to William Crimsworth, Frances Henri includes her tuition fee, which comes in the form of what he calls “a kind of Lilliputian packet” (*Professor* 136). He uses the word with a hint of endearment. More directly, in *Jane Eyre*, *Gulliver’s Travels* is described as the favorite of the young heroine:

This book I had again and again perused with delight. I considered it a narrative of facts, and discovered in it a vein of interest deeper than what I found in fairy tales: for as to the elves, having sought them in vain. . . . I had at length made up my mind to the sad truth, that they were all gone out of England to some savage country. . . . whereas Lilliput and Brobdingnag being, in my creed, solid parts of the earth’s surface, I

doubted not that I might one day, by taking a long voyage, see with my own eyes the little fields, houses, and trees, the diminutive people, the tiny cows, sheep, and birds of the one realm; and the cornfields forest-high, the mighty mastiffs, the monster cats, the tower-like men and women of the other. (26)

*Gulliver's Travels* is the very first book through which Jane seeks to find relief after her nervous breakdown in the red chamber. It is not surprising that, among all the episodes in *Gulliver's Travels*, it is the book that foregrounds relativity in size that draws Jane's—and Brontë's—attention. Brontë chose this book for a reason: according to Susan Stewart, it is “absolutely necessary” that Lilliput be an island (68), for “the miniature world remains perfect and uncontaminated by the grotesque so long as its absolute boundaries are maintained” (68), a description echoing Brown's contemplation of the Brontës' tiny texts. Lilliput and Brobdingnag are such fantasized destinations for Jane precisely because they seem so far from the cruel reality she lives in. The miniature world not only provides a sense of security against the changes in the larger world, but also creates the sense of curiosity—defamiliarization or “out-landishness”—so prevalent throughout Brontë's works. It is obvious that the sense of curiosity created by the difference of size is engrained in Jane Eyre's—as well as Brontë's—imagination. Thus in this chapter, I seek to examine such a miniature-based image that exemplifies its greater counterpart, the ideal Victorian home.

### III. Two Types of Dolls' Houses

I will discuss such concept of home in Brontë via examinations of the two types of dolls' houses coexisting in her text. Before examining the dolls'-house imagery in Brontë's works, the actual applications and receptions of the dolls' houses in her time must be introduced. According to James E. Bryan III, in his research on several historical dolls' houses, dolls' houses aiming at entertainment can be divided into two categories: “dolls' houses for adults, which are intended primarily to be viewed and admired, and dolls' houses for children, which are intended primarily to be played with actively as toys” (Bryan 8):

Generally, those meant for adults are very fully detailed and carefully wrought, and thus have many fragile components, and can correspondingly involve a great deal of expense. Contrarily, those meant for children tend to be very simply made, with few delicate pieces, in order to withstand vigorous handling, and tend to be less costly. (Bryan 8)

It can be deduced from such a difference that the images surrounding dolls' houses can also be further categorized: I will argue that for Brontë there are also two types of dolls' houses: those that are splendidly decorated, cold, and seemingly uninhabited, and those that are small, old, and endearing. The former resemble more those adult collector's items, appreciated only visually, while the latter, full of tactile traces, intimate and finely worn, are closer to the nineteenth-century dolls' houses enjoyed by children. A sense of permanency is obvious in both miniature worlds, yet while the collected dolls' houses permanently display the glamour of upper-class life, the dolls' houses actually handled by children are perpetual illustrations of domestic happiness. The contrast between the two illustrates the anxiety always present in Brontë's depictions of "home."

Here I intend to bring attention to the "timelessness," or, rather, the "changelessness," of the dolls' house, which caters to the compensation effect of a perfect, timeless world in Brontë's earlier works. Jacobs claims in *A History of Dolls' Houses* that "[a]ll sorts of things, however ephemeral, are left as they were in a dolls' house that would never remain in a human's" (5). English doll maker and collector Faith Eaton, for example, describes her 1940 dolls' house in a letter: it has "an air-raid shelter and brown sticky paper X's on its windows and blackout-curtains because, when we did my own home I did my dolls' home as well and—mercifully—I put the house away in this condition when I grew up" (qtd. in Jacobs 5). The London of World War II is thus preserved in the dolls' house, while the larger, inhabited, house must go through endless renewals. An English journalist, Sonia Roberts, also notices in a letter that

[A]lthough the war virtually halted toy production in Britain, a few dolls' house things were made and these were in keeping with the grim circumstances of the blitz. My own dolls' house was equipped with miniature sandbags, a stirrup pump, and an additional supply of buckets and ladders for fire fighting. (qtd. in Jacobs 5)

The sense of permanency, associated with an enclosed space, occurs over and over again in Brontë's works. In the following discussions the two types of dolls' houses will be juxtaposed, with the sense of timelessness quite apparent in both. I will argue that in each of Brontë's works these two types of dolls' houses coexist, contrasting and mirroring each other.

In *Jane Eyre*, as in Brontë's other works, the dolls' house imagery can be multi-layered. Mrs. Fairfax knitting in a room seems to Jane the "beau-ideal of

domestic comfort” (114), precisely because Jane is so familiar with scenes of domestic happiness and yet is never included in one. On the very first page of this book, Jane describes the familial scene in Gateshead: “Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round their mamma in the drawing-room: she lay reclined on a sofa by the fireside, and with her darlings about her (for the time neither quarrelling nor crying) looked perfectly happy” (9). Jane herself, on the other hand, is “dispensed from joining the group.” As an outcast in the Reed household, and later as a governess in a family not her own, Jane is always the outsider, looking at, but not touching, domestic, dolls’-house-like, scenes. After the break-down in the red room, Jane anticipates the day when she is to be sent to a boarding school, yet months go by and Jane waits in silence. Her Christmas and the New Year are spent, as usual, in exclusion from all familial festive activities (34-5), and one day in January, a moment of ennui takes place while Jane cleans the room:

Having spread the quilt and folded my night-dress, I went to the window-seat to put in order some picture-books and doll’s house furniture scattered there; an abrupt command from Georgiana to let her playthings alone (for the tiny chairs and mirrors, the fairy plates and cups, were her property) stopped my proceedings; and then, for lack of other occupation, I fell to breathing on the frost-flowers with which the window was fretted, and thus clearing a space in the glass through which I might look out on the grounds, where all was still and petrified under the influence of a hard frost. (37)

Here, Jane’s action of “putting in order” the wonderful “tiny chairs and mirrors, the fairy plates and cups” is halted. Not only is she rejected from the domestic domain in the actual house, she is also forbidden to meddle with the dolls’ house. From such rejection, she turns to the window, through which she sees only the “still and petrified” world. Waiting for her new life, which does not come, her days are indeed spent in stillness and petrification. From the innermost domestic space—the dolls’ house—to the exterior of the home, Jane experiences the impotence of a child and an *étranger*: she cannot control her own “still, petrified” life any more than she is allowed to arrange the doll’s house furniture. Furthermore, just as the domestic scene by the fireside is *complete* without her, so the *neatness* of the doll’s house is out of her reach.<sup>60</sup> Whether as a metaphorical representation of the home or as a literal structure played with by children, here the “dolls’ house” is no place for Jane.

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<sup>60</sup> According to Frances Armstrong in her study of literary representation of dolls’ houses between 1690 and 1920, two standards were applied to dolls’ houses in the nineteenth century: “The tidy and satisfying coupling of *neat* and *complete* exemplifies its own meaning. This theme becomes a favorite

Here Jane's inability to enter the world of dolls' house echoes Brontë's own traumatic experience as a governess. In a letter to Emily Brontë in June 1839, Charlotte writes,

I said in my last letter that Mrs [Sidgwick] did not know me. I now begin to find she does not intend to know me; that she cares nothing about me, except to contrive how the greatest possible quantity of labour may be got out of me; and to that end she overwhelms me with oceans of needlework; yards of cambric to hem, muslin night-caps to make, and, above all things, dolls to dress. (*Letters*)

Stonegappe, where the Sidgwicks lived, is often said to be the prototype after which Gateshead Hall is modeled. This experience is rendered more vivid by the fact that an actual dolls' house allegedly decorated by Charlotte Brontë—the dolls' house mentioned in passing in her letter—was auctioned off early in 2009.<sup>61</sup> For Brontë, literal dolls' houses are inseparable from feelings of estrangement, of not being known, and of being an eternal outsider looking in. In *Jane Eyre*, Gateshead seems to Jane a domestic space at once glamorous, cold, and uninhabited, just like the collector's item.

Jane, as she says herself, is always a "wanderer on the face of the earth" (262) when under the roof of Gateshead. Bathed in such still and petrified air, it is not surprising that, when Jane Eyre returns to Gateshead years later, the entire house seems to have been forgotten by time. The lodge looks brand new: it is "very clean and neat" (261). Jane further describes this impression as she enters the breakfast-room:

There was every article of furniture looking just as it did on the very morning I was first introduced to Mr. Brocklehurst: the rug he had stood upon still covered the hearth. Glancing at the bookcases I thought I could distinguish the two volumes of Bewick's "British Birds" occupying their old place on the third shelf, and "Gulliver's Travels" and the "Arabian Nights" ranged just above. The inanimate objects were not changed; but the living things had altered past recognition. (262-3)

Years have gone by and Mrs. Reed is lying in sickness, yet the "inanimate objects" remain ever the same. In Gateshead/Stonegappe, where Jane's traumatic childhood echoes that of Brontë's governess days and where Jane's literal and symbolic

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literary tag throughout the nineteenth century, turning up in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction" (33, original italics).

<sup>61</sup> See the on-line news article: *The Telegraph*, 20 January 2009:

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/4297346/Dolls-house-decorated-by-Jane-Eyre-author-Charlotte-Bronte-up-for-auction.html>>

encounters with the dolls' house reflect those of Brontë, the air of changelessness persists.

In contrast with this cold, new, and permanent dolls'-house-like air, another family that Jane enters—the family that later proves to be her own—is characterized by traces of age. Jane delineates the parlour in the Moor House, or “Marsh End”:

There was no superfluous ornament in the room—not one modern piece of furniture, save a brace of workboxes and a lady's desk in rosewood, which stood on a side-table: everything—including the carpet and curtains—looked at once well worn and well saved. (396)

While the rooms in Gateshead are “clean and neat,” they are also wanting in human warmth. Here in Marsh End, everything is “well worn” yet “well saved.” The entire structure of the house is as aged and plain as its interior. Jane loves the “gray, small, antique structure,” with its “low roof, its latticed casements, its mouldering walls, its avenue of aged firs, all grown aslant under the stress of mountain winds” (402).

Everything here seems to be the opposite of Gateshead Hall. While Jane still feels like “a wanderer on the face of the earth” when she again stands under the roof of Gateshead, once Jane has “crossed the threshold” of Marsh End she feels “no longer outcast, vagrant, and disowned by the wide world” (387). Ironically, while a dolls'-house-like mansion like Gateshead should be characterized by domestic comfort, it is in a house that looks entirely different from an upper-class dolls' house that Jane finds true domestic bliss. Here it is worthy of note that as soon as Jane is financially independent, the first thing she does is to renovate the house:

My first aim will be to *clean down* (do you comprehend the full force of the expression?)—to *clean down* Moor House from chamber to cellar; my next to rub it up with bees-wax, oil, and an indefinite number of cloths, till it glitters again; my third, to arrange every chair, table, bed, carpet, with mathematical precision; afterwards I shall go near to ruin you in coals and peat to keep up good fires in every room. . . (450, original italics)

Besides the cleaning down, the polishing, the re-arranging of furniture, the setting up fire, and the preparing of meals, Jane has purchased new furniture to fit the rooms, including “dark handsome new carpets and curtains, an arrangement of some carefully selected antique ornaments in porcelain and bronze, new coverings, and mirrors, and dressing-cases. . . .” She has also refurnished the spare rooms with “old mahogany and crimson upholstery,” she lays “canvas on the passage, and carpets on the stairs” (452). Marsh End is now at her disposal, and she treats it like a big dolls' house. The Brontë who derived the chronicles of an entire kingdom from merely six toy soldiers

cannot easily resist the joys of playing house. Indeed, when Jane Eyre has finished with the house, it looks to her “a *model* of bright modest snugness within, as it [i]s. . . a *specimen* of wintry waste and desert dreariness without” (452, italics mine). The indoor space resembles what twentieth-century architectural critic John Summerson calls, in his research on children’s playhouses, the “neatness and serenity within, contrasting with wildness and confusion without” (Summerson 2). Though the snow-clad exterior world of “wintry waste and desert dreariness” is not so far from the “still and petrified” January morning that Jane saw through the window years ago, the atmosphere is entirely different. This is a house arranged by Jane’s own hands, her dream-house of domesticity—by far the house closest to home. Excited about the refurbishment, Jane is nevertheless careful about maintaining the history of the house:

The ordinary sitting-room and bed-rooms I left much as they were: for I knew Diana and Mary would derive more pleasure from seeing again the old homely tables, and chairs, and beds, than from the spectacle of the smartest innovations. (452)

Full of traces of wear, these old pieces of furniture are what make a home home.

Indeed in *Jane Eyre* it is often the small, the shabby, and the aged spaces that seem most endearing—like a dolls’ house played with often by the small hands of children, these spaces are saturated with nostalgic feelings of home. In *Jane Eyre*, the coldness of a seemingly uninhabited space that Gateshead suggests is contrasted with the worn, endearing small space in Marsh End, while the imagery of dolls’ house is detectable in both.

Likewise, in *The Professor*, the new and glaring—the un-homely, that is—is contrasted with the small and ancient: when William enters Mdlle. Reuter’s Pensionnat, the first thing he notices is a passage paved with “black and white marble,” and the walls are “painted in imitation of marble also” (64). The grandiosity is understandable, given that the Pensionnat is a public space, and its visual display must correspond to its image and reputation. However, the link between the presentation of the Pensionnat and the Mademoiselle herself should not be overlooked. Indeed, as William notices, her salon is just as cold as the entrance of the institute:

I found myself in a salon with a very well painted, highly varnished floor; chairs and sofas covered with white draperies, a green porcelain stove, walls hung with pictures in gilt frames, a gilt pendule and other ornaments on the mantel-piece, a large luster pendent from the centre of the ceiling, mirrors, consoles, muslin-curtains and a handsome centre table completed the inventory of furniture; all looked extremely clean and glittering but the general effect. . . [is] somewhat chilling. . . (65)



As mentioned in the first chapter, the living space reflects the character of its inhabitant. Middle. Reuter is later found to be manipulative and dishonest, and this, for Brontë, is reflected in the newness and “chilling-ness” of her room: the centre table “completed the inventory of furniture,” making the entire space a show-room of feigned domestic comfort. In very similar delineations Ruskin has commented on the immorality reflected in the interior design of the room in William Holman Hunt’s *The Awakening Conscience* (see Fig. 1):

There is not a single object in all that room common, modern, vulgar (in the vulgar sense, as it may be), but it becomes tragical, if rightly read. The furniture so carefully painted, even to the last vein of the rosewood—is there nothing to learn from that terrible lustre of it, from its fatal new-ness; *nothing there that has the old thoughts of home upon it, or that is ever to become a part of home.* Those embossed books, vain and useless—they also new—marked with no happy wearing of beloved leaves; the torn and dying bird upon the floor; the gilded tapestry, with the fowls of the air feeding upon the ripened corn; the picture above the fireplace, with its single drooping figure—the Woman taken in Adultery. (Ruskin 126-7, italics mine)

Such words and phrases as “well painted” and “lustre” are echoed in both passages with symbolic meanings. With the embossed books unread, the room Hunt creates is as much a replica of a real home as the Middle.’s salon. It is obvious that the very newness and luster of the room symbolizes the fallen nature of the woman, which is exemplified by the impossibility of turning the room into a home. Brontë indeed shares this concept when she describes the Pensionnat, for, as far as William is concerned, Middle. Reuter’s deceptive and manipulative nature makes her equally incapable of ever establishing a home. The Pensionnat is also lacking in anything that “has the old thoughts of home upon it, or that is ever to become a part of home.”

By contrast, Frances’ abode is small yet neat. It is

A small room with a painted floor and a square of green carpet in the middle; the articles of furniture were few, but all bright and exquisitely clean: order reigned through its narrow limits. . . . Poor the place might be; poor truly it was, but its neatness was better than elegance. . . (144)

Like the spinsters in *Shirley*, Frances lives in a small, neat and complete space.

Furthermore, when Frances starts to make tea, the entire scene seems like a game of playing house:

The fire being lit, the hearth swept, and a *small* kettle of a very *antique* pattern, such as I thought I remembered to have seen in *old* farm-houses in England, placed over the now ruddy flame, Frances’ hands were washed and her apron removed in an instant; then she opened a cupboard and took out a tea-tray, on which she had soon arranged a china tea-

equipage whose pattern, shape and size denoted a *remote antiquity*; a *little, old-fashioned* silver spoon was deposited in each saucer, and a pair of silver tongs, equally *old-fashioned* were laid on the sugar-bason [sic]; from the cupboard too, was produced a *tiny* silver cream-ewer, not larger than an eggshell. (145, italics mine)

The words “tiny” and “old” are repeatedly echoed throughout the passage. Given that having tea is indeed one of the most popular routines in child-play, and that this tea time foreshadows their future marriage and domestic happiness—indeed it can be seen as a rehearsal of their life together—it is quite obvious that the entire room now seems a dolls’ house, and the protagonists are now having a tea party not unlike one in playing house. The sense of antiquity is also essential in creating this dolls’-house like atmosphere. Susan Stewart comments that “nostalgia” is one of the “dominant motifs” concerning the dolls’ house (Stewart 61). Often handed down as heirlooms, dolls’ houses serve as a testimony to history while the time within them seems to be frozen—such miniatures of the past are “meant to stop time and thus present the illusion of a perfectly complete and hermetic world” (Stewart 62). Thus here Frances’ room and the tiny, antique tea utensils brought long ago from England and passed down as heirlooms further strengthen the inherent sense of the dolls’-house-like atmosphere—besides the obvious qualities of tininess, these utensils, used by Frances in a foreign country to re-create the “England of a hundred years ago” (145), are, like objects in a dolls’ house, specimens of a reality that no longer exists. Like Faith Eaton’s 1940 dolls’ house, in which the London in WWII was preserved, here Frances’ tiny utensils bring back memories of an ancient England. As in Mdlle. Reuter’s case, here the tiny and antique room—and the objects within—are inseparable from Frances herself; and indeed, while the Mademoiselle, occupying a somewhat chilling salon, keeps creating the false impression of a possible future with William, here Frances and her tiny, dolls’-house-like room provides a true feeling of domestic comfort. After the tea, Frances asks William if the tea set reminds him of home, and William answers that he has no home in England, and along with this reply comes a pang:

It was a pang of mortification at the humility of my position and the inadequacy of my means; while with that pang was born a strong desire to do more, earn more, be more, possess more; and in the increased possessions, my roused and eager spirit panted to include the home I had never had, the wife I inwardly vowed to win. (146)

This wife he vows to win is precisely the woman who has made his tea with tiny antique pieces of England, the woman who has played the role of wife in the game of

the dolls' house. While he claims to have yet no home, along with the game simulating domestic activity comes the desire to create a home for himself. In Brontë, although literal dolls' houses can be traumatic, reminding the author of her own experiences as an eternal outsider, metaphoric dolls' houses still emerge from time to time, intimating Brontë's own unquenchable desire for a complete home.

Madame Beck, in *Villette*, is a further developed counterpart of Mdlle. Reuter, and in *Villette* the contrast between the two types of dolls' houses: her Pensionnat and a real home, is even more obvious. As Lucy walks into the institute, she observes all around her:

The next moment I sat in a cold, glittering salon, with porcelain stove unlit, and gilded ornaments, and polished floor. . . . I sat with my eyes fixed on the door—a great white folding door, with gilt mouldings. . . . All had been quiet: not a mouse had stirred; the white doors were closed and motionless. (79)

She sits anxiously waiting, surrounded by the white, cold, glaring room, where everything is motionless, doors do not open, and silence prevails. Indeed, the room full of gilded objects again echoes William Holman Hunt's painting. The artist explained the arrangements in "The Awakening Conscience": "I arranged the two figures to present the woman recalling the memory of her childish home, breaking away from her gilded cage with a startled holy resolve, while her shallow companion still sings on, ignorantly intensifying her repentant purpose" (qtd. in Nochlin 109). Not only is the memory of the woman's childish home in contrast to the dolls'-house-like newness that the room stands for, it is also a recollection of domestic happiness that the room lacks; the expression "gilded cage" marks a space of decadence, as the word "gilt" was considered in the Victorian age "vulgar and coarse" (Shefer 476).<sup>62</sup> The Pensionnat, although seemingly clean, white, and beautiful, also carries a hint of vulgarity.

Later, Lucy gradually realizes that this room—along with other glisteningly white chambers in the Pensionnat—is part of the Madame's "hollow system" of education (114): this system exemplifies not merely Madame Beck's character but also the fakeness of the façade that Brontë emphasizes so often throughout her works. Although not small in scale, the seemingly uninhabited space, its resemblance to a show-room, makes the Pensionnat resemble a collector's item. As Lucy is "called down from [her] watch-tower of the nursery, whence [she] had hitherto made [her]

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<sup>62</sup> See Francis Lichten, *Decorative Art of Victoria's Era* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1950).

observations,” and is “compelled into closer intercourse with this little world of the Rue Fossette,” the “enchantment of distance” melts away (92). She gradually realizes that the seemingly impressive education provided by the Pensionnat is just an empty shell. She finds the school a “strange, frolicsome, noisy little world,” where

great pains were taken to hide chains with flowers. . . large sensual indulgence. . . was permitted by way of counterpoise to jealous spiritual restraint. Each mind was being reared in slavery; but, to prevent reflection from dwelling on this fact, every pretext for physical recreation was seized and made the most of. (157)

The glittering rooms are, like “physical recreation” in the students’ lives, links in the system of a hollow education. In a way, the entire school resembles a dolls’ house, consisting merely of façades.

To highlight the pretense of beautiful facades, Brontë describes a small space quite contrary to these glittering white rooms. At the day of the fête held in honor of Mme. Beck, Lucy reluctantly acquiesces to M. Paul’s demand that she replace a sick student and perform in the vaudeville. M. Paul thus rushes Lucy to the attic and locks her in to practice her lines (166); the schoolmaster jokingly remarks later that throughout this event he resembles a “tyrant and Bluebeard, starving women in a garret” (169). The “garret” space is evidently a stark contrast to the schoolroom from which she has just been rudely ejected: while the walls of the *classe* are “fresh stained, their planked floors fresh scoured and scarce dry. . . and draperies, fresh hung, beautifying the great windows” (163), for the attic “old dresses draped its unstained wall—cobwebs its unswept ceiling” (166). The attic is as dark, dirty, naked, and stifling as the *classe* is bright, fresh, decorated and full of big windows. However, described in almost parallel terms, these two spaces become mirrored images to each other, or rather one is the hideous backstage of the other. Behind a façade of beauty and physical luxury, the school hides the poor minds and empty souls stunted by their *petit education*. It is apparent that the horrible attic is both the space behind the surface of the façade—the unpainted wooden scaffold, the lumber scattered all over, the dust and the dirt—and the substantial reality of which the perfect schoolroom is merely the mirror image. Locked in the attic, Lucy sees clearly the interior reality of the school, the reality that she has already observed and that is now embodied. Furthermore, the reference to Bluebeard amplifies the convoluted relationship between the façade and its back-stage area. Like Bluebeard’s castle, the Pensionnat is a display; hidden behind both are rooms that enslave women, though in the case of the

Pensionnat it is the mind, rather than the physical body, that is reared in slavery. In both cases, the façade is represented as both concealing a horrid reality and mirroring it—as the *classe* is depicted in terms parallel to the attic, so Bluebeard’s garret, where he assembles bodies of his victims like trophies, is as much a space of exhibition as the grandiose castle itself.

In contrast to the pretentious Pensionnat, another school in *Villette* seems much humbler, resembling the second type of dolls’ house. M. Paul shows Lucy this tiny school:

Opening an inner door, M. Paul discloses a parlour, or salon—very *tiny*, but I thought, very pretty. Its delicate walls were tinged like a blush; its floor was waxed; a square of brilliant carpet covered its centre; its *small* round table shone like the mirror over its hearth; there was a *little* couch, a *little* chiffonnière. . . . He led the way. I was shown a *little* kitchen with a *little* stove and oven, with few but bright brasses, two chairs and a table. A *small* cupboard held a *diminutive* but commodious set of earthenware. (604-5, italics mine)

The living space is tiny, and all the objects seem like toys in a dolls’ house. As M. Paul leads Lucy further, a “miniature classe” is shown, a classe that is “complete, neat, pleasant” (605). The connection of this description to dolls’ houses is quite obvious. Even the first meal they have there seems like the food served when playing house: chocolate, rolls, and a plate of fresh summer fruit. This school is to become Lucy’s final home, a home that M. Paul provides her with, and a home that they expect to share. Like William Crimsworth, Lucy reiterates throughout *Villette* that she has no home (eg. 453, 455), until she finally enters this dolls’-house-like dwelling. The house is as snug, warm, and simple as Madame Beck’s Pensionnat is grand, cold, and ostentatious. As the spaces reflect their respective educational methods, they also reflect the personality of the inhabitants. While Madame’s Pensionnat apparently resembles a dolls’ house in that it is meant only to be looked at, rather than inhabited, Lucy’s school is imbued with the true charm of a miniature world, the endearing dolls’ house deeply rooted in the imagination of home.

Throughout Brontë’s works, the desire of finding/founding a home is essential. This desire is reflected in the endings of her four major works. In each and every one of them the story ends with a new house, new in the sense that the heroines move into them as they bid farewell to their old lives, a new home that belongs entirely to the heroine, a dream-house that she has been imagining perhaps ever since she was old enough to play house. In each case, the final “home” is a small house. In *The*

*Professor*, William and Frances move back to England, living in a “picturesque and not too spacious dwelling” in a sequestered region (215); Jane Eyre and Rochester spend the rest of their lives in Ferndean, a “building of considerable antiquity, moderate size, and no architectural pretensions, deep buried in a wood” (*JE* 496); in *Shirley*, after the double marriage, both heroines witness “the manufacturer’s day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes” (541)—as planned by Robert, their entire estate and the areas surrounding it go through a rebirth, and it is as if these two couples build their new home from scratch. It is finally in *Villette*, Brontë’s last long novel, that the final home is embodied by the dolls’ house. However, it is also in this final work that the dream of domestic happiness seems to be shattered: finally living in the dolls’ house, Lucy can never actually have a family of her own, for the master of the house will never return from the sea. Like the spinsters in *Shirley*, she will be forever implanted in the small, neat, and complete house of domestic comfort—alone.

Such disillusionment with domestic happiness is not surprising, for the transiency and unpredictability of happiness in general is a prominent theme throughout *Villette*, culminating at a moment of evoking a dolls’ house, a moment of both illusion and disillusion. As this section intends to explicate, two sets of symbols concerning the two types of dolls’ houses are always present in Brontë’s works. However, the clarity of this dichotomy is often undermined by moments of epiphany, where the co-existence of both extremes suggests the complication of “object” experiences. Like the scene of Lucy in the park, where metaphors of innocence and its opposite merge, at the moment when Lucy awakens from her coma, an intimation of both types of dolls’ houses—and the metaphors they entail—surfaces. Like Jane Eyre in the red chamber, Lucy Snowe wakes up and finds herself surrounded by haunting objects:

I was puzzled, because I could not make the glimpses of furniture I saw, accord with my knowledge of any of these apartments [in the Pensionnat]. . . my eye fell on an easy chair covered with blue damask. . . Other seats, cushioned to match, *dawned on me* by degrees; and at last I took in the complete fact of a pleasant parlour, with a wood-fire on a clear-shining hearth, a carpet where arabesques of bright blue relieved a ground of shaded fawn; pale walls over which a slight but endless garland of azure forget-me-nots ran *mazed and bewildered* amongst myriad gold leaves and tendrils. A gilded mirror filled up the space between two windows, curtained amply with blue damask. (208, italics mine)

Lucy is passively acted upon by these objects: they *dawn on her*. Her sight moves curiously and gradually from single pieces of furniture to the entire space, a sign of puzzlement—indeed she is puzzled: even the garland of forget-me-nots seems “mazed and bewildered.” The lurking significance of this play on “forget-me-nots” is to be revealed later, when Lucy realizes the “auld lang syne” of the space. In the mirror, Lucy watches herself: “I saw myself laid, not in bed, but on a sofa. I looked spectral; my eyes larger and more hollow, my hair darker than was natural, by contrast with my thin and ashen face” (208). Here, Lucy’s curiosity and passivity become obvious: she sees herself *laid* on a sofa, and she looks *spectral*. Waking up in a strange place, she experiences bewilderment and a sense of helplessness.

However, Lucy gradually realizes that, although the space seems strange, the furniture within grows familiar to her:

Strange to say, old acquaintance were all about me, and “auld lang syne” smiled out of every nook. . . . Of all these things I could have told the peculiarities, numbered the flaws or cracks, like any *clairvoyante*. Above all, there was a pair of hand-screens, with elaborate pencil-drawings finished like line-engravings; these, my very eyes ached at beholding again, recalling hours when they had followed, stroke by stroke and touch by touch, a tedious, feeble, finical, school-girl pencil held in these fingers, now so skeleton like. (209)

Here Lucy, like a clairvoyant, is able to account for each object. However, the visual image is gradually transformed into tactile image, eyes tracing the pencil-drawing, done by Lucy’s own school-girl hand, stroke by stroke and touch by touch. This tactile memory exemplifies the sense of intimacy that Lucy feels towards these objects. Although the objects she recognizes are “of past days, and of a distant country” (209), they are nevertheless “precisely the same, in every minutest detail, with those [Lucy] so well remembered, and with which [she] had been so thoroughly intimate, in the drawing-room of [her] godmother’s house at Bretton” (210). The curiosity created by a displacement of space is here conspicuous. Indeed Lucy recognizes the pieces of furniture from Bretton, where “the house and its inmates specially suited [her],” where the rooms are “large” and “peaceful,” the furniture “well arranged,” and windows are “wide and clear” (5). The tininess of the furniture now in front of her seems to announce that this room is a miniature of what the Bretton estate used to be, a miniature of the house that Lucy loved so:

. . . as I gazed at the blue arm-chair, it appeared to grow familiar; so did a certain scroll-couch, and not less so the round centre-table, with a blue *covering*. . . and, above all, two *little* footstools with worked *covers*, and

a *small* ebony-framed chair, of which the seat and back were also *worked* with groups of brilliant flowers on a dark ground. . . (208, italics mine)  
Here, two sets of symbols emerge. First of all, the smallness of these pieces of furniture is obvious. According to Lucie Armitt, Lucy's response to these pieces is positive, and "Lucy's positive response here is not just to the familiar, but as with that she makes to the interior of M. Paul's 'dolls' house,' the *diminutive*" (Armitt 224, italics mine). Besides the sense of familiarity, the size of these pieces themselves introduces a feeling of warmth and endearment.

However, hidden in these pieces of furniture is another set of symbols. As George Speaight argues when considering Victorian interior design, drawing rooms are "submerged beneath a vast accumulation of feminine ingenuity. Objects were coated. . . screens were painted or worked. . . tables were painted. . . footstools were covered. . . artificial flowers were created" (Speaight 89). Armitt also notices that "the stress the passage places upon the 'worked' nature of that interior and the various 'covers' it includes" reminds us of the artifice of the projection of Lucy's self onto these objects,<sup>63</sup> as well as "those unknown aspects of what lies beneath the overwriting of Lucy's past" (Armitt 224). Along with "artificial flowers," the fad of covering up furniture gives the Victorian domestic space a sense of artificiality and formality, somewhat undermining the supposed comfort of the space. Here, such delineation seems a reminder of the unnaturalness and covertness—and thus incredibility—of Lucy's vision. While the interior of a dolls' house might reflect that of an actual Victorian home, the fact that it is a replica of the actual thing, and that it is modeled exactly upon the real house, further problematizes the naturalness and genuineness of the Victorian domestic order.

The two sets of metaphors—the familiar and comfortable versus the strange and covert—here merging in one room, indicate Brontë's ambivalence towards "home." While in her narrative the Bretton house seems Lucy's first real home, her own family receding into the background, it is never hers—the Bretton of Bretton, the family name and birthplace emphasized throughout the first page of *Villette*, is a name that Lucy Snowe does not share. Here in the blue room, the furniture seems to her both familiar and strange. She cannot believe that the happiness of the past is now materialized in front of her; she has been too hopeless to believe in true happiness,

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<sup>63</sup> Here Armitt quotes the Object Relations theory of Melanie Klein, who suggests that for children "things represent human beings," and "the projection of good feelings and good parts of the self [are] essential for the infant's ability to develop good object relations." (9)



and now, ecstatic at seeing these old friends, she is struggling between the loneliness and reservation that characterize her life and the tender sentiments that she considers an illusion and strives to avoid. Here, as elsewhere in her works, Brontë illustrates the sense of comfort and intimacy, and at the same time of trauma and bereavement, from which dolls' house imagery is inseparable.

#### IV. The Haunted Dolls' House

While the dolls' houses or dolls'-house-like spaces in Brontë illustrate at the same time her vision of domestic bliss and a traumatic experience of home—or rather the lack of a home—it is the *dolls* in the dolls' houses that really show how deeply such trauma is rooted in Brontë's writings. However, as I will discuss later, Brontë's dolls haunt the dolls' houses instead of passively resting within. The history of linking women negatively to dolls goes back a long way. According to Frances Armstrong, throughout the eighteenth century, women “were often likened to ‘babies,’ a word interchangeable with ‘dolls.’” (Armstrong n.1) This tradition can actually be traced back to even earlier years. In 1673, Bathsua Makin, for example, wrote with disapproval about women “dressing and trimming themselves like Bartholomew-babies” (Makin 30). In 1701, Mary, Lady Chudleigh reprimanded women who were “made, like puppets, to divert mankind” (Lonsdale 2). Rousseau wrote in the 1750s that a girl would eventually “be her own doll” (*Emile* 331), a statement not intended as negative, but often interpreted to be so. This discourse of comparing women to dolls continues well into the nineteenth century, and it is embodied in many fictional figures. Rosamond Lydgate in *Middlemarch*, for example, is one of the most renowned doll-like women: beautiful yet shallow, she values appearance—her own appearance as well as the appearance of an affluent household—over other things. She is ignorant in terms of moral priorities and the way a society functions. Likewise doll-like women who are beautiful yet hollow seem ubiquitous in Brontë's works: William Crimsworth shudders at the thought of marrying any one of his doll-like cousins (6), and he again contemplates the boredom that he would feel were he to join a “pretty doll” in marriage:

I know that a pretty doll, a fair fool might do well enough for the honeymoon—but when passion cooled, how dreadful to find a lump of wax and wood laid in my bosom, a half idiot clasped in my arms, and to remember that I had made of this my equal—nay my idol, to know that I must pass the rest of my dreary life with a creature incapable of

understanding what I said, of appreciating what I thought or of sympathizing with what I felt! (*Professor* 90).

Shirley also complains that, for men, the good woman is “a queer thing, half doll, half angel”; “fine” and “divine” as these doll-like women may be, they are, to Shirley’s point of view, “often quite artificial—false as the rose in [her] best bonnet” (*Shirley* 296). Such women seem to be embodied in the Misses Sykes, who visit the Helstones one afternoon. Mr. Helstone likes to see women who are “as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible” (99), and they are merely “toys to play with, to amuse a vacant hour and to be thrown away” (100), and for that reason he enjoys the company of Hannah Sykes, who permits herself “to be treated quite like a doll, a child, a plaything”; with her, he actually feels “tempted to commit matrimony a second time” (100). It is worth noting that, in Brontë, these doll-like women are set against domestic environments. They are considered suitable (or unsuitable, as in William Crimsworth’s case) companions in marriage, for they seem most at home in scenarios of dolls’-house-like domestic perfection.

In comparison with these doll-like women, another type of doll in Brontë’s works reveals how deeply the sense of death, of homelessness, and of bereavement, is ingrained in her imagination of the domestic environment. These are the dolls that *haunt* the dolls’ house instead of *living* blankly in it. In the chapter on waxworks, I contemplated the bodies of Brontëan heroines, which are curious for being alive and dead at the same time; their uncanny resemblance to waxworks and the Pygmalion statue is precisely what enables them to be seen as marriageable women who are capable of bringing forth domestic happiness. Here, I seek to explicate further the Brontëan domestic space by examining the doll-like girls haunting the “home.” In *Jane Eyre*, even a passage associated with an actual doll seems to be suggestive. In the festive seasons in Gateshead Jane is often alone with only the companionship of her doll:

I . . . sat with my doll on my knee, till the fire got low, glancing round occasionally to make sure that nothing worse than myself haunted the shadowy room; and when the embers sank to a dull red, I undressed hastily, tugging at knots and strings as I best might, and sought shelter from cold and darkness in my crib. To this crib I always took my doll; human beings must love something, and, in the dearth of worthier objects of affection, I contrived to find a pleasure in loving and cherishing a faded graven image, shabby as a miniature scarecrow. (35)

With the lifeless doll on her knee, Jane looks around constantly in order to make sure that “nothing worse than herself” haunts the room. The link between the Jane that

haunts the room and the doll that she “half fancies” to be alive is further rendered obvious when Jane admits that she “could not sleep unless it was folded in [her] night-gown” and that when the doll lies there “safe and warm” she is “comparatively happy, believing it to be happy likewise” (35). The doll can neither feel “safe and warm” nor happy, so it is quite obvious that Jane has projected herself onto the poor raggedy thing. This is the same girl who has looked into the mirror of the red room and found there a “strange little figure” with “a white face and arms specking the gloom” and “glittering eyes of fear,” a figure that looks like “a real spirit” or one of the “tiny phantoms” in Bessie’s stories (18).

Jane’s childhood comes back to haunt her time and time again: her imprisonment in the red room is echoed by that of Rochester’s attic-bound wife, the starvation she has experienced in Lowood later reappears en route in her escape from Rochester, and her incessant search for a home originates from the lack of one in her childhood. Yet Jane the child is herself haunting the domestic space. In the scene where she projects herself onto the doll—the object that she dotes on as if it is her only family—the uncanny impression of a girl haunting the room emerges. This sense of eeriness—this uncanny link between the little girl and the doll, both haunting the domestic space—again surfaces in *Villette*. Little Polly is apparently doll-like—sitting on Mrs. Bretton’s lap, she “looked a mere doll; her neck, delicate as wax, her head of silky curls, increased. . . the resemblance” (9)—and she is repeatedly described in diminutive terms. Lucy watches her with curiosity:

I watched Polly rest her *small* elbow on her *small* knee, her head on her hand; I observed her draw a square-inch or two of pocket-handkerchief from the *doll-pocket* of her *doll-skirt*, and then I heard her weep. Other children in grief or pain cry aloud, without shame or restraint; but this being wept: the *tiniest* occasional sniff testified to her emotion. (10, italics mine)

It is not uncommon that a little girl is compared to a doll, yet this doll seems somewhat different. While other children cry aloud, she simply weeps. According to Lucie Armitt, such “enforced and unsettling miniaturism” recalls “the trend (first initiated by the Victorians) to domesticate the sprite or fairy, struggling to tame both by a reduction in stature to that of ‘girl-child’.” (Armitt 219) This popular Victorian connection further strengthens the bizarreness of Little Polly’s demeanor. Again that night, Lucy notices that, lying in bed, Little Polly still weeps, yet she weeps “under restraint, quietly and cautiously” (11).

Lucy again notices such peculiarity when she watches the child hemming a piece of handkerchief:

When I say *child* I use an inappropriate and undescriptive term—a term suggesting any picture rather than that of the demure little person in a mourning frock and white chemisette, that might just have fitted a good-sized doll—perched now on a high chair beside a stand, whereon was her toy work-box of white varnished wood, and holding in her hands a shred of a handkerchief, which she was professing to hem. . . (18, original italics)

Meanwhile, she is “silent, diligent, absorbed, womanly” (19). It becomes obvious that the uncanniness of Polly comes from the discrepancy between her appearance and her attitude: while she looks like a doll, her demeanor resembles that of a woman. She even performs household chores with a diligence unfit for her age: once Lucy watches her moping and she finds the child’s face growing “old and unearthly.” “I, Lucy Snowe,” she admits, not without dread, “plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination; but whenever, opening a room-door, I found her seated in a corner alone, her head on her pigmy hand, that room seemed to me not inhabited, but haunted” (14). Again, the imagery of a doll/girl is linked to the imagery of the ghost—both uncanny yet both *domestic*.

In the cases of both young Jane and Little Polly, it is the dolls’-house-like domesticity that is haunted—haunted by an intruder. Both Jane Eyre and Little Polly are involuntarily situated in spaces that exude domestic comfort, yet these spaces are not their homes. The sense of estrangement is embodied by the imagery of haunting dolls, the supposedly most intimate object in a nursery becomes here a source of eerie discomfort, juxtaposed with a little girl. Here, Lucie Armitt’s interesting analysis of the irony inherent in Polly Home’s name seems apposite: in Armitt’s viewpoint there is “an explicit irony attendant in [Little Polly’s] naming, one most fully brought out in relation to Polly’s mother who, of course, in becoming estranged from her husband, similarly starts to bear a fractured relationship to the patronymic ‘Home’” (Armitt 220). She further argues that

Clearly Mrs. Home. . . is no longer “at home” and nor is little Polly. Neither is this mother “homely” (either in the sense of being domesticated or plain in appearance). In gothic terms we can extend this identification to claim that a woman who is not *heimlich* / homely must, by definition, be *unheimlich* / uncanny, and hence capable of haunting. (220)

Entangled in both the separation from a father, with whom she has an unusually intimate relationship perhaps typical between a widowed father and his motherless

daughter, and the loss of a mother who has never proffered her any maternal love, Paulina Home is now homeless and is also *unheimlich*/uncanny. Metaphors of domesticity, ghosts, and dolls/little girls are entangled in Brontë's works.

While Little Polly the doll is inseparable from Little Polly the ghost, another doll-like creature also haunts Lucy's reclusive world. The phantasmal black-and-white nun that Lucy repeatedly runs into later proves to be Alfred de Hamal in disguise. De Hamal's resemblance to a doll is noteworthy. Lucy's first impression of him is quite telling:

He was a straight-nosed, very correct-featured, *little* dandy. I say little dandy, though he was not beneath the middle standard in stature; but his lineaments were small, and so were his hands and feet; and he was pretty and smooth, and as trim as a doll: so nicely dressed, so nicely curled, so booted and gloved and cravated—he was charming indeed. (180-81, original italics)

This very same Colonel-Count is later on referred to by Lucy as “the doll—the puppet—the manikin—the poor inferior creature” (183). The three successive nouns delineating the image of Alfred de Hamal obviously share similar traits: artificiality, soullessness, and lack of character. A man is seldom described as a doll, yet here the comparison is appropriate. De Hamal is pretty much feminized throughout Lucy's narrative: his words are never heard except by being indirectly recounted in a summary, and, as an aristocrat, he serves no more purpose than being Ginevra's trophy husband. Even after their marriage, de Hamal is still only mentioned in Ginevra's letters to Lucy, in which he is depicted with “ominous murmurings” because of his inability to pay off his own debts (596). Besides resembling a doll, he is also not so different from the Brontës' wooden soldiers. Aside from the fact that Alfred de Hamal is an empty and faceless character whose voice is almost never heard, the doll imagery goes hand in hand with the fact that it is him—in the disguise of the nun—who haunts Lucy. De Hamal the doll is inseparable from the ghost-like nun, who, as this thesis discusses in the previous chapter, appears repeatedly at crucial moments in Lucy's love life. As the apparition of the nun is coupled with the story of an actual girl buried alive, the intimation of death/ghost is unquestionable. Although here it is no longer the dolls' house that the doll haunts, and, instead of a little girl, the doll is a man “not beneath the middle standard in stature,” still the connection between the imagery of a doll and that of a phantom is conspicuous, and this doll/phantom is again inseparable from Lucy's quest for a home.

It is not surprising that for Charlotte Brontë dolls always seem to haunt the domestic space. As Kate E. Brown suggests, Charlotte Brontë's writing career "literally began as a memorial to her sisters" with the toy soldiers and the stories they inspired. Such storytelling with toys resembles the process of playing house: in both cases, a form of creativity and imagination is played out upon the basis of objects—miniature objects modeled upon the real world. As noted earlier, these objects mark the end of the mourning period for her sisters' deaths. Maria—and her death—is fundamental to Charlotte's writings: one example is Helen Burns, the literary counterpart of Maria Brontë. Also, as Brown points out, critics "tend to read Maria's death as reviving the death of her mother, also named Maria" (Brown 407).<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Brown argues that the death of a sibling "fractures the family," and such loss imposes on the mourner "an identification with the lost one that is enforced both by physical resemblance and by shared circumstances" (Brown 407). Also, because the death of a sibling "casts a dismaying light on the parents, rupturing the fantasy of parental invulnerability without in any way mitigating the child's dependence on that still powerful but now also dangerously impotent authority," so the remaining child feels "compelled to compensate the parent for the lost child" and thus becomes "necessarily both double and ghostlike" (Brown 407). Indeed, Charlotte somehow became a double of her deceased sisters—she blamed her own physical smallness on the poor conditions at Cowan Bridge School, the exposure to which had also killed her own sisters; she further claimed that she never grew after her sisters' deaths (Brown 407).<sup>65</sup> Having stopped growing after Maria's death, Charlotte Brontë's own body has forever remained a miniature of what she could have been, for she has become a living memento of her sisters. Like Paulina, who according to her own father has grown "neither. . . in wisdom nor in stature" during her ten-year absence from the story (349), Brontë remained doll-sized.

I do not agree with Lucie Armitt in "Haunted Childhood in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*" that "Polly's main narrative function is to cast reflected light upon Lucy's past" (217), and that ghosts in Brontë's works are merely "narrative decoys, distractions deflecting attention from something else" (218). I would argue that the

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<sup>64</sup> For examples see Winifred Gerin, *Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) and Robert Keefe, *Charlotte Brontë's World of Death* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1979).

<sup>65</sup> Harriet Martineau recalls as such in the obituary of Charlotte Brontë, which is published in the *Daily News* in 1855 and later reprinted in E. M. Delafield, *The Brontës: Their Lives Recorded by Their Contemporaries* (London: Hogarth Press, 1935), 246-50.

haunting dolls are themselves very direct representations of Brontë's complicated emotional reaction to her sisters' deaths. The toy soldiers mark the mourning process of the remaining Brontë children, and, as argued by Kate Brown in "Beloved Objects," it is in the very materiality of these toy soldiers—their smallness, that is—that the loss can be somewhat compensated. Furthermore, the toy soldiers share similar traits with dolls in that they are *objects* with human appearance, and are thus situated between the living and the dead. The Angrians, whose bodies derive from the wooden soldiers, are "magnificently voluptuous and flawlessly beautiful," and they "justify their material wealth by their own physical splendor," so their bodies are "always wholly and immediately equivalent to value. . . . The value and meaning of the self is written on the surface of the body" (Brown 402). Such depiction can easily be shared by dolls and toy soldiers. It is thus significant that, years after the deaths of Charlotte's sisters, she dreamt of the return of the deceased: "they were changed," she said, "they had forgotten what they used to care for. They were very fashionably dressed, and began criticizing the room, etc." (Mary Taylor's letter to Elizabeth Gaskell, Gaskell 132). Dressed up like dolls, Charlotte's deceased sisters complained about the domestic space where they had once lived. According to Brown, this is "a vision of the dead as Angrian, 'splendidly, magnificently voluptuous' in their expectation of luxury, coldly intolerant of want or imperfection" (Brown 411).<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, one of Charlotte Brontë's narrators in her juvenilia claims,

I like high life: I like its manners, its splendors, its luxuries, the beings which move in its enchanted sphere. . . . Let fools talk about the artificial, voluptuous, idle existences spun out by dukes, lords, ladies, knights and squires of high degree. . . . Voluptuous they are to a proverb, splendidly, magnificently voluptuous, but not inactive, not unnatural. (*HLIV* 2:2:4, qtd. in Brown 402)

Given the material nature of the wooden soldiers, from whom these tales were generated, it is only apposite that the Angrian bodies are as such. Here Charlotte's dead come back not to haunt her, but to vex her by being as impenetrable and superficial as the Angrians—or, as dolls. While the shadow of death was indeed more present in Brontë's life than in those of many people of her time, death was nevertheless prevalent in the nineteenth-century imagination, so much so that it was even acted out in child-play. According to Miriam Formanek-Brunell in *Made to Play House: Dolls and the Commercialization of American Girlhood, 1830-1930*,

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<sup>66</sup> For the discussion of the characteristics of the Angrians, see Brown 402-3.

In a change from sparse and somber colonial funereal customs, late nineteenth-century Americans (following Queen Victoria's lead) romanticized grief and burial practices. Mourning was demarcated by shades of black dresses, stationery, and other mourning accoutrements. . . . To middle-class parents in the second half of the nineteenth century, that children devised imaginary and miniaturized funerals was not seen as evidence of a morbid preoccupation with death. As a result, adults encouraged rather than discouraged the doll death ceremonies their daughters conducted. . . . Fathers constructed doll-sized coffins for their daughters' dolls instead of what we consider the more usual dollhouses. (20)

Death became part of the child-play associated with dolls and dolls' houses. Charlotte Brontë was not alone in associating dolls with death.

## V. The Dolls' House Doll: The Sense of Impotence in Brontë's Texts

Given the haunting doll imagery surrounding the deaths of Charlotte's mother and sisters, it is not surprising that a sense of powerlessness, associated with the inevitability and irrevocability of such familial loss, is likewise represented with the powerlessness of dolls'-house dolls. According to Armstrong, "dollhouse furnishings" were often "much more successfully miniaturized than houses," and this "tended to show up dolls' inadequacies by contrast," for, "surrounded by realistically detailed small accessories, dolls appear awkward, unstable, and inflexible" (43). E. F. Benson also asserts that "the only voluntary and self-impelled movement a Doll can make is to fall down" (Benson and Weaver 163). Such inability is one of the most frequent themes for Brontë. In *Villette*, for example, when a heroine looks into a mirror, she more often than not sees herself manipulated like a doll. On the day of Mme. Beck's fête, Lucy is required to dress like a man for her part in the vaudeville, and she refuses to do so, especially when Zélie St. Pierre, the coquettish French teacher with whom Lucy feels least in harmony, claims that she is to dress Lucy herself (171). Lucy's strong protest against being dressed as a man somehow brings into question Charlotte Brontë's role as a woman writer in a man's world, a world in which she chooses to publish under a male pseudonym, a world in which she begins her writing career with the voices of male narrators, reincarnated from wooden soldiers. Brontë's works reflect such compromise and sense of impotence; thus autonomy and perseverance on Lucy's part is gradually altered as she steps further and further into the society in *Villette*. When she is again required to be dressed by hands not her own—this time the hands of her godmother—she has no choice but to



acquiesce. Having agreed to attend a concert with the Brettons, Lucy is surprised to see the pink dress prepared for her, yet she can only consent to it without any objections:

Without any force at all, I found myself led and influenced by another's will, unconsulted, unpersuaded, quietly over-ruled. In short the pink dress went on, softened by some drapery of black lace. I was pronounced to be en grande tenue, and requested to look in the glass. I did so with some fear and trembling; with more fear and trembling, I turned away. (260)

Seeing herself dressed by her godmother in the mirror is quite unsettling. The “fear and trembling” are consequences of her being situated in a position not her own, being involuntarily dressed in a way which, according to herself, disagrees with her quiet nature. The passive tense repeatedly adopted in the passage further reinforces the impression of powerlessness. Later in the concert, when Lucy sees herself and the Brettons in a great mirror, she “believe[s] them all strangers,” for she does not recognize herself. The recognition of her own image then brings “a jar of discord, a pang of regret” (262), for she does not like her own image at all—it stands in front of her, a walking evidence of both her own misplacement in the environment and her powerlessness. It is with the same powerless feeling that she sees herself “laid, not in bed, but on a sofa” in a mirror when she resuscitates from her coma (208). When Lucy wakes up not knowing where she is, the sense of dislocation and powerlessness asserts itself again. Reflected in the mirror, Lucy experiences a sense of impotence with acute self-consciousness.

Lucy Snowe is not alone in this situation. Little Polly too experiences such disquieting incapacity. One night Graham jokingly lifts her up, which piques her:

. . . he caught her up with one hand, and with that one hand held her poised aloft above his head. She saw herself thus lifted up on high, in the glass over the fireplace. The suddenness, the freedom, the disrespect of the action were too much.

“For shame, Mr. Graham!” was her indignant cry, “put me down!”—and when again on her feet, “I wonder what you would think of me if I were to treat you in that way, lifting you with my hand. . . as Warren lifts the little cat?” (21)

While Lucy watches her own powerlessness with silence, here Little Polly explicitly enunciates her anxiety. Like a cat—or rather like a toy—she is lifted up and maneuvered.

The anxiety that Little Polly verbalizes is not surprising from Brontë, since its materialization in Brontë's works can be traced back to her juvenilia, where the

characters are reincarnations of wooden soldiers, and their bodies—splendidly clad, perfect, and superficial—resemble not merely the wooden soldiers, but also dolls. In “A Romantic Tale,” a travel narrative in which the twelve heroes go through a series of adventures, an incident takes place in “the palace of the Genii” and clearly portrays the vulnerability of the heroes:

The Genius led us into a hall of sapphire in which were thrones of gold. On the thrones sat the Princes of the Genii. In the midst of the hall hung a lamp like the sun. Around it stood genii and fairies without, whose robes were of beaten gold sparkling with diamonds. As soon as their chiefs saw us they sprang up from their thrones, and one of them seizing Arther Wellesley exclaimed, “This is the Duke of Wellington!” (*EW* i. 14)

These last words, echoing Charlotte in the 1829 “History,” strike the reader with the realization that the mighty Prince of the Genii is the young author herself, and the heroes with whom the reader identifies are nothing more than wooden toy soldiers. The theme of impotence conjured by a sense of non-existence—embodied in the material body of a toy—is quite conspicuous here. It is noteworthy that, in Brontë’s juvenilia, where the author embodies herself in beings almighty, she is always presented as physically male. Like the pseudonyms the Brontës later adopted, the creators of Angria are always “Princes” of the Genii. Gender roles in Brontë’s works are elusive, for, from the very start of her writing career, Brontë adopted male voices—voices which, judging from the sarcasm with which she writes,<sup>67</sup> she knowingly thought of as disguises.

Another incident in the Angrian tales further illustrates the sense of powerlessness that recurs throughout Brontë’s works, and it explicates the self-conscious impotence that tortures Brontë’s heroines as they look into the mirror. Here again the author is represented as male. A story entitled “Strange Events” (1830) chronicles an incident experienced by Lord Charles Wellesley, Charlotte’s favorite narrator. As he sits in the public library one day, indulging in a modish sense of ennui, his thoughts wander into a rather curious state and he suddenly feels like “a non-existent shadow,” as if he “neither spoke, eat, imagined or lived of [himself], but [he] was the mere idea of some other creature’s brain” (*EW* I:257). Mentally lingering in

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<sup>67</sup> As Heather Glen points out, the writings of Glass Town are narrated “through the voices of fictional personae, who are sharply and variously characterized and often mockingly seen. Within the fictional world these personae become the objects of one another’s admiring or critical regard: their viewpoints are questioned and ironized, their limitations made clear” (10).

such a frightening state of mind for hours, Lord Charles suddenly feels himself raised to the ceiling:

. . . ere I was aware, [I] behold two immense, sparkling, bright blue gloves within a few yards of me. I was in [a] hand wide enough almost to grasp the Tower of All Nations, and when it lowered me to the floor I saw a huge personification of myself—hundreds of feet high—standing against the great Oriel. (*EW* I:258)

He then clearly expresses his despair:

This filled me with a weight of astonishment greater than the mind of man ever before had to endure, and I was now perfectly convinced of my non-existence except in another corporeal frame which dwelt in the real world, for ours, I thought, was nothing but idea. (*EW* I:258)

Here, the Lord meets his maker, who appears to be “a huge personification of himself”—indeed in Brontë’s later works this ultimate sense of impotence in the face of one’s own *gestalt* is evoked in *mirrored* reflections. Strangely, here the “personification” of Lord Charles Wellesley is actually a teenage girl. As Lord Charles Wellesley faces an almost Lacanian moment, where he becomes an other in the face of a mightier and more complete image of himself, Brontë’s heroines see their own bodies reflected as powerless and diminished. Given the identification mechanism in Brontë’s works, the gender shift seems quite natural.

While Brontë’s later stories are set against realistic domestic environments instead of the fantastic world of the Glass Town, a sense of incapability still prevails, though chronicled in a less supernatural way. Throughout Brontë’s writing career, the existential crisis depicted in “Strange Events” gradually grows more specific; it becomes clear that her utmost fear, articulated as physical inferiority and a sense of impotence in “Strange Events,” is a fear more personal, closer to home. Heather Glen points out that Brontë’s childhood was one

more shadowed than most by that ultimate proof of human impotence, the fact of mortality: a childhood spent in a house surrounded by graves, in a place in which more than 40 per cent of the population died before reaching the age of 6, and in a family that had lost three of its eight members. . . by the time the writer reached the age of 9. (Glen 18)

The experiences of such a childhood mark the beginning of Brontë’s writing career; it is no wonder that it is from the inevitability of death that her works draw nourishment and inspiration. Buried underneath Lord Charles’s ennui and his fear of non-existence is in fact Charlotte’s acknowledgement of her own powerlessness in the face of the deaths of her mother and sisters. Thus, whether expressed as a wooden soldier coming face to face with his own existence—which, by the way, is a teenage girl—or

as ghostlike dolls haunting the dolls' house, Brontë's hero(in)es actualize the innermost despair of an incomplete family with their doll-like body images. It is through coping with death that Brontë has set out to create imaginative works, and it is via the image of the doll—that endearing object whose body challenges the boundaries between the living and the dead, the human Subject and the “thing,” and the Lilliputian and the Brobdingnagian, as in “Strange Events”—that both the grief of bereavement and the (somewhat reluctant) channeling of such grief can be manifested.

While the bodies of wooden soldiers share similarities with dolls, the world within the Glass Town Saga resembles a dolls' house. In both, time remains still, and in both, through physical smallness, a world of infinite space and possibilities is created. Although Brontë bid farewell to her Angria in 1839, the curiosity created by such a world, along with the shadow of death looming behind it, lives on in her imagery of dolls' houses and haunting dolls. In her analysis of the relationship between Charlotte Brontë's writings and the famously/notoriously sensational paintings of John Martin, Christine Alexander suggests that Charlotte might have “thought of becoming a miniaturist, painting tiny portraits, scenes, and flowers for ornamental use,” for “[h]er extreme short-sightedness and her large number of surviving pencil and watercolor portraits suggest this possibility” (299). Given the physical size of the books of the Angrian saga, this conjecture is far from invalid. Characterized also by such small scale, the dolls' house as a site of both still life and still death, both creativity and petrification, is a quite conspicuous presence in Brontë's works. This chapter has traced the imagery of the dolls' house in Brontë—the curious space where the relativity of size is interrogated and domestic comfort coexists with a sense of stagnation—in order to illuminate her seemingly ambiguous delineation of home, and in turn illustrate how “domesticity,” and the shadow of death always threatening to disrupt it, is central to her work. Her ambivalence towards the concept of home is embodied by the curious dolls' house, a space replicating actual domestic spaces yet never actually inhabited; a space at once small and gigantic, both cold and endearing.

## Illustrations

Hunt, William Holman. *The Awakening Conscience*. 1853.

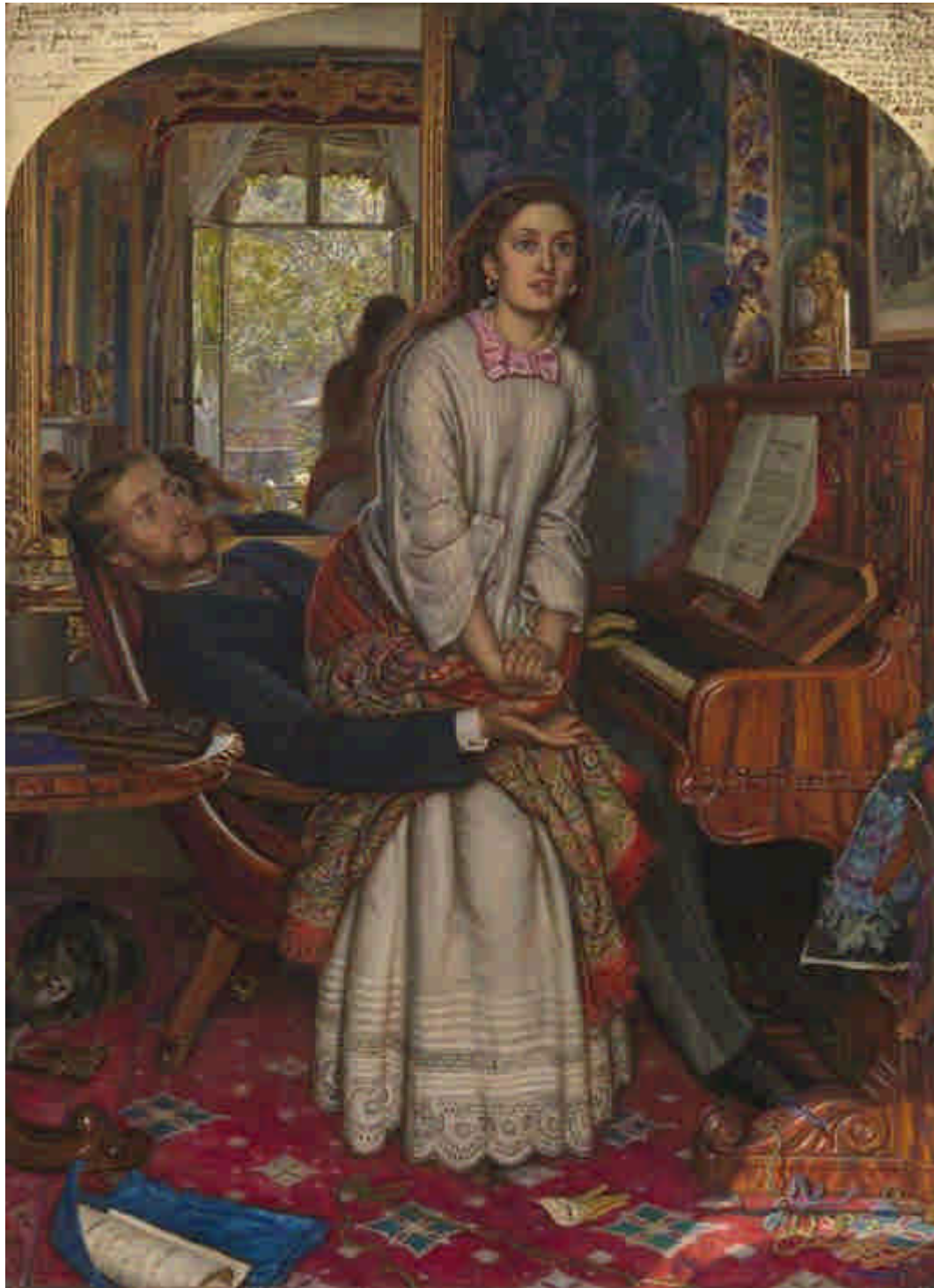


Fig. 1↑ William Holman Hunt, *The Awakening Conscience*, 1853.

## Conclusion

### Final Thoughts

Charlotte Brontë's dolls' houses, with all their associations with death, intimacy, and timelessness, resembles Walter Benjamin's snow globe. Esther Leslie writes about Walter Benjamin's two 1930 radio lectures for children, in which he talks about his childhood toys. Among these toys, Benjamin was especially fascinated by snow globes, which he still collects as an adult. Being, as Theodor Adorno says, among Walter Benjamin's favorite objects, those "small glass balls containing a landscape upon which snow fell when shook" (Adorno 233) perfectly embody Benjamin's fascination with "petrified, frozen, or obsolete elements of civilization" (233). A dolls' house, modeling upon historical houses, also preserves a piece of civilization already obsolete. The *nature morte*, still life or dead life, under glass is as frozen, permanent, and dead as it is alive—for the seemingly petrified objects, protected by the glass and becoming thus timeless, are remnants of a history that has terminated yet has also been kept on-going. "The snow globe is a curious object," writes Leslie,

[c]ontradictions are concentrated in it. It contains a world under glass. . . and, as such, the scene inside is untouchable, but the globe itself exists precisely to be grasped in the hand. . . . It is miniature and cosmic. It is personal and mass. It is kitsch and sublime. It is for contemplation and for play. . . . The snow globe meddles somehow with the edge between life and lifelessness. . . (3)

Most of these "contradictions" can be readily applied to dolls' houses without major alterations. Furthermore, I think the image of a snow globe serves here as an appropriate metaphor that encompasses and concludes the curiosity in *things* I have discussed thus far in this thesis. Kept in a static state, when being seen and touched the souvenirs revive memories, memories of things, people, and events no longer present: memories of a dead past. Such process resembles that of the snow globe when being shaken: containing a world seemingly still, the snow globe comes alive with proper tactile motion. The interrogation between life and death, the animate and the inanimate again recalls the "waxworks" chapter, and the preservation of things in an eternal state of perfection echoes the "garden" chapter. Another totemic "object" that seems to be able to encompass the different senses of curiosity this thesis deliberated upon is Snow White in the glass coffin. Like the anatomical Venuses, her body seems to be both living and dead: while the Venuses are objects mimicking dead human bodies, she is a living person resembling a corpse. Furthermore, her dormant state perfectly preserves her innocence like a Wardian case, and her sexuality is thus

invisible until her future husband awakens her: much like a Pygmalion statue. The preservation of innocence is here essential, for it is her Eve-like curiosity that directly leads to such crisis: she has taken bites at the fruits offered to her three times before being trapped in a state of sleep. It is also worthy of note that when the Prince comes, he sees Snow White and reads what was written in golden letters on the glass coffin<sup>68</sup> before he makes up his mind to carry the glass case, with Snowdrop inside, home. For him, she is readily portable and purchasable: a displayed piece of curiosity.

The similarity that the snow globe and Snow White share—besides the element of snow—is glass as a medium of preservation and display. In the introduction of this thesis, Isobel Armstrong’s discussions of Victorian glass culture were evoked in order to explicate the sense of “curiosity” involved in mid-nineteenth-century visual experience. In Charlotte Brontë’s world examined throughout this thesis, things literally or metaphorically “behind glass” emerge from time to time, exemplifying the sense of curiosity I have hitherto discussed. As a screening device, a medium, a preservation container, glass keeps things beyond the reach of their viewers while emphasizing their value as objects of visual attention: curious objects meant to be looked at, studied, and revered. Glass distances the viewer from a world of still life, purity, and eternal youth; yet it also contains a world of death and petrification. Thus the sense of curiosity created by defamiliarization and ambiguity can be manifested through glass.

Intriguingly, Brontë’s juvenilia center on the African kingdom of Glass Town, whose name possibly comes from the grand Niger in which its own image is mirrored. It is:

The Queen of the Earth, who looks down on her majestic face mirrored in the noble Niger and sees the far reflection of her valley and her turrets caught by the flashing Guadima and flung with beauty unimaginable on the glass that her harbour gives her. (*EW II:2:241*).

Not only do these early writings thus participate in what Isobel Armstrong terms “glass culture,” but the kingdom itself resembles a gigantic snow globe: the timelessness of the city-state itself, the never-ending nature of the adventures of its heroes, as well as the seemingly on-going life within, are all suggestive of the world within a snow globe. In the later part of Brontë’s juvenilia, however, as she focuses more and more on the Byronic aspect of her hero, the world she delineates also seems to turn from a time-less snow globe to the ambiguous Babylon or a fallen Eden.

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<sup>68</sup> From Edgar Taylor’s translation of the Brothers Grimms’s collected tales.



Zamorna, an oriental despot and her Byronic hero, has a “basilisk’s fascination” for women, he is a “haughty serpent, concealing under his glittering and crested pride a sting of such deadly venom” (*EW* II:2:17). Her heroines fall under his charms and dress themselves in uniform black satin with scarlet flowers: they form “a splendid bouquet for Beelzebub, a magnificent regiment of Lucifer’s own raising” (*EW* II:2:342). Such connections to Eden, or rather anti-Eden, is echoed throughout Brontë’s later novels. In her early writings, the ambiguities of change/timelessness, innocence/corruption, the gigantic/the miniature are already incorporated.

### **Findings: Summary**

Throughout this thesis, ambiguities surrounding Charlotte Brontë’s heroines are examined via discussions of curious things and spaces in Brontë’s texts as well as the sense of curiosity / curiousness as it was in mid-nineteenth century England. In order to consolidate familial relations, upon whose basis the social structure was based, the role of Victorian woman became essential, for in the separate spheres it was the woman who occupied and managed the domestic space. “Keeping up appearance” became a crucial lesson in female education: as Maria Edgeworth’s *Lady Delacour* states towards the end of *Belinda*, “What signifies being happy, unless we appear so?” (478). The ambiguities surrounding the Victorian woman are a result of such a demanding task: in order to maintain domestic happiness, or at least the appearance of it, she has to be both an angel in the house and a physically attractive mortal; she has to be practical, functional, diligent in the house, while keeping an appearance of innocence and grace. By taking the element of “curiosity” as a vantage point, this thesis thus intends to illuminate further these ambiguities. As “curiosity” entails either a sense of defamiliarization or a paradoxical co-existence of opposites, in each chapter an issue of paradox is contemplated through a type of nineteenth-century exhibition space, in which curious objects or sights are displayed. This thesis aims to explicate the paradoxes inherent in the image of Brontëan women and the domestic space they inhabit, with the hope of illuminating the mid-nineteenth-century background against which Brontë’s texts were written.

In the first chapter, the imagery of curiosity cabinets surrounding Charlotte Brontë’s heroines is examined. The enclosed, private spaces inhabited by the Brontëan heroine, where she hoards / hides things, can be seen as a reflection of her own person. In Brontë’s narration these private spaces become inseparable from their

female owner; the sense of control over her, either self-control or external control, is enforced upon the space she inhabits. In other words, by inspecting and arranging these “curiosity cabinets,” one seeks to observe, influence, or have power over the women to whom they belong. Besides these spaces, the souvenirs kept by the heroines within small, enclosed spaces are also examined. Not only are they defamiliarized and thus rendered curious throughout the texts, they denote an ambiguous attitude that Brontë’s heroines have towards romantic love. Hidden from sight, these souvenirs are buried, metaphorically or literally, in order for the memories they carry to live on. Given the relationship between the Brontëan heroine and her cabinets of curiosities, these enclosed souvenirs serve a symbolic function: like an idolater, she feels “both too much pain and too much pleasure” towards her beloved, and she chooses to bury her feelings for the sake of protection. It is only in hidden-ness that her world can stay uninterrupted, uncontaminated, and unharmed. For Brontë herself, hidden-ness entails empowerment: hiding behind her public persona and a male pseudonym, she is able to develop a successful writing career. This chapter establishes the allegorical relationship between Brontëan heroine and her things—especially the things curiously removed from their original context and preserved in an enclosed space.

The second chapter examines the ambiguous sense of “innocence” surrounding the Brontëan heroine by examining the garden imagery in Brontë’s text and mid-nineteenth-century gardens: pleasure gardens, urban plantations, and the Wardian case. At mid-century, as the old England was metamorphosing into its modern form, a nostalgic longing for the past co-existed with the hope of a new future brought forth by civilization. Under such an atmosphere the metaphorical relationship between garden and Eden was changing, which was reflected in the changing forms of nineteenth-century gardens; thus the concept of innocence in turn became ambiguous. Depicted often as Eves in garden scenes, Brontë’s heroines no longer resemble the ignorant and child-like prototype: their innocence remains intact because of their discretion, although they are experienced through the understandings of worldly affairs, human desire, and difficulties of life. While the Wardian case popular at the time brought forth a set of metaphors that echoes the tendency of nineteenth-century discourse to keep women in an impossible state of “perpetual babyism,” Brontë’s heroines render such discourse problematic. This chapter discusses the ambiguity

inherent in the concept of innocence via examining the curious garden scenes and actual nineteenth-century gardens.

The third chapter contemplates the body shape of Brontë's heroines and nineteenth-century female ideal via discussing nineteenth-century shows of waxworks and the Pygmalion myth. Slim and petite, the Brontëan heroine has the potential to gain flesh and metaphorically "come alive" like Pygmalion's statue; furthermore, for the Brontëan heroine such a process is reversible. When she is deprived of the hope of domestic happiness, she again pines away. Such versatility makes her similar to a wax figure, whose shape can be changed at will. Such versatility corresponds to the Victorian ideal: the perfect woman should be both the angel in the house and a fleshy, blushing, and flirtatious fairy; she should be sexually responsive, but only for her destined mate. Through the metaphor of waxworks, the Brontëan heroine is represented as both animated and inanimate, both dead and alive. Such curious quality sets her apart from other stereotypical women and aligns her with the Victorian ideal.

In the last chapter, Brontë's attitude towards domesticity is explored through the imagery of dolls' house. There were two types of dolls houses: the collector's item and the children's toy. The former is meant to be looked at: it is always cold and glamorous; although it looks like a house, no signs of inhabitation can be found. The latter is filled with traces of touch, and each piece of furniture seems intimate. In Brontë's texts these two types of dolls' houses co-exist, intimating her ambiguous attitude towards home. Due to the early death of her mother and most of her siblings, Brontë's home has always been incomplete. Like Brontë herself, the heroines in her texts always long to have a home of their own, with the feeling of death and frustration always looming behind—this attitude is clearly illustrated by the Angrian saga, Brontë's early writings. Through the curious space of the dolls' house, this chapter aims to explicate the ambiguity inherent in Brontë's delineation of home.

### **Contribution, Limitation, and Aspiration**

This thesis initiated with the hope of solving the following questions: why exhibitions and shows reach their peak in the nineteenth century? What did curiosity mean in Victorian England, and how did such sense of curiosity influence the social milieu? How do Brontë's texts respond to and reflect such curiosity? In order to answer these questions, this thesis focuses especially on the material culture, on the

curious things displayed and the relationship between them and Victorian women. In different aspects, the four chapters tackle with the elements of ambiguity—and thus the blurring of boundaries—inherent in the nineteenth-century sense of curiosity. The “cabinet of curiosities” chapter points out the ambiguity inseparable from the nineteenth-century façades and the well-acknowledged discrepancy between the facades and what lies behind them. The “garden” chapter examines the ambiguity involved in the concept of innocence. The “waxworks” chapter seeks to unravel the fascination with the ambiguity between the living and the dead. The “dolls’ house” chapter sums up the ambiguities throughout Brontë’s texts by analysing her ambiguitous attitude towards home, which is on the one hand permeated by the atmosphere of death discussed in the “waxworks” chapter and on the other hand inseparable from the sense of escapism and reservation established in the discussions on Wardian cases. Furthermore, as the established façades highlighted in the “cabinets of curiosities” chapter endow the Brontëan heroines with marriageability and Brontë herself with hidden power, within the dolls’ house space a sense of domestic happiness is not only displayed, but also impossibly reserved, against the ever-changing world without.

According to Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins, from the 1990s and “well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” four areas of study have focused intensely on objects: “anthropology and material culture studies, science and technology studies, technoculture and digital media, and critical theory and philosophy” (OR 4). This thesis is more concerned with the material culture studies. Daniel Miller also contemplates the increased interest in objects towards the end of the twentieth century and points out that Pierre Bourdieu (1977) established the significance of everyday things in socialization and that Arjun Appadurai (1986) argues that things have social lives of their own. According to Miller, Bourdieu and Appadurai’s writings instigated “a variety of approaches to the issue of materiality, varying from material culture as analogous with text to applications of social psychological models (Miller 3). Christopher Pinney, on the other hand, refutes the sociological approaches suggested by Bourdieu and Appadurai, for in these approaches objects “can only ricochet between the essentializing autonomous object and the dematerialized space of things whose only graspable qualities are their ‘biographies’ and ‘social lives’” (Pinney 259). In a similar vein Tim Ingold (2000) argues that anthropological and archeological studies have neglected the materiality of things; instead, they have highlighted only the

“issues of meaning and form—that is on culture *as opposed to* materiality” (Ingold 340, original emphasis). With these arguments in mind, this thesis attempts to inspect the sociological meanings of exhibited curiosities without neglecting the actual materiality and “thingness” of things. In terms of critical theory and philosophy, recent studies focus on “the thing itself” as opposed to the object we perceive or construct through social and cultural experiences. Bill Brown’s theories, as I mentioned in the introduction, are an example of such focus: outside of the order of objects, *things* are unstable and ambiguous. And curious. This thesis seeks to participate in and enrich such an on-going conversation on the object / thing antithesis by bringing Charlotte Brontë’s works, nineteenth-century exhibitions, and the sense of curiosity into discussion. Through the examination of the curiousness of things and how Brontë’s heroines interact with, resemble, or are caught up in these very things, this thesis seeks to initiate more thoughts on thing theory and the role human beings play in this conundrum of things.

This thesis has far from exhausted the ambiguities surrounding Victorian women. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, many issues cannot be deliberated upon. For example, the breaking of boundaries between women and animals, exemplified by the dreadful / powerful mermaids delineated by Shirley, can be juxtaposed with the proliferation of freak shows and animal performances in the nineteenth century. The exhibitions of models and artifacts, replicating reality with alternate materials, were popular at the time: ivory and wooden cathedrals, fishbone flowers, paper constructions, glass work, waxen tableaux. These artifacts can be used to discuss the discrepancy between the constructed façade—of domestic harmony, of innocence, of moral standards—and reality. As Richard Altick points out in *Shows of London*, nineteenth-century London exhibition-goers “were willing to gaze at any mimicry of reality, no matter how grotesque, clumsy, unsuitable, or improbable” it was; the “verisimilitude” of these objects was what these show-goers were looking for, “despite the palpable incongruity” (399). As an aspiration for a more thorough study of these topics, further research on relevant grounds should be considered in future endeavors.

Another sense of ambiguity that this thesis has not yet explored is the ambiguous Self of the English empire, which, as the Great Exhibition illustrated, was established upon the amalgamation of exotic objects illustrative of its power. The criticisms on colonial and post-colonial issues in Brontë’s texts have already been

extensively established, and such post-colonial re-workings of these texts as *The Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) are also abundant. However, I believe that, along with the exploration of ambiguities between women and animals, as mentioned in the previous passage, the colonial issues will inevitably submerge. This can indeed be seen as a relatively new approach to tackle the problems of slavery and (post-)colonialism. While this thesis did not deal with this specific aspect, a more extended project will indeed benefit from such an approach.

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