“THE EVENTS OF MY INSIGNIFICANT EXISTENCE”; TRAUMATIC TESTIMONY IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË’S FICTIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

A dissertation submitted to Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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August 2009
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the Chair of my Doctoral Dissertation Committee, Dr. Vera J. Camden, who has provided me with countless hours of assistance and valuable direction with this project as well as with both my academic career and my professional career. For all of her encouragement and for her willingness to assist with this and future projects, I am truly grateful. I also wish to thank the members of my Dissertation Committee, Dr. Anne Hiebert Alton, Dr. Claire Culleton, and Dr. Lionne Hudson, whose assistance has proven immeasurable. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with a committee made up of such fine individuals and equally superior professors.

I wish to thank my mother, Joan Carey Haller, for her love, her strength, her wisdom, her support on all levels, and her ability to help me find just the right word, as well as for the myriad of times she has made my life easier by taking on both large and small tasks in order that I may always have time to work and finish my degree. She is a wonderful role model, and I know that I could not have made it this far without her.

Above all, I would like to thank my son, Sam Tucker, for his love at all times, his patience in even the most tedious of circumstances, his assistance in searching for the right topic, his consideration in all things, and his infinite level of understanding in always providing me the time I needed to complete this project. He has shown me the importance and indeed the necessity of balancing work with play. For his presence in my life, I am forever grateful.
Introduction

A significant gap in current criticism surrounding Charlotte Brontë’s novels has led to a superficial rendering of her primary characters, situting them as mere autobiographical products of a certain place and a certain time. It is my intent to fill this gap by establishing Brontë’s primary characters as complex individuals who cannot be oversimplified and defined by their gender or their historical moment and who are not limited by their creator’s frame of reference. To provide a deservedly deeper and more illuminating explication of her work, this study shall further a critical understanding of Brontë’s narrative structures in her fictional autobiographies—*The Professor* (1857), *Jane Eyre* (1847), and *Villette* (1853)—through the application of trauma theory, a theoretical stance that has yet to be utilized in analyzing any of her novels.

**Dominant Critical Traditions**

Given their Victorian context and the prominence of study in the era’s female suppression, it is perhaps not surprising that the abundance of scholarly criticism surrounding Brontë’s novels applies a feminist or gendered approach to reading her characters and explicating her narrative technique. Feminist and gendered studies tend to center their attention on Brontë’s dominating males, and equally dominating Victorian patriarchal society, whose presence figures prominently in the moral and psychological
growth of her female characters. The basis of discussion, then, is how female protagonists within the novels react to such male domination, facing “a changing world in which a girl, in order to be saved, must leave the past, act on her own, and seize the present day” (Polhemus 165). Does she submit and perish under the strong male presence, or does she retaliate and develop outside of or in harmony with the male presence? While attentive to the delineation of the public and the private selves inherent in the Victorian culture, this type of analysis places a restriction on feminine and masculine selves, viewing the Victorian patriarchal role as a deciding factor in the formation of self. The insufficiency of this type of criticism lies in its reactive focus; who the female and the male characters are and who they will eventually become rests in how each reacts to the role foisted upon them by a patriarchal society. In these studies, therefore, the propensity for moral and psychological growth is restricted by the degree to which one person or facet of society has dominance over another, making the growth process a collaborative act. The reductive factor of this type of criticism when applied to Brontë’s novels is not only its reciprocal nature but its apparent disregard in considering forces outside gender and patriarchal society as inherent in the formation of self.

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Another area of critical prominence that proves just as restrictive as feminist and gendered studies is the autobiographical analysis of Brontë’s narrative structures, in which her use of first-person narrative is viewed as indicative of autobiographical events while at the same time criticizing her male narrative as deficient in its perceptions of the male psyche. This type of criticism provides an insufficient rendering of the novels both in its inability to consider the characters as separate from the author—certain in any autobiographical reading of the novels—and in its narrow representation of deficient narrative based on the author’s gender. The predominance of autobiographic analysis is psychobiographical criticism, an area that also falls under the psychoanalytic category of thought (a framework to be subsequently discussed). Like other autobiographic analyses, psychobiographic studies focus on the biographical nature of the novels, identifying people, places, and situations within the texts with counterparts in Brontë’s life; these studies look at the extent to which “we can read the novels from the evidence of the life, and the extent to which we can discern an autobiographical voice in the fiction” (Tromly 10). The psychobiographic category of criticism, however, goes further in suggesting that Brontë’s novels are also reactions to some early psychic need or deprivation that she experienced in her own life. While these studies tend to provide more depth than the

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approaches previously discussed, they are purely speculative and highly restrictive, failing to expound upon the idea that not all characters and situations are based in reality. Consequently, these studies are limiting in their placement of Brontë’s narrators as situated solely within their creator’s frame of reference, simplifying their formation as contained within one individual rather than considering them as separate and distinct lives within their own narratives, possessing intricacies beyond the life of their creator.

Each of the aforementioned prominent critical stances surrounding Brontë’s novels—feminist, gendered, and autobiographical—include within their framework a rendering of the characters’ quest for self in relation to the other, reinforcing the concept that each novel serves as a *Bildungsroman.* As such, these studies look at the outcome of the self as contingent upon external perceptions and revelations with the resulting moral, psychological, and intellectual growth falling within the given social order. The difficulty with this type of textual rendering is its reinforcement of the idea mentioned above that a formation of the self is advantageous when it is a collaborative effort, with the nurturing of psychological growth ultimately dependent upon an affiliation with someone or something outside oneself. They do not consider the possibility that growth is contained within as an autonomous act dependent upon one’s own actions rather than

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upon interactions. It is equally as narrow in its presumptuous assertion that a quest for self has been successfully met by the end of each novel, a view which I shall further contend herein.

Facets of autobiographical, feminist, and gendered criticism are encompassed in psychoanalytic approaches to the novels, discussing the familial significance of Brontë’s plots and characters or pointing out the mindfulness to social and cultural restrictions inherent in the structural makeup of her characters and chosen scenarios. Although decidedly less circumscribed than the singular application of prominent areas of study surrounding Brontë’s novels, present psychoanalytic criticism is still an area that requires further broadening and development. When applied to the narratives, this type of analysis inevitably culminates in a character’s positive perception of the self, using the concluding chapters of each novel as evidence of such perception with characters revealed as content in their circumstances; however, the implication and the accuracy of such a perception is rarely—if ever—analyzed. Do the characters, indeed, end there? To perceive the self ultimately implies an original lack of perception, yet what is the originating force of this deficiency? What is its trace to the past? And, perhaps most importantly, what is its role in shaping the future self, however constructed or imagined.

in these texts? Current criticism devoted to the novels has fallen short in its response to such questioning, thus critically omitting key aspects of the novels. To comprehend the significance of presenting these private lives to public perception, I find it imperative to explore such questions further, providing an indication of the true present and probable future of Brontë’s characters. My contention is that unfulfilled reigning critical assumptions surrounding the evolution and indeed the certainty of the self discovered, the self achieved by the heroines or heroes in the course of their fictional autobiographies, ends up predetermining most readings of these novels in ways that overlook the unresolved traumatic core at the heart of the works. Indeed, at the heart of each of the characters, of every disposition, is this core of trauma. Brontë’s texts simply do not fit the dominant linear models in the ways they are read by major critics. My project views trauma theory as a more fitting, indeed inevitable lens through which to view these texts.

Brontë’s primary characters possess a past laden with intricacies that form them as individuals and that can be traced to a specific event—their originary trauma—that took root on a sub-conscious level. Trauma theorists Bessel van der Kolk and Alexander McFarlane discuss the imperative of locating the originary trauma:

The core issue [of trauma] is the inability to integrate the reality of particular experiences, and the resulting repetitive replacing of the trauma in images, behaviors, feelings, physiological states, and interpersonal relationships. Thus, in dealing with traumatized people, it is critical to examine where they have become ‘stuck’ and around which specific
traumatic event(s) they have built their secondary psychic elaborations.

(“Black Hole of Trauma” 7)

Repetitive patterns of behavior indicative of a character’s originary trauma occur throughout Brontë’s fictional autobiographies and indicate that not only are the narrators discontented in their life choices but they are writing their autobiographies as a means of providing testimony to their continued struggle with trauma in an attempt to master that trauma and experience a true revelation of self. This study covers each novel, looking at the narrator’s autobiographic representation of life events as traumatic testimony with the public forum of the novel allowing the reader to serve as witness. Approaching Brontë’s novels in this manner (through trauma theory) sheds insight into the traumatic stimulus of these works, mirrored in the characters who, as individuals, reveal the truth of their lives that is not entirely represented in their fictional autobiographies and that is completely overlooked in previous critical studies.

**Trauma Theory**

The imperative of repetition in the working through and subsequent mastering of trauma is presented in Sigmund Freud’s landmark 1914 study on trauma titled *Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through*. Freud set forth the basis of re-experience as existing in the inherent latency of the traumatic event, the often delayed and uncontrollably repetitive response: “The patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it” (150).
Prominent trauma theorist Cathy Caruth furthers Freud’s concept of remembering, repeating, and working through in stating that “the pathology [of trauma] consists . . . solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (*Trauma 5*). According to Freud (1914), therapeutic work on traumatic neurosis “consists in large measure in tracing it back to the past,” working through the patient’s unconscious resistance to the event (152):

The first step in overcoming the resistances is made, as we know, by the analyst’s uncovering the resistance, which is never recognized by the patient, and acquainting him with it. . . . [G]iving the resistance a name could not result in its immediate cessation. One must allow the patient time to become more conversant with this resistance with which he has now become acquainted, to work through it, to overcome it. (155)

Caruth again furthers Freud’s conception in her 1996 study titled *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*:

The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself. The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. (17)
In order to work through a trauma, an individual must first remember and repeat so that it may be incorporated into one’s conscious awareness, enabling its contextualization that one may confront resistances to uncovering the trauma.

Freud furthers the repetition or re-experiencing concept in his 1920 study *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which he contends, through the introduction of a game performed by his grandson,\(^5\) that some individuals suffering from trauma tend to subconsciously expose themselves to situations reminiscent of the trauma with an aim to gain mastery. This idea of repetition compulsion stems from the concept that unconscious repetition of the traumatic experience is an attempt to become consciously aware of what cannot otherwise be grasped. The child experienced pleasure in the repetition of a representatively painful experience. Freud states that this is a type of masochism, a passive instinct that when turned upon the ego means the infliction of suffering upon oneself. As passive, masochism is a regression, a return to an earlier event, an event in which one reverts to earlier behavior patterns to escape an unpleasant situation. Regression leads to repression—repressing the unpleasant situation—which leads to repetition in trauma, the repetition of the earlier event. It is through this repetition that one initiates a working through and eventual mastering of the event.

\(^5\) Freud’s classic example from this study involves a game—fort (gone)/da (there)—performed by his young grandson, who is saddened at his hiding of a toy and joyful at his retrieval of the same toy moments later. This action is repeated by the toddler several times over the course of a week, culminating in the child’s eventual loss of sadness at the hiding of the toy. Freud was able to deduce that since this action began as the child’s mother returned to the workforce and lasted the span of time his mother was at work during the day, for the child the toy represented his mother. His sadness at the hiding of the toy represented his sadness at his mother’s leaving for work, and his joy at its reappearance represented his joy of his mother’s return from work. The child was attempting to cope with his mother’s absence through an unconscious repetition of the event, thereby mastering the event to the point where he was no longer saddened at his mother’s departure.
It is in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that Freud refers to trauma as “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (13). With this as close as possible to a most basic definition, trauma was not officially acknowledged and categorized by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) until the 1980 publication of their *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, third edition (DSM-III). The DSM-III defines trauma under the term Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), constituting it as a response to a sudden or catastrophic event “outside the range of usual human experience” (DSM-III 247).⁶ The APA further established that PTSD was marked by the unconscious and “recurrent re-experiencing of the traumatic event,” a concept of repetition initiated by Freud, as stated above (Lerner and Micale 2). In PTSD, the primary issue is an inability to integrate traumatic experiences and the resulting repetition of the trauma by various means: actions, relationships, behaviors, etc. As a result, it is critical to consider the latency of the event inherent in its unconscious repetition and to locate the origination of the trauma in order to bring it away from dissociation and repression and into one’s conscious awareness.

As Dorrit Cohn points out, the narrative process is the “retrospective cognition of an inner life that cannot know itself at the instant of experience” (146). This necessity of a gap in understanding a traumatic event is central to the theories set forth by Freud and furthered by Caruth as well as other significant trauma theorists Dori Laub and Shoshana

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⁶ As Lerner and Micale point out in *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930*, the establishment of PTSD resulted, in part, from lobbying on behalf of Vietnam War veterans, grounding their “puzzling symptoms and behaviors in tangible external events. . . . Since 1990, the idea of post-traumatic psychopathology has spread far beyond combat-related stress to include natural disasters, work accidents, domestic abuse, and all manner of emotionally trying experiences” (2).
Felman. This necessary gap does exist in Brontë’s novels, as the fictional autobiographers recount selected events of their lives that took place several years prior to writing their autobiographies. Cohn refers to this as “distanced self-narration,” looking back on one’s past and narrating that past (135). There are certain privileges taken in such a narration: “the experiencing self in a first person narration . . . is always viewed by a narrator who knows what happened to him next, and who is free to slide up and down the time axis that connects his two selves” (Cohn 145). Therefore, the narrators can pick and choose the individuals and events to include in their autobiographies that would serve to further an accurate representation of their lives, whether or not the individual’s or event’s representative role was apparent at the original time of involvement. The extent to which their involvement served to traumatically impact the life of the narrator is only evident when a distance is achieved between the narrator and the said individual or event. Hence the difficulty, as Caruth states, of “writing a history from within it” (Unclaimed Experience 12). There is, then, a necessary latency implicit in an accurate representation of one’s life.

Caruth asserts that what inhabits all traumatic experience is “the inability fully to witness the event as it occurs. . . . Since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time” (8). This concept was set forth by Freud in one of the first full-length studies of the twentieth-century devoted specifically to trauma, Moses and Monotheism (1934), in his discussion of the accident:
It may happen that a man who has experienced some frightful accident—a railway collision, for instance—leaves the scene of the event apparently uninjured. In the course of the next few weeks, however, he develops a number of severe psychical and motor symptoms which can only be traced to his shock . . . He now has a ‘traumatic neurosis’. . . . The time that passed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is described as the ‘incubation period,’ in a clear allusion to the pathology of infectious diseases. . . . [T]he characteristic that might be described as ‘latency’. (67 - 68)

As Caruth notes, Freud seems to describe the trauma as “the successive movement from an event to its repression to its return” (Trauma 7). Therefore, stages are present in the coping with a traumatic event, and latency is imperative to its recognition. These stages and the necessary latency are key aspects of Brontë’s narrative structures.

**Testimony and Witness**

The fictional autobiographers discussed herein have all undergone some type of traumatic event either directly prior to or years prior to writing their autobiographies including the loss at a young age of both parents, years of physical and/or emotional abuse at the hands of caregivers or authority figures, forced enclosure, abandonment, and spectral visitation. The narrator, by recounting his or her own trauma, is allowing/asking the reader to bear witness to the testimony of that trauma. As Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler point out in their study *Witness and Memory: the Discourse of Trauma*, “active
repetition is crucial to witness, a practice made urgent by the continuous danger of forgetting. . . . To accept the role of reader or hearer is to accept a responsibility and obligation, to take one’s place in a series of readers whose attention keeps the witness alive” (44 - 45). As such, it is not only the narrator who serves as witness to his or her own testimony, but it is also the successive readers of the novel who bear witness as well.

Douglass and Vogler further discuss the role of witness in noting that “there is a special relationship between the traumatic event and its witness, and a special dependency, since whether or not an event is traumatic can only be established by the existence of witnesses whose trauma both authenticates them and the reality of the traumatic event” (36). They acknowledge that in some cases the whole life of a victim “can become living testimony to the traumatic experience, both physical and mental, the traumatized body and mind of the victim serving as evidence for the reality of a history that hurts, as the charred remains of a building are witness to its conflagration” (Douglass and Vogler 36). In their presentation as autobiographers, Brontë’s narrators provide what Douglass and Vogler refer to above as living testimony.

Living testimony is analogous to an unconscious repetition of the trauma. As Freud (1914) remarks, the “compulsion to repeat is [a] way of remembering” (150). Once resistances are met, the act of remembering and working through the event can take place, with the analyst—in a doctor/patient relationship—serving as witness to the testimony of the traumatic event. However, as further trauma studies have noted and as has been suggested in my discussion of the qualifications of witnessing, though a witness is imperative in the production of testimony, it is not imperative that the act of witnessing
be restricted to an analyst. Laub, in his extensive work on the significant role of testimony and witness in surviving trauma, states:

What ultimately matters in all processes of witnessing, spasmodic and continuous, conscious and unconscious, is not simply the information, the establishment of the facts, but the experience itself of living through testimony, of giving testimony.

The testimony is, therefore, the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness: reconstitutes the internal “thou,” and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself.

[R]epossessing one’s life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change, which one has to actually pass through, in order to continue and complete the process of survival after liberation. The event must be reclaimed because even if successfully repressed, it nevertheless invariably plays a decisive formative role in who one comes to be, and in how one comes to live one’s life. (―Truth and Testimony‖ 70)

Laub’s discussion of testimony can be applied to Judith Williams’s theory of “utterance.” In looking at what Williams termed the “utterance” as an act of testimony one can further analyze the significance of the “bringing it forth” in that it is not simply speaking but taking action. As Felman states in “Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching”:

To testify—to vow to tell, to promise and produce one’s own speech as material evidence of truth—is to accomplish a speech act, rather than to
simply formulate a statement. As a performative speech act, testimony in effect addresses what in history is action that exceeds any substantialized significance, and what in happenings is impact that dynamically explodes any conceptual reifications and any constative delimitations. (17)

Each fictional autobiographer in this study provides a history of significant portions of his or her life, presented as either a straight autobiography or an autobiography containing a combination of narrative forms including a letter and a transcribed oral history. Though these are fictional autobiographies, they are presented in such a way as to make the reader believe he or she is reading the true-life events, the true history, of each book’s main characters. Felman states that a “‘life testimony’ is not simply a testimony to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can penetrate us like an actual life” (“Education and Crisis” 14). As such, I assert that these novels should be looked at as acts of testimony—material evidence of truth.

I address several areas in my analysis to support this assertion: a tracing back to the past for the originary trauma of each character; the effect the originary trauma has had in shaping the characters’ lives; the role their testimony will play or has played in reshaping their lives; the intention to have others read their lives; the extent to which the reader and characters within the novels act as witnesses; the effect on the autobiographer of providing testimony to these witnesses; and, the resulting rise of the self however constructed or imagined in these texts. Since my focus is on the trauma of the characters evident in their narratives, how it shaped their lives, and how their lives are reshaped
through their narrative form as an act of testimony, mine is a completely fresh approach to Brontë’s novels.

Analysis

Brontë criticism has frequently revolved around interpretation of certain key moments in the novels, with particular consideration being given to Jane Eyre, to such an extent that these moments have achieved an almost iconic status. Key scenes and passages include the letter that begins The Professor, the red-room scene in Jane Eyre as well as Rochester’s voice on the wind, and Villette’s nun imagery along with Lucy’s introductory silence and the novel’s ambiguous ending. I have incorporated these frequently explicated scenes and passages into my discussion, illustrating how trauma theory further elucidates the passages beyond any rendering supplied by dominant methodologies; as such, reversing many of the assumptions, expectations, and conclusions considered by traditional critical discussion as inherent in these scenes. Additionally, within each chapter, I focus on the resulting “working through” involved in the presenting of testimony. In a much larger sense, though, the reader ultimately serves as witness to the narrator’s testimony in presenting his or her autobiography for public viewing.

There are critical and calculated omissions of large spans of time in each fictional autobiography. As I discuss in chapter one, Crimsworth omits large portions of his life in his depiction of a three year span of his existence, and as we will see in chapter three, Lucy skips over the eight years wherein she alludes to having experienced the greatest
hardships. Jane passes over eight years of her life during her stay at Lowood, the same amount of time omitted by Lucy, and ten years of her life at Ferndean is also omitted. Jane’s reasoning behind her exclusion of these portions of her life rests with the reader: “Hitherto I have recorded in detail the events of my insignificant existence. . . . I am only bound to invoke Memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest” (67). Interest to whom? The reader. It is the reader whom Jane is addressing in her narrative, just as it is the reader whom Crimsworth addresses—“My narrative is not exciting . . . but it may interest some individuals” (The Professor 14)—and it is also the reader whom Lucy consistently and directly addresses throughout her narrative. The reader, then, serves as witness to the narrative testimony of these fictional autobiographies.

Rather than relying on dates of publication, the novels are discussed in the order in which they were written. As such, my analysis begins with the first of Brontë’s full-length novels, The Professor. Originally submitted in 1846, The Professor met with rejection at each of Brontë’s nine attempts at publication during her lifetime. Its posthumous publication in 1857 came only after Elizabeth Gaskell’s The Life of Charlotte Brontë (1856) renewed the public’s interest in Brontë’s writing. Willing to placate the public’s desire, Brontë’s publishers, Smith, Elder and Co., published the manuscript they originally thought to be too “deficient in ‘startling incident’ and ‘thrilling excitement’ that it would never suit the circulating libraries” on whose success works of fiction largely depended (ltr. to G. H. Lewes, November 6, 1847, in Smith vol. 1: 43). Even with the novel’s numerous rejections, Brontë remained loyal to its content,
describing to her editor, George Smith, in a letter dated February 5, 1851, that her relationship to it could “only be paralleled by those of a doting parent towards an idiot child” (Smith vol. 2: 45). Brontë’s resolute loyalty to The Professor despite such harsh criticism caused her to use its Brussels foundation—“the middle and latter portion of the work, all that relates to Brussels, the Belgian school etc. is as good as I can write”—to form the germ of Villette. She was intent on representing this life for public consumption, if not in one novel than in another—if not in a male narrative than in a female narrative. But why? This is explored further in my conclusion as I look at the possibility that the narrative testimonies of The Professor, Jane Eyre, and Villette serve to elucidate a truth central to all novels that Brontë found essential to bring forth for witnessing.

Before exploring this deeper connection, however, I begin my study in chapter one with a look at the originary trauma of The Professor’s fictional autobiographer, William Crimsworth. The loss in infancy of both parents and his resulting dependent state shaped Crimsworth’s sense of self as an encumbrance, resulting in repetitive patterns of behavior meant to cope with this trauma as he consistently seeks a position of dependency only to revolt against such a state. When further examined, this pattern reveals Crimsworth’s seemingly unaffected persona as blanketing a strong need for control.

Chapter two looks at Jane Eyre, Brontë’s first published novel. I consider Jane’s early loss of both parents as an originary trauma which predates her red room experience. This core traumatic scene further informs her life as Jane consistently seeks situations of
enclosure for the sheer purpose of escape, forever attempting to overcome her
imprisonment in the red room of Gateshead Hall.

Lucy Snowe, the heroine of Brontë’s final novel, *Villette*, is the focus of chapter
three. While Lucy’s past is decidedly more ambiguous than both Jane’s and
Crimsworth’s, it is evident from what little we are provided that hers is a childhood
marked by profound and traumatic loss. Lucy’s response is to remain unobtrusive and
isolated. Although she consistently revolts against such isolation, she repeatedly places
herself in situations conducive to solitude as a means of protecting herself against the
possibility of further loss.

By applying trauma theory to my analysis of Brontë’s fictional autobiographies,
this study looks at the individual narrative as an act of testimony. I identify the originary
trauma of the primary characters, analyze repetitive patterns of behavior indicative of
trauma, examine indications of working through or regression in mastering their trauma,
and consider whether or not a successful revelation of self has occurred.
Chapter 1

“Rebel of Circumstance”: William Crimsworth’s Quest for Independence

Virtually every critic who has written on The Professor has commented on William Crimsworth’s psychological growth and maturation during the course of the novel, sharing the belief that he executes an “exemplary progress from powerlessness to mastery” (Boumelha 47). My own position differs from this insofar as it seems to me that in order to exhibit growth a logical progression must be evident, and we do not necessarily witness such a progression with Crimsworth because he does not elaborate on details of his childhood or his adolescence; therefore, we have no direct means of comparison to indicate a pattern of growth. Indeed, in claiming growth one would expect evidence or a chronicle of origination, and what is missing from Brontë’s published construction of Crimsworth is precisely a sense of origination and the characterological core that is universally acknowledged to be the foundation of moral character. This lacuna may very well have once been filled but has now been obliterated to Brontë’s extensive revision of the manuscript in an attempt to appease her editors and encourage

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publication. She eliminated the first seven chapters, finding “the whole narrative
deficient in incident,” replacing them with a compendium in the form of a letter to
Charles (ltr to W.S. Williams, December 14, 1847, Smith vol. 1: 189). Therefore, the
foundational narrative is utterly missing from Crimsworth’s autobiography, and what we
do see of his background is problematic.

Crimsworth provides the reader with only a roughly three year span of his adult
life—and even that information is limited, for he consistently conceals details of his true
nature; self-reflection is entirely at a minimum. Indeed, he takes pride in his ability to
conceal, believing it to reveal his intellectual superiority—“I showed him my
countenance with the confidence that one would show an unlearned man a letter written
in Greek” (17). In looking at what he does choose to reveal and at the control he
displays in concealment, however, it is certain that Crimsworth is far from powerless.
Thus I contend in this chapter that he does not move from powerlessness to mastery but
rather manipulates both impressions to his advantage. Indeed, his true nature is concealed
in the persona of a powerless man—“without social, economic, or legal status; to be
unconfident, dependent, insecure, and vulnerable” (Moglen 104)—a role he often
exploits to obtain what he desires: the ability “to do more, earn more, be more, possess
more” (146).

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8 An abandoned preface to The Professor, reprinted in Appendix III of Smith and Rosengarten’s 1987
Clarendon edition of the novel, has Brontë writing in the voice of someone who was a friend of
Crimsworth’s, providing a “brief summary of the import of these chapters” in an attempt to “content the
reader” by filling in the gap left by the omission. Brontë then discarded this preface in favor of the letter,
providing the reader with a consistent narrative voice throughout.
references to this work are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text by page number.
This chapter will argue that applying trauma theory to Crimsworth’s autobiography reveals his manipulative presence and his desire for control as defense mechanisms against dependency, providing insight into the true self that he so vehemently wishes to conceal—a true self shaped by trauma. Evident behavioral patterns indicate his attempt at working through an originary trauma—the loss in infancy of both parents and his subsequent status as disdained orphan. He is made to feel inferior and insignificant by all surviving familial relations, and his learned response is to identify areas of superiority, to control situations in reaction to a childhood deprived of affection and any sense of control. Crimsworth’s originary trauma perpetuates his early sense of self as an encumbrance, thereby resulting in repetitive patterns of behavior wherein a state of dependency is sought and then revolted against as he consistently releases himself from one burden only to enter into another. In each situation of dependency, there is an act of duplicity that reinforces his sense of inferiority and initiates Crimsworth’s desire for release and his ultimate revolt.

Though Crimsworth boastfully portrays himself as stoic throughout, his narrative self-representation betrays a perpetual quest for moral and intellectual superiority. The first evidence of this is found in the letter that begins his autobiography, an opening sequence that several critics find problematic. The “apparently meaningless machinery” (Williams 6) of the letter is defined representatively by Diane Hoeveler and

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Lisa Jadwin in their critical study *Charlotte Brontë*: “Brontë’s unsuccessful attempt to use a letter . . . suggests that she had not as yet found her own narrative voice and was trying instead to write in a safe style that would be recognizable to her reading audience” (37). I contend, however, that trauma theory further elucidates this opening sequence, maintaining that Crimsworth’s letter to his classmate Charles serves as “an introduction” to his traumatic life narrative. It provides the singular details, however brief, of his orphaned childhood and disdained upbringing at the hands of his uncles. Additionally, the letter is our only glimpse into his adolescence spent at Eton, one of the locations he later designates as containing a significant record of his past (12). It is worthy to note that even though he designates its importance, Crimsworth devotes only one paragraph to Eton. We must then take from this paragraph what we can to form an impression of his adolescent experiences. Rather than it being a search for “her own narrative voice” and a “safe style” choice, it is the adolescent picture Brontë renders in this spare scene that offers insight into not only Crimsworth’s character but the thrust of this novel’s narrative ethic.

As explored in my Introduction, at the core of virtually all of Brontë’s works is a traumatic trace that compels consideration of both childhood and adolescence as one strives to recover origins and meaning in the baffling excesses of this fictional world. In his discussion of the significance of implicit memory in the incorporation of childhood experiences, trauma theorist Antonie Laden states that

> If we wish to know who we are and why we feel, think, and react as we do, then it is of great importance to have access to our past, including our
childhood . . . Our moral development . . . travels a substantially implicit path. Thus, a person generally does not consciously remember under what circumstances he mastered the moral rules that drive his behavior. . . . By being stored in the implicit memory system, our childhood experiences form the basis for the relational patterns that determine our interaction with ourselves and with others (56).

We are not provided the details of Crimsworth’s childhood, but it is evident from the opening letter that his childhood experiences thus far had enough of apathy to determine his interaction with Charles in remaining unaffected by “sardonic coldness” (5). Indeed, what Crimsworth tells in the letter of his relationship with Charles reinforces a continual absence of intimacy and also displays an early quest for superiority that builds throughout his narrative:

I never experienced anything of the Pylades and Orestes sentiment for you, and I have reason to believe that you, on your part, were equally free from all romantic regard to me. Still, out of school hours we walked and talked continually together; when the theme of conversation was our companions or our masters we understood each other, and when I recurred to some sentiment of affection, some vague love of an excellent or beautiful object, whether in animate or inanimate nature—your sardonic coldness did not move me—I felt myself superior to that check then as I do now. (5)
When the topics remained neutral the discussion was continual, but his attempts at delving beyond surface concerns and into more emotional elements were met with mockery by Charles. Crimsworth is unaffected, though, and felt himself superior to such criticism then as he does now; he has learned to control his emotional proclivity. In her *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, Anna Freud introduces the concept of defense against affect:

> An affect may be primarily pleasurable or painful, according to its nature. If the ego has nothing to object to in a particular instinctual process and so does not ward off an affect on that ground, its attitude towards it will be determined entirely by the pleasure-principle: it will welcome pleasurable affects and defend itself against painful ones. . . . It is all the more ready to ward off affects . . . if these affects happen to be distressing, e.g. pain, longing, mourning. . . . This simple defense against primarily painful affects corresponds to the defense against the primarily painful stimuli which impinge upon the ego from the outside world. (66-67)

Crimsworth’s ego, then, is warding off painful affects as a mechanism of defense against those affects. His unaffected state in his dealings with Charles—only indicated as a result of Brontë’s calculated inclusion of the opening letter sequence—is the first glimpse we receive of Crimsworth’s “tendency to internalize and control strong emotional impulses” (Millard 30). This is an attribute nurtured by Crimsworth throughout his narrative in response to an earlier trauma; as a foundational indication of future behavior,

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11 This concept will also be applied in my chapter three discussion of *Villette*, wherein Lucy Snowe utilizes isolation as a defense mechanism in warding off the pain of loss.
then, the opening letter can hardly be seen as “meaningless machinery.” Indeed, in a reverse of dominant critical conclusions pertaining to the letter sequence, trauma theory reveals that the letter quite clearly sets up Crimsworth as a strong narrative presence, revealing a past laden with trauma and an early attempt at controlling impulses as a compulsion relative to that trauma. Heather Glen sees these impulses as a “positive assertion of choice” (41). It is not choice, however, that instigates such impulses but rather a compulsive need to obtain control where there is otherwise none. Though there is no indication that he has achieved what prevailing critical thought sees as a full psychological development by the end of his autobiography, I will show that there is indeed an indication of emotional alteration that signifies his attempt at mastering trauma.

At the close of his letter, Crimsworth notes that Charles never received the correspondence meant for his “private benefit” (12). As such, he dedicates his leisure time instead to sharing his life for public benefit: “My narrative is not exciting and, above all, not marvelous—but it may interest some individuals, who, having toiled in the same vocation as myself, will find in my experience, frequent reflections of their own” (12). Rather than abandoning the idea altogether for lack of his intended audience, Crimsworth redirects his intent to the “public at large” and pursues his narrative; whomever the audience, Crimsworth has an imperative to provide testimony to his life story and to the trauma which has formed that story (12). Laub states that this “imperative to tell and to be heard can become itself an all-consuming life task . . . The pressure thus continues unremittingly, and if words are not trustworthy or adequate, the life that is chosen can become the vehicle by which the struggle to tell continues” (“Truth and Testimony” 63).
This reinforces Laub’s stance on the significant role of testimony in surviving trauma wherein he states that while trauma plays a decisive role in who one comes to be, the ability to repossess one’s life story begins with the process of giving testimony. Crimsworth makes a point of noting that his letter to Charles serves as the introduction to his life narrative, but it also provides testimony to his originary trauma and the ensuing dependent state that will imbue his life.

In her preface to *The Professor*, Brontë notes the type of hero she wanted to achieve with this work:

> My hero should work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs—that he should never get a shilling he had not earned—that no sudden turns should lift him in a moment to wealth and high station; that whatever small competency he might gain, should be won by the sweat of his brow. (37)

Critics have commented that Crimsworth is a “self-made man,” but I contend that this is misleading (Boumelha 53). By her own definition, Brontë has not fully accomplished what she set out to do with Crimsworth. While he never does “get a shilling he had not earned,” whatever competency he does gain is not purely “won by the sweat of his brow.” As I will argue herein, all that he gains by way of employment is gained through manipulative maneuvers rather than honest work. Indeed, the truest representation of the type of hero Brontë wished to achieve in her first novel is actually found in her last novel,

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Villette, in her heroine Lucy Snowe. Lucy most accurately fits Brontë’s definition as she works her way through life, honestly and independently earning all that she obtains by the sweat of her brow. Similarly, The Professor’s Frances Henri better fits Brontë’s estimation of what she intended to achieve with her hero in this work, as I shall later discuss. Certainly Crimsworth puts forth effort resulting in success, but that his efforts are entirely his own is questionable, as he consistently manipulates circumstances to gain control and further his “do more, be more” agenda.

Raised by his paternal uncle until the age of nine and then separated from his elder brother and passed on to his maternal uncles, the Tynedales and the Seacombes, by way of political blackmail, Crimsworth was a burden on all familial ties—unloved and unwelcome and made to feel equally so: “my boyhood was lonely, parentless; uncheered by brother or sister” (191). His only immediate family, his brother, Edward, shares the antipathy of his relatives. The few letters Crimsworth received from Edward displayed a “determined enmity” toward the Seacombes and a distinct “reproach” toward Crimsworth for “living, as he said, on the bounty of that house” (7). Just a child, Crimsworth could not understand why he should not be indebted to his maternal uncles for the privilege of an education. Over time, however, he learned the roots of their forced benevolence, and he also learned why they expressed such a marked and cold indifference toward him: “as I grew up, and heard by degrees of the persevering hostility, the hatred till death evinced by them against my father—of the sufferings of my mother—of all the wrongs, in short, of our house—then did I conceive shame of the dependence in which I lived, and form a

\[13\] This shall be further discussed in chapter three.
resolution no more to take bread from hands which had refused to minister to the necessities of my dying mother” (7). Van der Kolk and McFarlane state that often trauma does not present a “radically new experience, but rather confirms some [long-feared] belief that an individual has tried to evade . . . rather than presenting them with novel incongruity” (“Black Hole of Trauma” 8). Crimsworth always felt a marked lack of affection from his uncles, but he also felt a sense of indebtedness toward them; therefore, the source of their animosity is a point he tried to evade. Once the source of their coldness toward him is confirmed, however, and their complicity in the death of his mother is made clear, Crimsworth is shamed by his reliance on their patronage and is resolute in breaking ties with the individuals whose actions placed him in a lifelong position of isolation and dependency.

Crimsworth spurns his uncles’ offer to retain his dependency in entering the church and marrying a Seacombe. Instead, he decides to follow in his father’s footsteps and become a tradesman, like Edward. Knowing full well that he is not cut out for trade—“I do not think that my turn of mind qualifies me to make a good tradesman”—it is Crimsworth’s spite over the contemptuous tone used by his maternal uncles in mentioning his father’s profession that leads him to this decision (6). In retrospect, he sees the error in this impulsive act: “In reviewing this transaction I find that I was quite right to shake off the burden of Tynedale’s patronage—but a fool to offer my shoulders instantly for the reception of another burden which might be more intolerable and which certainly was yet untried” (6). Instead of resolving to make his own way, he initiates his compulsion to repeat in trading one dependency for another. When he decides to “shake
off” the Tyndale and Seacombe burden he immediately enters another dependency as he turns to Edward for employment.

Crimsworth makes it quite clear that he has set no ideal for the forthcoming reunion with Edward: “I was in no danger of encountering severe disappointment; from this, the moderation of my expectations guaranteed me. I anticipated no overflowing of fraternal tenderness” (43). He expects no tenderness because none has been evinced in any correspondence with his brother—“Edward’s letters had always been such as to prevent the engendering or harbouring of delusions of this sort” (9)—but also because all of his relational experiences and interactions thus far have proven lack of tenderness as the standard behavioral pattern. However, two comments he makes shortly after arriving at his brother’s home betray his expectations. Though he has sensed a resentful tone from Edward’s letters—written more out of duty than affection—he still wonders if he will feel the same sense of contempt from Edward, once in his presence, as he did from his uncles: “I thought of my uncles; and [I] engaged in wondering whether Edward's indifference would equal the cold disdain I had always experienced from them” (9). That he wonders whether he will feel the same disdain implies consideration of the possibility that he may not. Crimsworth also comments on the eagerness he felt prior to reuniting with his brother: “as I sat awaiting his arrival, I felt eager—very eager—I cannot tell you why; my hand, so utterly a stranger to the grasp of a kindred hand” (43). That he felt eager suggests a certain amount of expectation on his part. Likewise, his anticipation of the “grasp of a kindred hand” implies the expectation or hope of fellowship. However, any expectations were quickly checked by Edward’s sharp tone and manner: “I am not
bound to help you. . . . I shall excuse you nothing on the plea of being my brother . . .

business-like habits, feelings, and ideas, suit me best” (15, 16). Crimsworth is clearly a

burden to his brother, reinforcing a pattern of dependency and contempt within his

remaining familial relationships.

The only affection Crimsworth has ever felt is that which exudes from a portrait

of his mother:

I took a wax taper from a stand, and held it up. I gazed long, earnestly; my

heart grew to the image. . . . The face, I remembered, had pleased me as a

boy, but then I did not understand it; now I knew how rare that class of

face is in the world, and I appreciated keenly its thoughtful, yet gentle

expression. The serious grey eye possessed for me a strong charm, as did
certain lines in the features indicative of most true and tender feeling. I

was sorry it was only a picture. (12)

The phrasing that he uses—thoughtful, gentle, true, tender—and his mention of the rarity

in encountering such traits indicates that he has lacked these characteristics in his

acquaintance thus far. He expresses both his reverence toward his mother and his regret

in not being able to experience these traits firsthand. Likewise, although he never knew

his father, he had reverence for him: “My father was but a name to me—yet that name I

did not like to hear mentioned with a sneer to my very face” (6). Crimsworth does not

receive a similar reverence from his brother, as his felt malevolence is quite evident: “No

fibre of sympathy united me to any living thing in this house; I looked for and found my

mother’s picture” (20). His parents had been reduced to mere names and portraits, and he
is deeply affected by their loss. Edward was his last hope for familial kindness and regard, and this hope is soon dashed.

Crimsworth remarks that Edward is “alien” to what he likes, sarcastically referring to him as the “affectionate relative now striding before me” (45). His comparison of himself with Edward reveals Crimsworth’s physical inferiority, but it also reveals his ability to identify areas of superiority:

I looked at him: I measured his robust frame and powerful proportions; I saw my own reflection in the mirror over the mantel-piece; I amused myself with comparing the two pictures. In face I resembled him, though I was not so handsome; my features were less regular; I had a darker eye, and a broader brow—in form I was greatly inferior—thinner, slighter, not so tall. As an animal, Edward excelled me far; should he prove as paramount in mind as in person I must be a slave—for I must expect from him no lion-like generosity to one weaker than himself; his cold, avaricious eye, his stern, forbidding manner told me he would not spare.

(14)

Though Edward’s manner confirms any doubts regarding his disdain, Crimsworth notes his satisfaction that he had not, “in the first moment of meeting, betrayed any warmth, any enthusiasm” towards his brother (44). His unaffected manner portrays his superiority over Edward, whose feelings towards Crimsworth are openly displayed, in his ability to control emotional impulses.
It is during the discussion surrounding terms of his employment that we first glimpse Crimsworth’s propensity to identify superiority and obtain control. He easily identifies his intellectual superiority over Edward as the primary cause of his brother’s open displays of contempt: “Had I been in anything inferior to him, he would not have hated me so thoroughly, but I knew all that he knew and, what was worse, he suspected that I kept the padlock of silence on mental wealth in which he was no sharer” (25-26). His superiority established, Crimsworth claims control once Edward clarifies that their status as brothers shall play no role in their further relations. Edward states, “I will take you as second clerk,” and Crimsworth, taking much liberty for one who is both unemployed and homeless, responds as though he had just been posed a request rather than afforded an opportunity: “I am to do my work for my wages; not to expect favour from you; and not to depend on you for any help but what I earn; that suits me exactly, and on these terms I will consent to be your clerk” (16). He turns on his heel and walks across the room, not caring for Edward’s opinion on the matter. This does not betray the attitude of one who considers himself powerless. The manner in which he consents to be Edward’s clerk shows his ability to claim control; rather than being handed a position, he is accepting an offer.

The degree to which he exhibits control is implied not only through his display of confidence in this scene but also through his use of concealment, a trait that will continue throughout his narrative as he learns to exploit his subordinate position, furthering his desire to “do more, be more.” It is during his first moments of Edward’s employ that Crimsworth reveals his superiority in concealment:
I felt as secure against his scrutiny as if I had had on a casque with the visor down—or rather I showed him my countenance with the confidence that one would show an unlearned man a letter written in Greek; he might see lines, and trace characters, but he could make nothing of them; my nature was not his nature, and its signs were to him like the words of an unknown tongue. (17)

Sally Shuttleworth notes that this success at revealing only what he wishes his brother to see shows Crimsworth’s sense of power as well as his marked ability at self-control:

“[Crimsworth’s] vigilant self-control gives him a triumphant illegibility, which defies his brother’s penetration, translating his state of social powerlessness into one of empowerment” (128). He attempts to assert power wherever he can as a means of coping with the dependent situation in which he repeatedly places himself:

I forced my eye to scrutinize this prospect, I forced my mind to dwell on it for a time, and when I found that it communicated no pleasurable emotion to my heart—that it stirred in me none of the hopes a man ought to feel, when he sees laid before him the scene of his life’s career—I said to myself, ‘William, you are a rebel against circumstances; you are a fool, and know not what you want; you have chosen trade and you shall be a tradesman.’ (13)

He knows he must endure his dependency, for he has no place else to go. He is indeed a rebel against circumstance. Yet even in this dependent state Crimsworth exerts his control over the situation: “I served Edward as his second clerk faithfully, punctually,
diligently. What was given me to do I had the power and the determination to do well” (19). It is in his power to do well as clerk, and he is determined to exercise that power.

Though his illegibility may defy his brother’s penetration, it does not defy that of another individual—Hunsden Yorke Hunsden. Crimsworth is initially taken in by Hunsden’s manner of address: “There was something in Mr. Hunsden’s point-blank mode of speech which rather pleased me than otherwise, because it set me at my ease” (59). Neither Hunsden’s tone “nor his manner displeased” him; Crimsworth’s “amour-propre was propitiated” in his company (21). Though Hunsden, as a manufacturer and a mill owner, is Crimsworth’s superior, he is set at ease because there is no duplicity in Hunsden, a behavioral trait that he continually revolts against. In discovering the truth behind his uncles’ patronage, Crimsworth is aware of their duplicity and spurns their further assistance. Likewise, Edward’s duplicity is evident in his preferred station as both tyrant master and indifferent brother. Crimsworth confronts this duplicity in the scene of his resignation, which will be looked at presently, choosing to talk to Edward as a brother rather than a master: “I remembered our relationship and remembering that, forgot the difference of position” (34). When met with duplicity, Crimsworth retaliates by way of seeking a new dependency. This is evident in the case of his uncles and of his brother, and it is also evident, as I will later discuss, in the case of his relationship with Monsieur Pelet and Mademoiselle Reuter. In their influential study *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar comment on the curious relationship between Hunsden and Crimsworth, saying that neither “ever expresses any particular affection for the other. And yet the two seem inextricably bound together in an uneasy partnership.
that lasts longer than any other relationship in the book” (332). Hunsden is the only significant individual in Crimsworth’s narrative who is completely devoid of duplicity, and it is for this reason that Hunsden remains a constant in Crimsworth’s life story.

Crimsworth is not a mystery to Hunsden; he is aware of Crimsworth’s relation to Edward, and he is also aware that he is not cut out for the life of a tradesman. Hoeveler and Jadwin state that Hunsden “generally functions throughout the novel as Crimsworth’s alter ego, acting rebelliously where Crimsworth will not allow himself to” (40). Yet this is not the case. Hunsden is not a substitute for Crimsworth’s inaction but rather an unsolicited advisor, providing Crimsworth with the possibility of an alternative. Hunsden bore witness to the tyranny faced by Crimsworth at Edward’s hands: “I owed him a sort of involuntary grudge, because he had more than once been the tacit witness of insults offered by Edward to me. I had the conviction that he could only regard me as a poor-spirited slave” (21). Hunsden habitually articulates the truth as he sees it and expresses to Crimsworth the reality of the circumstance in which he has placed himself: “you’ve no power; you can do nothing; you’re wrecked and stranded on the shores of commerce” (31). Hunsden’s manner of speaking to Crimsworth is aimed at “goading the oppressed into rebellion against the oppressor,” providing the possibility of resistance to one who “endures patiently what ought to be unendurable” (31). Shuttleworth speaks to Crimsworth’s sense of power when she states that “only in the experience of the tension of resistance is his own sense of agency and power affirmed” (137). While he regrets his decision to become a tradesman, his determination to justify his resolve hinders him from immediate resistance: “I will place my cup under his continual dropping; it shall stand
there still and steady; when full, it will run over of itself—meantime patience’” (17). The lack of resistance, however, begins to take its toll:

No man likes to acknowledge that he has made a mistake in the choice of his profession . . . [I]nfluenced by the double desire of getting my living and justifying to myself and others the resolution I had taken to become a tradesman, I should have endured in silence the rust and cramp of my best faculties; I should not have whispered, even inwardly, that I longed for liberty; I should have pent in every sigh by which my heart might have ventured to intimate its distress under the closeness, smoke, monotony and joyless tumult of Bigben Close, and its panting desire for freer and fresher scenes . . . But this was not all; the antipathy which had sprung up between myself and my employer striking deeper root and spreading denser shade daily, excluded me from every glimpse of the sunshine of life; and I began to feel like a plant growing in humid darkness out of the slimy walls of a well. (25)

It is clear that Crimsworth can no longer endure his dependency. Edward provided the outlet for Crimsworth’s resistance against the contemptuous dependency of his uncles, and it is Hunsden who now provides the outlet for his resistance against the tyrannous dependency of his brother. In both cases, he again puts aside one burden only to take up another.

During the scene of his resignation, Crimsworth’s self-control betrays his sense of power. He remains calm in the face of Edward’s wrath, fed by Hunsden’s insults at a
public meeting, and is finally compelled to resist his brother’s tyranny and give his notice: “I have now given your service three months’ trial, and I find it the most nauseous slavery under the sun. Seek another clerk—I stay no longer” (35). By instigating his departure, he maintains control. In a scene of despotic violence similar to one we will see in *Jane Eyre* between John Reed and Jane, Crimsworth even manages to wrest a whip from Edward’s hands: “He flourished his tool. The end of the lash just touched my forehead. A warm excited thrill ran through my veins, my blood seemed to give abound, and then raced fast and hot along its channels. I got up nimbly, came round to where he stood, and faced him . . . A minute sufficed to wrest it from him, break it in two pieces, and throw it under the grate” (35). He defies Edward’s orders to leave and deliberately walks to his desk to take up his belongings before leisurely leaving the counting house of his own accord. These are not the actions of a powerless man. With the surge of rebellion, leaving his brother’s dependency provides a new sense of liberation for Crimsworth:

> A load was lifted off my hart, I felt light and liberated. I had got away from Bigben Close without a breach of resolution; without injury to my self-respect: I had not forced Circumstances, Circumstances had freed me; Life was again open to me; no longer was its horizon limited by the high, black wall surrounding Crimsworth’s Mill. (37)

He has reclaimed control and released himself from his brother’s dependency, but not before Hunsden has supplied him the way out. Through his public insult of Edward,
Hunsden provided Crimsworth with the opportunity to retreat from his brother’s employ with due cause.

Once the reclamation occurs, Crimsworth’s powers of manipulation are revealed. He earlier denounced himself as a “rebel against circumstances,” but he soon goes from a rebel of circumstance to a manipulator of circumstance, as we first see in his discussion with Hunsden regarding his recent departure from his brother’s employ. Though he initiated his own departure and was jubilated by the liberation, Crimsworth conceals this fact from Hunsden in an effort to exploit his new position over him—Hunsden as beholden to Crimsworth. Ironically, though he does not endure duplicity in others, Crimsworth is capable of justifying his own duplicity. He deceives Hunsden into believing that he is sorely and adversely affected by Hunsden’s interference, fully blaming him for the dismissal: “I, yielding to the whim of the moment, took up the subject as though I considered myself aggrieved rather than benefited by what had been done” (80). Crimsworth has manipulated Hunsden into acting as his patron, providing a letter of introduction for a new dependence in Brussels. Again, he has left one burden only to enter another.

Just as in Jane Eyre, where Jane delineates the events of her life into five locations, in Crimsworth’s introduction to the Belgium portion of his autobiography, he remarks on the four significant locations of his life, describing them as images entombed in the four-walled cell of his mind:

Three—nay four pictures line the four-walled cell where are stored for me the Records of the Past. First, Eton. All in that picture is in far perspective,
receding, diminutive; but freshly coloured, green, dewy, with a spring-sky, piled with glittering yet showery clouds—for my childhood was not all sunshine—it had its overcast, its cold, its stormy hours. Second, [Bigben Close]; huge, dingy; the canvass cracked and smoked; a yellow sky, sooty clouds; no sun, no azure; the verdure of the suburbs blighted and sullied—a very dreary scene.

Third—Belgium; and I will pause before this landscape. As to the fourth, a curtain covers it, which I may hereafter withdraw, or may not, as suits my convenience and capacity. At any rate for the present it must hang undisturbed. (46)

His unhappy childhood contained glittering prospects overshadowed by turmoil. The promise of a new beginning in his turn as tradesman was equally sullied under his brother’s tyranny. It is Belgium and Daisy Lane that seem to contain the potential for true liberation. It shall be seen, however, whether he reaches this potential or if he yet again perpetuates his repetitive pattern of behavior.

Upon his arrival in Brussels, Crimsworth feels the freedom of independence while at the same time recognizing the abject need for dependency: “I, a bondsman just released from the yoke, freed for one week, from twenty-one years of constraint, must of necessity, resume the fetters of dependency; hardly had I tasted the delight of being without a master, when duty issued her stern mandate: ‘Go forth and seek another service’” (49). This is a striking parallel to the scene in Jane Eyre which, though desiring liberty, finds Jane choosing to leave the confines of Lowood in search of “at least a new
servitude” (72). Surely, obtaining a servitude was a cultural preoccupation for both Jane and Crimsworth, as both possessed no significant familial or independent means of financial subsistence; however, service is a preoccupation psychologically for both of them as well. In both cases, when met with the possibility of securing the freedom they so richly desire, Crimsworth and Jane seek service, a dependency, in an attempt to work through trauma.\footnote{Jane’s compulsion to seek oppressive situations in response to trauma shall be discussed further in chapter two.} Crimsworth enters his next dependency as a professor at a boy’s school run by Monsieur Pelet. Just as he is finding his niche as teacher at Pelet’s school, he reveals his formula for success: “when I had shown myself the mildest, the most tolerant of masters—a word of impertinence, a movement of disobedience, changed me at once into a despot. I offered but one alternative—submission and acknowledgment of error, or ignominious expulsion” (98). Crimsworth faces similar behavior from Edward in his antipathy, a feeling “which was liable to be excited by every, the most trifling movement, look or word of mine” (25). This type of relational behavior is all that he has known and hence has determined his interaction with others. Because this is the manner in which he remains the most consistent throughout his narrative, it is logical to surmise that this is the closest Crimsworth comes to revealing his real nature. However, this is behavior formed as a result of trauma. If he is effectively able to work through this trauma, he can then reveal his true nature.

As he had done with Edward, during Crimsworth’s employ at Pelet’s school he identifies areas of superiority in order to claim control, including his superiority in
concealment. Up to this point, Crimsworth has portrayed himself as adept at concealing his emotions, but in Brussels he exhibits a proficiency in physical concealment as well. This proclivity towards concealment is also seen in Villette, where Lucy often cloaks her emotions as a defense mechanism against the pain of loss and conceals her physical presence as a means of gaining entry to another’s actions. Additionally, just as a garden is the center of Lucy’s physical concealment, a garden is also the center of Crimsworth’s concealment. An examination of his room at Pelet’s finds one window boarded up, and the first thing he does is try to locate a crevice through which he can catch a glimpse at what lies beyond the boards—the garden of the girl’s school next door, run by Mademoiselle Reuter. He remarks how pleasant it would have been to study “female character in a variety of phases, myself the while sheltered from view by a modest muslin curtain” (96). It is this garden that later conceals him from view of Pelet’s school as he converses with Reuter, and it is while concealed behind this same window that he becomes privy to an intimate conversation between Reuter and Pelet that proves the duplicity of each.

Crimsworth initially believes Pelet to be just and mild enough, yet when he observes Pelet’s treatment of the Flamands he remarks how, regardless of their nationality, “they were men, and, in the main, honest men; and I could not see why their being aboriginals of the flat, dull soil should serve as a pretext for treating them with perpetual severity and contempt” (99). Pelet’s unjust treatment of the Flamands causes Crimsworth to reconsider his initial reaction of Pelet’s character as benevolent: “This
idea of injustice somewhat poisoned the pleasure I might otherwise have derived from Pelet’s soft, affable manner to myself” (99). Though he clearly shows sympathy for the Flamands, Crimsworth ultimately decides to conceal his sympathy in favor of a pleasant living environment, dismissing Pelet’s treatment by saying “we are none of us perfect” (99). He makes the conscious choice to refrain from interference: “I had no inclination . . . to institute a prying search after defects that were scrupulously withdrawn and carefully veiled from my view” (100). He is willing to accept Pelet “for what he seemed”—the ideal employer he initially believed him to be—rather than coping with the reality of Pelet’s concealed character, because it did more to serve his self-interests (100). However, Crimsworth does place a stipulation on his acceptance, stating that he will believe him to be the ideal until such time as he might be proven otherwise—similar to his resolve to endure Edward’s tyranny, to a point.

The disillusionment he experiences in the realization of Pelet’s true character does little to curb any of Crimsworth’s further expectations—especially regarding Reuter. We sense Crimsworth’s manipulative ability when he convinces Hunsden to act as patron, but we are not aware of the extent of his manipulative power until he encounters Reuter, one who has made a profession of manipulation. After Crimsworth’s first lesson at her school, Reuter appeals to him to conceal nothing from her: “repose in me entire confidence” (117). Yet after he responds that all went smoothly on his first day, he experiences Reuter’s true nature. She enforces her “penetrating” eye, which Crimsworth plainly reads as stating “Be as close as you like, I am not dependent on your candour; what you would conceal I already know” (118). Her demeanor quickly changes to befit
her intentions. She proceeds to elicit small talk, but Crimsworth asserts his superiority in seeing beyond her thinly veiled effort through a study of her countenance: “Her glances were not given in full, but out of corners, so quietly, so stealthily, yet I think I lost not one. I watched her as keenly as she watched me; I perceived soon that she was feeling after my real character” (118). The sport of his returned effort is clarified shortly thereafter:

I enjoyed the game much, and did not hasten its conclusion; sometimes I gave her hopes, beginning a sentence rather weakly, when her shrewd eye would light up—she thought she had me; having led her a little way, I delighted to turn round and finish with sound, hard sense, whereat her countenance would fall. (119)

However, he is ultimately disappointed by the end result of this initial game of manipulative power, as he sees that her straightforward glance is “moderate, temperate, tranquil,” exemplifying her superiority—he has not shaken her as much as he had thought (119).

In the second instance of their emotional sparring, Crimsworth again concedes to his opponent. Reuter continues to watch him and perseveres in her efforts to become, as Crimsworth puts it, “Mistress of my nature” (118), and he is entertained by her efforts:

Now she flattered with exquisite tact, now she moralized, now she tried how far I was accessible to mercenary motives, then she disported on the brink of affection . . . anon, she talked excellent sense, aware that others have the folly to admire judgment. I found it at once pleasant and easy to
evade all these efforts; it was sweet, when she thought me nearly won, to turn round and to smile in her very eyes, half scornfully, and then to witness her scarcely veiled, though mute mortification. (134)

Reuter is ultimately the victor as she offers him her hand, unasked, and acts under pretense of caregiver to an ill Crimsworth. He is taken by her apparent display of affection because it is the only affection he has received in life thus far. He reveals that his heart has succumbed: “her finger, 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” (134). That she broke it or that the lid snapped down on her is revealed shortly thereafter, as Crimsworth witnesses a moment of duplicity—an intimate conversation between Reuter and Pelet.

Once Crimsworth overhears Reuter profess her engagement to Pelet as well as her lack of attraction to Crimsworth, he is aware that he has fallen prey to their duplicitous behavior and he rebels, taking back that which he has relinquished—self-control. Pelet, his “principal, confidant, and counselor,” has betrayed him (138). The morning after Pelet’s encounter with Reuter in the garden, Crimsworth feels superiority over Pelet: “I felt half his master, because the reality of his nature was now known to me . . . I saw his soul lurk behind his smile, and heard in every one of his smooth phrases a voice interpreting their treacherous import” (142). He has reclaimed control.

Following the garden scene, Crimsworth’s next meeting with Reuter finds his countenance openly displaying his emotions as he finds her duplicity intolerable: “I shot into her eyes, from my own, a look, where there was no respect, no love, no tenderness,
no gallantry; where the strictest analysis could detect nothing but scorn, hardihood, irony. I made her bear it, and feel it” (142). Crimsworth notices that Reuter’s manner towards him is altered since he began treating her with “hardness and indifference” (157). She attempts to “lure back the game she had lost” through inundating him with affection, but to no avail: “ere long the plating of pretension wore off, the real material appeared below, and [she is] laid aside as a deception” (144, 158). He again reveals his compulsion to rebel against duplicity, culminating in his resignation from the dependency of both Pelet’s and Reuter’s employment. Equally repetitive, Crimsworth leaves one dependency only to enter into another through the exploitation of circumstance as he yet again manipulates assistance.

When he leaves Reuter’s employ and refuses Pelet’s offer of continued employment, he turns to Monsieur Vandenhuten, the wealthy parent of a student, under the correct assumption that since he had once saved the life of Vandenhuten’s son Vandenhuten would surely wish to repay the debt. While he initiates the discussion with Vandenhuten on the premise of exploiting his indebted position, Crimsworth notes that he “went on to explain to him that my wish was not so much to be helped, as to be put in the way of helping myself” (177). This is the first instance where he has left a dependency and has attempted to take control in helping himself rather than relying solely on someone else to come to his aid. Vandenhuten puts him in the way of a position which would prove fruitful in gaining his financial independence and establishing merit in taking a wife. This emerging reclamation follows his “do more, be more” agenda as he pursues the attention of Frances Henri, the only person who has
shown him true affection and with whom he can release his stores of love and affection. It is in his relationship with Frances that Crimsworth begins his emotional development and subsequently experiences a psychic break, indicative of an attempt at mastering trauma, which will be discussed presently.

Soon after Frances’ acceptance of his marriage proposal, Crimsworth experiences a psychological break in the form of a hypochondriac episode:

I felt my chamber invaded by one I had known formerly, but had thought for ever departed. I was temporarily a prey to hypochondria. . . . She had been my acquaintance, nay, my guest, once before in boyhood; I had entertained her at bed and board for a year; for that space of time I had her to myself in secret; she lay with me, she ate with me, she walked out with me, showing me nooks in woods, hollows in hills, where we could sit together, and where she could drop her drear veil over me, and so hide sky and sun, grass and green tree; taking me entirely to her death-cold bosom, and holding me with arms of bone. . . . [T]here was no marvel that, just as I rose to youth, a sorceress, finding me lost in vague mental wanderings, with many affections and few objects, glowing aspirations and gloomy prospects, strong desires and slender hopes, should lift up her illusive lamp to me in the distance, and lure me to her vaulted home of horrors. No wonder her spells then had power; but now, when my course was widening, my prospect brightening; when my affections had found a rest; when my desires, folding wings, weary with long flight, had just alighted
on the very lap of fruition, and nestled there warm, content, under the caress of a soft hand—why did hypochondria accost me now? (191)

Although this situation is not unfamiliar to Crimsworth, as he states that he had the same experience as a child, he questions why it should come upon him at the present when his existence seems to be broadening. One critic states that “All that can be deduced from the incident is that for Crimsworth . . . the prospect of marriage is more unsettling than he is willing to acknowledge” (Malone 186). This is a surface concern, for what can be deduced from this incident goes much deeper than a simple case of cold feet. According to Otto Fenichel, in his *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, “If a person reacts to an event in an exaggerated way or with a type of affect that seems inadequate, this is a sign of displacement; the affect actually belongs to some other situation which had been warded off” (193). For Crimsworth, Frances possesses those traits which had forsaken him in the loss of his mother and the subsequent loss of the comforts of home.

In Crimsworth’s estimation, Frances is a “model of truth and honour . . . silent possessor of a well of tenderness, of a flame as genial as still, as pure as quenchless, of natural feeling, natural passion, those sources of refreshment and comfort to the sanctuary of home” (141). He has found the affection and the lack of duplicity that has thus far been deficient in his life; the loss of his sense of being an encumbrance would soon follow. In Frances he has projected all of his own needs and desires: “I loved her . . . my best object of sympathy on earth, thinking such thoughts as I thought, feeling such feelings as I felt, my ideal of the shrine in which to seal my stores of love” (141). While his mother is the otherworldly object of his sympathy, he has found her replacement on
earth within Frances. In projecting his needs on to Frances he has found a home “of my own making” (145). The loss of his mother, then, is at the heart of the displacement found in this hypochondriac episode, just as parental loss was at the heart of his childhood episode as well. It is as a child that he initially experienced the trauma of the loss of his parents that would shape his life. Unlike in childhood, though, when she had been his guest, Crimsworth now revolts against the tyranny of hypochondria:

I repulsed her as one would a dreaded and ghastly concubine coming to embitter a husband’s heart toward his young bride; in vain; she kept her sway over me for that night and the next day, and eight succeeding days. Afterwards, my spirits began slowly to recover their tone; my appetite returned, and in a fortnight I was well. . . . I was glad when the evil spirit departed from me, and I could again seek Frances, and sit at her side, freed from the dreadful tyranny of my demon. (191)

He now experiences an attempt at mastering trauma in seeking to end his pattern of dependency and following the path of independency. In marrying Frances he has gained a like sympathy, a partner, and a willing participant in his quest for superiority.

With Frances as student and, later, as fiancée, Crimsworth proves himself the mild and tolerant master. His attraction to Reuter lay in their like sympathy of manipulative prowess; once their emotional sparring proves Reuter the deceptive victor, he ceases his admiration. With Frances, his attraction also lay in a like sympathy—the pursuit of knowledge—but when their verbal sparring proves her in possession of a frank and open manner, as well as proving that Frances knows when to let Crimsworth win, his
attraction to her is strengthened. He sums up his attraction: “the tailworn, fagged, probably irritable tutor, blind almost to beauty, insensible to airs and graces, glories chiefly in certain mental qualities: application, love of knowledge, natural capacity, docility, truthfulness, gratefulness, are the charms that attract his notice and win his regard” (149). He found Frances to be possessed of “perseverance and a sense of duty; I found she was really capable of applying to study, of contending with difficulties” (159). Moglen states that it is Crimsworth’s submissiveness that “manipulates Frances’ love and earns him her half-fearful adoration” (92). I contend, however, that it is his care in furthering her education and his ability to assert himself that Frances is attracted to, which is why she continues to refer to him as “master,” even after their marriage. Crimsworth perceives that “in proportion as my manner grew austere and magisterial, hers became easy and self-possessed” (166). He discovers how to best “foster” his student:

Constance of attention—a kindness as mute as watchful, always standing by her, cloaked in the rough garb of austerity, and making its real nature known only by a rare glance of interest, or a cordial and gentle word; real respect masked with seeming imperiousness, directing, urging her actions, yet helping her too, and that with devoted care. (176)

Crimsworth devotes himself to establishing Frances’ confidence and furthering her English skills, even comparing his participation in Frances’ development to a gardener and his blooming plant: “I watched [her] change much as a gardener watches the growth of a precious plant, and I contributed to it too, even as the said gardener contributes to the
development of his favourite” (185). While he had once felt like a plant excluded from the sunshine of life under his brother’s tyranny, Crimsworth has now elevated himself to the position of gardener; however, it is yet too early to tell whether their botanical relationship shall run similar to Edward’s and Crimsworth’s and spell the demise of Frances’ sunshine as well.

During the scene of proposal, Frances echoes Crimsworth’s formula for success when she remarks that she believes he is “very good, and very superior,” as well as “stern to those who are careless and idle, but . . . kind, very kind to the attentive and industrious” (249). Contrary to his compliant nature with Frances as student and fiancée, with Frances as wife, Crimsworth reveals that Frances has not escaped chastisement: “Talk French to me she would, and many a punishment she has had for her willfulness” (276). He later states that, at times, he would make her read English to him as atonement for her behavior. He made Frances read Wordsworth aloud as a humbling experience, because “she had to ask questions, to sue for explanations, to be like a child and a novice, and to acknowledge me as her senior and director” (277). He can only regain control of Frances by making her like a child.

Once married, Crimsworth remarks that he felt as though he possessed two wives, a remark that speaks of a kind of duplicity:

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. . . . In the daytime my house and establishment were conducted by Madame the directress, a stately and
elegant woman, bearing much anxious thought on her large brow; much calculated dignity in her serious mien. . . At six o'clock P.M. my daily labours ceased. I then came home, for my home was my heaven; ever at that hour, as I entered our private sitting-room, the lady-directress vanished from before my eyes, and Frances Henri, my own little lace-mender, was magically restored to my arms. (275)

Though duplicitous in her two distinct demeanors, Frances’ is a duplicity that Crimsworth will not rebel against, because both sides of her serve his self-interests. As directress, Frances allows Crimsworth to maintain control: “She said that I must spend [time] amongst her pupils to learn their characters, to be au courant with everything that was passing in the house . . . to be able to give her my opinion on knotty points when she required it, and this she did constantly, never allowing my interest in the pupils to fall asleep, and never making any change of importance without my cognizance and consent” (276). As wife, Frances’ childlike presence as student to Crimsworth’s master encourages his need for superiority. Moglen notes, “that the price for Frances’s professional liberation is personal servitude, as becomes clear to the reader although it is not perceived by Frances” (241). I argue that a lack of perception is not at all evident. Crimsworth, as narrator, provides his view of Frances in her servitude, yet looking at how naturally she seems to slip in and out of her roles, both as Mrs. Crimsworth and as directress, is evidence that she is aware she must exchange personal servitude for professional liberation. Therefore, as blooming plant to Crimsworth’s role of gardener, Frances’ position as directress guarantees that she shall not forsake sunshine altogether,
but she must be content to spend some time in shadow as Mrs. Crimsworth in order to obtain (and maintain) her goals. By comparison, the time she spends as Mrs. Crimsworth is minimal to the time spent as directress. As such, her chosen concealment of her true nature is a small price to pay for the liberty she receives in exchange. In this manner, the result of Frances’ concealment is one that proves nothing but positive, both for herself and for Crimsworth; she fulfills her desire for liberty as well as his need for control.

Though many studies of *The Professor* focus on Crimsworth as a self-made man, it is actually Frances who is self-made. Our awareness of Frances’ goals provides us with a picture of her overall growth and development in achieving those goals, but we are not afforded the same opportunity with Crimsworth. He does not set forth lifelong ambitions he intends to achieve, he merely collects desires along the way and manipulates who and what he can in order to achieve those desires—hardly the hero Brontë set out to portray. However, Brontë may have realized a heroine in Frances. Like the hero Brontë wanted to achieve, Frances worked her way through life, never getting a shilling she hadn’t earned, no sudden turns lifting her to wealth, and the competency she gained was won through the sweat of her brow—“her own efforts are all she has to look to, her acquirements must be her sole fortune” (156). This is similar to what we see with Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, as shall be discussed further in chapter three. 16 Frances is “driven throughout by a desire to improve herself and to emigrate to her ‘Promised Land’”—England (Rauch 140). She knows what she has to do to obtain her goal, and she continually works to improve herself to that end. She requests that she be taught lace-mending as a means of obtaining

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16 This is also true to some extent with Jane Eyre, for while she does earn her competency by the sweat of her brow, she is also lifted unexpectedly by an inheritance.
money to take lessons in history, grammar, geography, and math. She plans on finding a position as governess or schoolteacher when she can speak and write English well and then intends to make her way to England. She ultimately achieves her goal through hard work, perseverance, and concealment. Unlike Crimsworth, who manipulates his position in exploiting his acquaintances to further his social position, Frances strives independently. Once she marries Crimsworth, it is Frances who proposes to begin a school, and it is Frances who makes a success of the school, although Crimsworth remarks “our school became one of the most popular in Brussels,” as though he played a role in its success (273). Indeed, Frances has to demand his presence in the school one hour a day in order to make him interested in what interests her.

Hunsden also plays a role in the success of the school, and he plays the largest role in Crimsworth’s life. Tromly notes that he “precipitates the release from Edward’s tyranny, makes the crucial referral for a teaching job in Belgium” and, through his recommendation, ultimately builds the clientele of the school Crimsworth refers to as “ours” (31). It is no wonder Frances and Crimsworth end up as neighbors to Hunsden, and Hunsden as “playmate” to their son, Victor. Hoeveler and Jadwin view Hunsden as an evil force in Crimsworth’s life: “Crimsworth’s shooting Victor’s dog Yorke, a gift from Hunsden, represents Crimsworth’s desire to rid Victor of Hunsden-like evils” (55). However, if he viewed Hunsden as an evil he wished his son to be rid of, then why would Crimsworth purchase the home neighboring Hunsden’s? He relies on the investment advice of Hunsden and Vandenhuten to achieve additional financial gain and is ultimately able to obtain the independency contained in his “do more, be more” agenda as a result of
his manipulation of their benevolence. Phillip Momberger touches on Hunsden’s influence over Crimsworth when he states that, for Crimsworth, “Hunsden is a gadfly. He tantalizes him with momentary visions of his own possibility. He annoys him and upsets him, but he is dependent upon him” (363). Indeed, Crimsworth puts up with the “annoyance” of Hunsden in his life, because he owes his current status to Hunsden’s patronage, and he knows that Hunsden will do for Victor what he did for him—propel him through life on his manipulated patronage. It is only through his exploitation of the beneficence of his acquaintances that Crimsworth is ultimately able to “do more, be more, possess more” and obtain “the home I had never had, the wife I inwardly vowed to win” (201). Therefore, although his compulsion to repeat indicates a desire to break free from his dependent state, it is precisely through his continued dependency on the benevolence of others, like Hunsden and Vandenhuten, that he exerts control in a feigned state of independence. Likewise, though he compulsively rebels against duplicity, he remains staid in Frances’ duplicitous behavior because it furthers his overall agenda in exerting his superiority. As a result, rather than mastering trauma, Crimsworth’s repetitive patterns of behavior continue to evolve and become further incorporated into how he comes to live his life.
Chapter 2

“Condemned to a Stiller Doom than Mine”:

The Despondent Union of Jane and Rochester

Charlotte Brontë closes *Jane Eyre* with a picture of marital bliss ten years after the union of Jane and Rochester. My intention in this chapter is to call that conclusion into question by establishing that consistent behavioral patterns throughout her life indicate that it is against Jane’s nature to remain content with Rochester at Ferndean. Despite a surface accommodation to the structure of resolution, the patterns of Jane’s life predict a breakdown. My point will be that these patterns, rooted in trauma, preside over any proclaimed conclusion. Indeed, although there is apparent movement through or toward a narrative resolution of psychological growth and surrender, what will be looked at is a repetition compulsion deeper than the apparent fulfillment indicated in the narrator’s conclusion. In this chapter I will look first at the repetitive cycles evident in the novel and then show how these cycles inevitably undermine *Jane Eyre*’s established ostensible harmonious ending.

In detailed portraits of five locations of Jane’s life—Gateshead Hall, Lowood School, Thornfield Hall, Moor House, and Ferndean—Jane sees fit to endure and submit to her situation, often oppressive, always deprived. Her submission defines her identity as she is bred to servitude. But that submission is only ever followed up to a point. We
must recall Jane’s statement that any restraint on her part has its boundaries: “I know no medium: I never in my life have known any medium in my dealings with positive, hard characters, antagonistic to my own, between absolute submission and determined revolt. I have always faithfully observed the one, up to the very moment of bursting, sometimes with volcanic vehemence, into the other.”17 After enduring what is often either several years of cruelty or several years (or months) of apparent contentment, Jane continually, indeed repetitively, reaches a breaking point—the “very moment of bursting.” It is a singular act involving oppressive confinement or the threat of such confinement at each location that finally forces Jane to revolt against her current situation, enforcing change with either direct intent or as a matter of consequence. Such recurring patterns of confinement and oppression and the resulting resistance to said patterns culminate in Jane’s eventual yearning for and attainment of liberty by way of a new prospect. Nature itself corresponds to these patterns; for as confinement is presented literally, with physical internment, as well as metaphorically, with emotional despondency, both are often represented parallel with nature. Consonant with what we will later see in Brontë’s Villette,18 Jane’s self-reflection in nature is twofold, for not only does it further mirror her literal and metaphorical confinement but it also reveals her inward tumult, her desire for change.


18 In chapter three, I will further discuss the correlation between nature and recurring patterns of behavior as they appear in Villette.
In this chapter I will trace Jane’s recurring patterns of behavior, originating with the core trauma of her red-room experience, to reveal her attempt at working through her trauma. I will also illustrate how Jane’s use of nature acts as a reflective mechanism, indicating an inward need for escape that is initiated by these behavioral patterns. Through analyzing Jane’s recurring patterns of behavior along with their further reflection in nature, I suggest that by the end of her autobiography Jane has again set herself up in an established pattern of endurance ending in escape; that she has not broken from her recurring pattern of behavior indicates not only that Jane has failed to work through her trauma but also that the union between Jane and Rochester cannot be as idyllic as the narrator, Jane, would lead us to believe.

Although Jane represents herself as “supremely blest” (384) in her marriage to Rochester, further analysis reveals that her ultimate end at Ferndean does not really resolve or veer from her recurring pattern of behavior, a pattern of “enclosure and escape” (Gilbert and Gubar 339). In order to accept the resolution of her happy marriage, we would have to be convinced that something has changed in Jane such that she is capable of reversing this pattern. We would have to believe that her relationship with Rochester in the end has transformed into something like a union of equals, freely chosen, contained perhaps by marriage vows but not ultimately confining. But I do not think that Jane’s record of this resolution is at all as sanguine as it appears on the surface. Indeed, it is my contention that the very pattern of Jane’s records of endurance followed by eruption, confinement followed by liberation, is rooted in her earliest memories and that nothing in the course of the novel reverses this embedded pattern. Brontë tells us
that Jane has been in some ways conditioned for this cycle of enclosure and escape when she shows us in bold and unforgettable colors how Jane’s childhood was in many ways interrupted forever by the intrusion of trauma and terror. I refer of course to the death of her parents and to her punishment and entrapment at the age of ten by her Aunt, Mrs. Reed, in the red-room. I will look at this core scene, but Jane’s traumatic origins must first be established.

All of Brontë’s fictional autobiographers experience at an early age the death of both parents, and all of them equally reduce these deaths virtually to subtext within their autobiographies. Crimsworth devotes two sentences to the death of his parents; Lucy only hints at vague allusions to her parents’ demise; and, Jane touches upon the event only briefly in less than a paragraph. Though these fictional autobiographers barely broach the details of their orphaned origins, it is surely the originary trauma that informs each of their lives. Jane is an infant at the time of her arrival at the Reeds, orphaned by the death of her parents and taken in by the brother of her deceased mother. The loss of both parents is the foundation of Jane’s trauma, as any familial acceptance or kindness that she may have known ceased upon her uncle’s death shortly after her arrival at Gateshead. The affection and guidance provided to a child by its natural parents or by its parental figures is entirely withheld from Jane; rather, she is “made to feel unsafe, unloved, and unworthy by a foster-parent who wishes her dead” (Paris 146). Mrs. Reed looks upon Jane as an irksome obligation rather than as an impressionable and desolate child in need of integration into a family unit. As a result, Jane considers herself an

19 This point has already been established with The Professor in chapter one and shall be further established with Jane Eyre and Villette in chapters two and three respectively.
object of “discord” within the household: “I was like nobody there; . . . My habitual mood [was] of humiliation, self-doubt, [and] forlorn depression” (12-13). Thus there is a low-grade perpetual trauma in addition to the drastic and dramatic. This sentiment predates the red-room experience, indicating an earlier predisposition to dissension, which is significant in establishing that her trauma goes back further than the red-room but ultimately does culminate in this core traumatic event. It is perhaps even more significant to note that Jane begins the story of her life with the day’s events leading up to the red-room experience, referring to it in the first line of her autobiography as “that day” (5). In his Psychoanalysis, Language, and the Body of the Text, Martin Gliserman points out that Jane opens with this phrase because “‘that day’ is the one that has been marked as being the day Jane’s liberation from the Reeds began” (88). While she is eventually physically liberated from the Reeds, I see that this phrase does not so much mark the date of her liberation as it marks the trigger of her psychological compulsion to repeat episodes of confinement and escape. In effect, Jane begins her testimony with “that day” because it marks the commencement of her attempt to master that trauma. Jane identifies this day—this moment—as the one that has set the trajectory of her life.

Although she has experienced several years of constant physical abuse at the hands of John Reed—“He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually” (8)—it is one solitary moment of this oppressive behavior during her existence at Gateshead Hall that breaks Jane, prompting a chain of defiance of her situation. As John again initiates an act of violence in hurling a book at Jane, this time her fall from the strike draws blood. As van der Kolk and
McFarlane clarify, and as I contended in chapter one, often trauma does not present a “radically new experience,” but rather “confirms some belief that an individual has tried to evade” (8). This single action is defining in its escalation of the violence directed towards Jane, traumatically confirming her insignificance as a human being in the eyes not only of John Reed but, as reaffirmed in the red-room scene, of all those classified as family.

Whereas, prior to the drawing of blood, she had accustomed herself to John’s abuse, “never [having] an idea of replying to it; my care was to endure the blow which would certainly follow the insult,” the sharp pain of the bleeding cut causes Jane to cease her endurance: “my terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded” (8). This shall be the first in a series of instances where her absolute submission bursts into determined revolt as she receives John “in frantic sort” (9). Jane notes this change in her behavior as she is taken away to serve her punishment confined in the red-room: “I resisted all the way, a new thing for me . . . The fact is, I was a trifle beside myself; or rather out of myself . . . I was conscious that a moment’s mutiny had already rendered me liable to strange penalties, and, like any other rebel slave, I felt resolved, in my desperation, to go all lengths” (9). Comparing her rebellion to that of a slave indicates that its intended end result is liberty, and she shall go all lengths to secure it, for what does she have to lose? One moment of mutiny has already established the fact that she shall be punished. It is Jane’s experience in the red-room, and the resulting “rapid rush of retrospective thought,” however, that secures her resistance and ironically guarantees her physical liberation from the Reeds (11).
She is locked in the red-room—“no jail was ever more secure” (11)—with her initial plea for release based on sheer terror going unheeded by Mrs. Reed, who states “it is only on condition of perfect submission and stillness” that she shall “liberate” Jane (14). The mere fact that Jane had only recently defied her ill treatment at Gateshead indicates that her life to this point has been nothing short of perfect submission, yet Mrs. Reed remains “blind and deaf on the subject” (8) of Jane’s abuse and even contributes to it by spurning her “wild supplication for pardon,” thrusting her back and locking her a second time in the “dark and haunted chamber” (60), an action which Jane “shall never forget” (19). As set forth by Pierre Janet, Jane’s terror in the red-room qualifies as a vehement emotion; therefore, although she states “I never forgot the, to me, frightful episode of the red-room” there is evidence in her repetitive patterns to suggest that she has, however, failed to fully integrate it into her conscious awareness, thereby causing her to continually seek out oppression to resist it in order to master it (60). The memory of her experience in the red-room remains dissociated from her conscious awareness with the patterns of repetition throughout her life indicating that Jane has indeed never forgotten but that she has repressed and, therefore, fails to fully remember.

Gilbert and Gubar state that “if Jane was ‘out of’ herself in her struggle against John Reed, her experience in the red-room . . . forces her deeply into herself” (340). I concur with this assertion, for it is within the red-room that Jane’s introspection further strengthens her resolve to resist oppression at the hands of Mrs. Reed and her children, even to the point of instigating death: “‘Unjust!—unjust!’ said my reason . . . ; and Resolve, equally wrought up, instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from
insupportable oppression—as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die” (12). Introspection, however, is only half of the equation. In actuality, Jane has also been forced out of herself to see who she is and what she has become. This type of forced reality is in keeping with Jacque Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage in psychological development, the function of which is “to establish a relation between the organism and its reality” (Lacan 63). According to Lacan, the visual identity reflected from the mirror supplies imaginary wholeness to the experience of a fragmentary real. He further states that the moment in which the mirror stage comes to an end is characterized as “the deflection of the specular I into the social I [inaugurating] the dialectic that will henceforth link the I” to narrative, or language (Lacan 65). It is through noticing her reflection that Jane moves from the real (life before language) into the imaginary (the mirror stage), whereby she will then begin movement into the symbolic (language), forming a narrative for her experiences thus far. Anthony Elliott clarifies Lacan’s theory of the movement from the imaginative into the symbolic order:

The imaginary order in Lacan’s writings is rather a world of distorted illusions. It comprises images and delusions that are constituted through a reflecting surface, a mirror. For Lacan, what serves to break up this imaginary hall of mirrors, and thereby prevents human subjects from psychosis, is the symbolic order. The symbolic in Lacan’s work is that

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20 While Lacan indicates that the mirror stage occurs in infancy somewhere between the ages of six and eighteen months, we must remember that Jane lacked a positive parental figure in infancy who would facilitate such psychological growth.
place of received social meanings, differentiation, individuation. Central
to the subject’s separation from the imaginary into the symbolic is the
function of language. This process of symbolization by language
represses the imaginary traps of specular images, and thereby for Lacan
constitutes the structure of the unconscious. Language and repression are
thus twin boundary posts which bring the subject into being as an “I,”
separated from that which is “Not-I”. (124)

When Jane spies her reflection in a mirror she notes that her “fascinated glance
involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that
visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a
white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else
was still, had the effect of a real spirit” (11). While Jane appears split from the image
reflected in the mirror, it is actually at this point that she immediately begins to self-
reflect, to question her accountability to the events that have constituted her life thus
far—“Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, for ever
condemned? Why could I never please? Why was it useless to try to win any one’s
favour? . . . I dared commit no fault; I strove to fulfil every duty; and I was termed
naughty and tiresome” (12)—thereby deflecting the specular I into the social I and further
invoking change in the form of verbal release. This release into the verbal/social,
however, does not necessarily liberate as it always brings Jane back into another
oppressive situation. As I will discuss, this cycle recurs at various points in the novel as
Jane pursues oppression precisely in order to resist it, thereby indicating her attempt at mastering trauma.

Whereas her initial resistance lay in being taken to the red-room, it has now spread to a resistance of her treatment in general, indeed to a general revolt that she shall compulsively repeat throughout her life. Although it began with the drawing of blood and was furthered through self-reflection, the pivotal moment of Jane’s resistance occurs during her verbal attack on Mrs. Reed, expressing years of resentment and disdain for her ill-treatment after a moment of silent deliberation: “Speak I must; I had been trodden on severely, and must turn . . . ‘[I]f any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty . . . You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so’” (30). Although Mrs. Reed had already set in motion Jane’s departure from Gateshead, securing her physical liberation, Jane finds a more vital liberation through her verbal expression: “my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhoped-for liberty” (30). This sense of liberation after rebellion is also seen in The Professor when Crimsworth leaves his brother’s employ, only to replace this dependency with another. For Jane, this liberating feeling of breaking away, of freeing herself from bondage, is repeatedly sought after as she pursues oppression precisely to master it through resistance and departure. Locating her voice through this resistance is an asset Jane shall carry with her throughout the novel, for it is a declaration of innocence that prevents her condemnation at Lowood,
directness of speech that shall define a relationship with Rochester at Thornfield Hall and release Jane from his potential oppressive objectivity of her, and verbal protest that ultimately allows her to refuse a future in captivity with St. John as a missionary’s wife in India.

In order to understand how originary and even deterministic this early red-room scene is to the unfolding of the narrative of Jane’s life thereafter, I want to turn to contemporary theories of trauma in order to understand not only how Jane attempts to negotiate this early experience but also to suggest how Brontë seems to be weaving this traumatic moment into the fabric of the narrative. Fundamental to Brontë’s sense of Jane’s evolution is the intractable and, I would suggest, irreversible damage such trauma can inflict. To follow contemporary trauma theorists, the effects of the events in question may be ameliorated by narrative and witnessing but the compulsion to repeat is never fully reversed.

As discussed in my Introduction, van der Kolk and McFarlane note the “repetitive replacing of the trauma in images, behaviors, feelings, physiological states, and interpersonal relationships,” making it critical to locate the specific traumatic event around which a person has “become ‘stuck’” (7). Jane’s red-room trauma becomes in this sense the core scene that confirms her fundamental need for resistance, and it is to this core that she returns in a manner consistent with the repetition compulsion found in trauma. As Freud (1914) indicates, it is the “compulsion to repeat” that becomes the “way of remembering” (Freud 150). For Jane, it is her unconscious compulsion to place herself in oppressive and confining situations where she must revolt and seek liberation.
that becomes her way of remembering the trauma of the red-room experience. Indeed, Jane’s compulsion to repeat as well as her need to provide testimony for a “condemned” life she earlier describes as “a stiller doom” indicates not only her despondency in marriage but her ultimate attempt at mastering trauma (93).

Corresponding to the weaving of the traumatic memory into the narrative is Brontë’s sense that nature itself bends in a kind of sympathy to this most isolating and unnatural act. Mrs. Reed excludes Jane from participation in the day-to-day life of the Reeds, from “privileges intended only for contented, happy, little children” (5). This exclusion initially results in self-confinement as Jane sits in the window-seat, drawing the scarlet drapery round her; the color of this exclusionary device provides a foreshadowing parallel to her impending traumatic and involuntary confinement in the red-room. It is in this recessed window that Jane’s thoughts mark the first of several instances where she looks both to nature and afar to places unknown—granting an “enlarged sense of life’s possibilities”—presenting the faraway as more promising, more pleasant than the restrictive, objectionable near (Chase 86). She sits looking through the panes of glass at a dreary winter afternoon: “Afar, it offered a pale blank mist and cloud; near, a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast” (5-6). In this case, the “pale blank mist and cloud” is as appealing as a blank slate, the prospect of a fresh start for Jane, while the “storm-beat shrub” and “ceaseless rain” parallels her horrid current living situation. Although she is protected from the elements by panes of glass and a roof over her head, Jane is not separated from the ceaseless hostility of the Reeds beating down and sweeping over her, culminating in
her “lamentable blast” towards such hostility. It is Jane’s physically rather feeble but verbally brilliant revolt against her treatment that consequently results in her expulsion from Gateshead Hall, actualizing the prospect of a fresh start.

As a direct result of Jane’s newfound defiance, her already exclusionary existence at Gateshead becomes a solitary confinement in the nursery: “[Mrs. Reed appointed] me a small closet to sleep in by myself, condemning me to take my meals alone” (22). This was a bearable confinement for Jane, however, for it brought with it the hope of liberty in the seeming nearness of a change which she “desired and waited . . . in silence” (22). Nevertheless, it also fortified Jane’s displeasure with Mrs. Reed and furthered her passionate responses toward acts of ill-treatment as she “bursts her bonds again and again to tell Mrs. Reed what she thinks of her, an extraordinarily self-assertive act” (Gilbert and Gubar 343). The servant, Bessie, albeit inadvertently, previously suggested to Jane the behavior necessary to secure her freedom from the Reeds: “[Y]ou should try to be useful and pleasant, then, perhaps, you would have a home here; but if you become passionate and rude, Missis will send you away, I am sure” (10). Passionate and rude perfectly defines Jane’s manner in her aunt’s eyes, thereby causing Mrs. Reed to take the steps necessary to release Jane from Gateshead and ship her off to Lowood Institution. While there is no indication that Jane’s behavior was pre-meditated, it was to be sure over-determined and unconsciously designed to offer her another servitude that would be more consonant with her desire for freedom.

As I discuss in chapter three, Lucy Snowe also leads an exclusionary existence; however, Lucy’s exclusion is self-imposed, whereas Jane’s is not.
Jane is entirely hopeful in her new prospect, initially viewing Lowood as “remote and mysterious” (35), a “complete change,” implying a “long journey, an entire separation from Gateshead, an entrance into a new life” (20). Along her journey from Gateshead to Lowood, however, there is a noticeable change in the natural surroundings which shall prove a presentiment of things to come: “the country changed; great grey hills heaved up round the horizon: as twilight deepened we descended a valley, dark with wood, and long after night had overclouded the prospect I heard a wild wind rushing amongst the trees” (35). It is as if she is entering a prison of nature; an obstructed horizon indicates limited possibilities, further supported by the overclouded view, while a darkly wooded valley indicates entrance into a bleak, walled-in existence. This image is reinforced her first day at Lowood as Jane enters the school’s garden and finds it to be “a wide inclosure, surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect” (40). Not only is Jane confined within the school and its surroundings, but Mr. Brocklehurst also seeks to confine Jane to a life of solitude at Lowood—similar to her life at Gateshead—condemning her as a liar and ordering the other students to avoid her, exclude her, and “shut her out” (56), just as Mrs. Reed had ordered her children “not to go near her” and refuse an association with her (22).

Jane’s confidant at Lowood is the saintly Helen Burns, who states, “‘It is far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you’” (47). Helen is ignorant to the fact that patient endurance to a smart only she felt is all Jane has done for the first ten years of her life, and only through her hasty action did she gain liberation
from that which she had so patiently endured. It is as a result of this condition that Jane replies to Helen: “‘when we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should—so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again . . . I must resist those who punish me unjustly. It is as natural as that I should love those who show me affection, or submit to punishment when I feel it is deserved’” (48). It is interesting to note that she speaks of this creed as if it were instinctive, yet by her own account striking back and resisting only became part of her nature months prior to her arrival at Lowood, after she struck back and resisted the Reeds. This indicates that the force of the traumatic memory and the invigorating feeling of liberation have caused these self-preserving defiant responses to become so ingrained in her psyche that they are now a natural part of her being.

Fearing endurance would again lead to oppression, as it had with the Reeds, Jane wishes to divert such oppression in her “new life” through resistance, except this time it would be a resistance similar to Bessie’s entreaty of being “useful and pleasant,” as she makes a conscious effort to strive to do her best at all lengths. However, although Jane fully intends to resist oppressive submission, circumstance again finds her compulsively repeating that which she meant to circumvent. Mr. Brocklehurst’s condemnations three months into Jane’s stay at the school serve to undermine her efforts at resistance, returning Jane to a similar emotional state experienced at Gateshead: “I had meant to be so good, and to do so much at Lowood: to make so many friends, to earn respect, and win affection. Already, I had made visible progress . . .; now, here I lay again crushed and trodden on; and could I ever rise more? ‘Never,’ I thought; and ardently I wished to die”
(58). Faced with conditions at Lowood analogous to life at the Reeds—discrimination, condemnation and isolation—Jane’s compulsion is to respond in kind; her anticipated “new life” is threatened with the responsive habits of her previous life at Gateshead. Her compulsion toward oppressive despair—just as she experienced in the red-room—is relatively short-lived, though, as she is provided the opportunity to defend the accusations made against her and is subsequently cleared of all charges, thereby “relieved of a grievous load” through the trust and assistance of Miss Temple (63). It is at this point that Jane reasserts a vow to “work afresh,” stating she “toiled hard, and my success was proportionate to my efforts” (63). Her determined efforts to resist oppression have evidently begun to penetrate her cycle of repetition. As shall be seen, however, this breach is only temporary; she has not yet mastered the trauma and is, therefore, compelled toward repetition.

The fourth month of Jane’s Lowood existence brought with it a cleared name resulting in renewed hope for a less oppressive future. As such, Jane describes the “privations, or rather the hardships” of Lowood as having “lessened. Spring drew on . . . the frosts of winter had ceased; its snows were melted, its cutting winds ameliorated” (63-64). With the onset of Jane’s firmly optimistic aspirations, nature again speaks to her situation. This onset of an improved physical, emotional, and atmospheric existence at Lowood brought with it equally improved prospects, as indicated by Jane’s now unsullied description of her surroundings: “I discovered . . . that a great pleasure, an enjoyment which the horizon only bounded, lay all outside the high and spike-guarded walls of our garden: this pleasure consisted in prospect of noble summits girdling a great hill-hollow,
rich in verdure and shadow; in a bright beck, full of dark stones and sparkling eddies” (64). The horizon is no longer obstructed, but it is now the sole measure of restriction of Jane’s enjoyment. She recognizes that beyond the walls of the garden is a place where she may now venture with newfound liberty, but how far beyond the walls she will choose to let herself go remains unclear, until a singular event (the departure of Miss Temple) causes her to once again break down years of endurance and react with resistance, as evidenced by her consequent departure from Lowood on her own terms—terms that once again lead to a repetition of the threat of oppression and the need for revolt, as shall be discussed shortly.

The last two years of her time at Lowood were spent as teacher, a position which she “discharged with zeal,” but she then reports that “at the end of that time I altered” (71). This alteration is as a direct result of Miss Temple’s departure from Lowood; it is after Miss Temple leaves that we learn the scope of her influence over Jane and are provided with one of several scenes in the novel that reveal Jane’s inner-workings. It is clear that, for Jane, Miss Temple served all stations: teacher, pacifier, mother, governess, and companion. From Miss Temple she had imbibed “something of her nature and much of her habits: more harmonious thoughts: what seemed better-regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind. I had given in allegiance to duty and order; I was quiet; I believed I was content: to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character” (71). The phrasing of the above scene is contradictory in its images of captivity, as addressed by Hoeveler and Jadwin:
[T]he repeated subjunctive ‘I believed’ and the metaphors of surveillance and imprisonment betray Jane’s discomfort. These newly adopted attitudes mark eight years of proper behavior at Lowood . . . Such terms or phrases as ‘inmates,’ ‘given in allegiance to duty and order,’ and ‘disciplined and subdued’ conjure the image of an enforced, military self-mastery that is undermined by the subjunctive ‘I believed’ and ‘I appeared.’ Jane’s self-mastery is illusory. (72-73, 80)

Her years of contentment are in doubt, and her discipline and restraint are mere appearances; as Jane points out, she often fooled even herself with the seemingly genuine nature of these qualities. She built a world at Lowood of distorted illusions, again reinforcing Lacan’s imaginary order. It isn’t until Miss Temple’s departure that Jane recognizes the illusory contentment she maintained through absorbing Miss Temple’s character as her own and again instigates a self-reflection culminating in resistance.

As Jane had resisted oppression through striving to be good, it becomes apparent that she chose to emulate Miss Temple—who is described by Helen as “full of goodness”—in accomplishing this task, taking on elements of Miss Temple’s personality that would befit her diversion (47). Although Miss Temple’s influence is portrayed as beneficial, it actually serves to negate Jane’s perceived progress toward her resistance of oppression. Indeed, Jane absorbed Miss Temple’s nature and habits with complete disregard to the nurturing of her own. As is evident from the contrasting nature of her phrasing in the above scene, once Miss Temple departs Lowood, it becomes clear to Jane the degree to which she acted as an oppressive factor in her life. Jane states that she
attained “what seemed” harmonious thoughts and feelings; she “believed” herself to be content. She was quiet and “appeared” regimented and restrained. Additionally, her use of the word “allegiance” suggests an obligation rather than a choice. That she seemed, believed, and appeared suggests that Jane’s true nature is to the contrary. Certainly, Jane’s description of her inner workings evident throughout the novel, and to be discussed herein, indicate that her true nature is indeed quite contrary to that depicted at Lowood. She consumed the best qualities of Miss Temple in an effort to resist oppression at Lowood, but Jane’s consumption ends up instead leading to a more complete oppression of her true nature than had ever been achieved up to this point. Just as she is forced to see her true self during her loathed exile in the red-room, as she spies her reflection in the mirror, so too is she forced out of herself in her willing exile in her Lowood bed chamber, as she realizes the illusory nature of her contentment in transforming herself into the mirror-image of Miss Temple. She has again deflected Lacan’s specular I into the social I, forcing a period of self-reflection and summoning change in the form of verbal release as her cycle ensues of resisting oppression and seeking liberty only to again enter into an oppressive situation.

As is the pattern for Jane, she has reached her breaking point, instigated by the departure of Miss Temple and the subsequent realization of her complete oppression at Lowood. While she ponders her new circumstance, Jane’s true nature begins to surface. She discovers “that in the interval I had undergone a transforming process; that my mind had put off all it had borrowed of Miss Temple—or rather that she had taken with her the serene atmosphere I had been breathing in her vicinity—and that now I was left in my
natural element, and beginning to feel the stirring of old emotions” (72). Identifying and resisting the threat of oppression soon follows suit, along with her yearning for liberty:

My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems; now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, waited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils. . . . I had had no communication by letter or message with the outer world: school-rules, school-duties, school-habits, and notions, and voices, and faces, and phrases, and costumes, and preferences, and antipathies: such was what I knew of existence. And now I felt that it was not enough: I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped. (72)

This yearning for liberty is again represented through Jane’s juxtaposition of her current situation—as monotonous and confining—with the boundless possibilities presented in what lies beyond the horizon:

I went to my window, opened it, and looked out. There were the two wings of the building; there was the garden; there were the skirts of Lowood; there was the hilly horizon. My eye passed all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks: it was those I longed to surmount; all within their boundary of rock and heath seemed prison-ground, exile limits. I traced the white road winding round the base of one
mountain, and vanishing in a gorge between two: how I longed to follow it further! (72)

After realizing that there is life beyond the scope of her vision, Jane decides to liberate herself from the confining walls of the school in search of that life. Like Crimsworth, though Jane initially desires liberty, she quickly settles on “at least a new servitude” (72). Through the supplication of a new servitude, Jane is unconsciously and repetitively confining herself to a potentially oppressive state, one in which she will again yearn for liberation—she again seeks oppression in order to master it through resistance. Once she finds her new servitude at Thornfield Hall, however, her captivity becomes less literal and more metaphoric through the threat of oppression.

For all intents and purposes, Jane is content at Thornfield, for it is here that she has the action, the excitement—in the form of affection and recognition—that she so richly desires.

As is true to form, soon after her arrival at Thornfield Jane looks to nature for the promise of a brighter future: “[I] looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line—that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen: that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach” (93). She repeats her yearning for change, and before she can consider taking action to make a change through liberty, the change is essentially brought to her in the form of Rochester
(155); for the first time, though the promise seems to lie in the faraway, with the arrival of Rochester, Jane soon finds that it lies rather in the near at Thornfield.

That Jane is comfortable in speaking to Rochester in a direct manner, with him equally as direct in return, is an asset she finds enticing and capable of breeding a type of intimacy between them, both of which she has never experienced with a member of the opposite sex: “The friendly frankness, as correct as cordial, with which he treated me, drew me to him. . . . So happy, so gratified did I become with this new interest added to life, that I ceased to pine after kindred. My thin crescent-destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of existence were filled up” (125). However, she soon discovers that to fully partake of this action—this enlarged destiny—would come at a price, that of consciously relinquishing her identity in being enveloped by another, thereby guaranteeing a life of objectification and oppression. For Jane, this will simply not do. Although she desires action, she is not willing to give up a sense of self to obtain it, for it is only through a renouncing of self that her desires could be met. She wishes for practical experience, intercourse with her kind, acquaintance with a variety of people, none of which is attainable through oppressive objectification. It is as a result that Jane repeatedly seeks liberation.

During one of the most famous and indeed significant scenes in the novel, Jane provides the reader with her defining perspective:

It is vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt
against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (93)

Because this part of the narrative breaks from past tense to present tense, we can conjecture that this is a doctrine not only held by the past Jane but by the current Jane as well, which is essential to understanding the true, present, and future course of her life at Ferndean. Even if theirs were an enduring love, as she leads the reader to believe, Jane cannot be content living sequestered in the woods with Rochester as his wife, nursemaid, and sole companion. Not only does her compulsion to repeat display evidence to the contrary, but she states herself that it is against her own nature to live such an existence. I shall later discuss this along with its implications on her desire to seek oppression, but for now I will turn my discussion to the marriage of Jane and Rochester.
Jane’s sense of objectivity and confinement at Thornfield Hall lay in the loss of self inherent in her pending marriage to Rochester. As Lena Ross observes, though Rochester does recognize Jane’s worth he also fails to recognize her as an individual:

—when he proposes, he says, in part, ‘my equal is here and my likeness. Jane, will you marry me?’ (217)—he also tells her, ‘I love you as my own flesh.’ Jane is apparently ‘equal’ because she is him—right at the moment of the proposal we see foreshadowed his inability to perceive her equality as one of equivalence of being. Jane must be him—she cannot be both loved and different by his tendency to treat her as a possession. (69)

Rochester portrays a tendency, a wish, to both own and consume Jane, for he looks upon Jane as an extension of himself. For instance, he tells Jane, “Once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I’ll just—figuratively speaking—attach you to a chain like this (touching his watch-guard)” (231). He refers to Jane as nothing more than a mere bauble. Though she may not be completely aware of the self-destructiveness of her feelings at the time, Jane observes that her future husband “was becoming to me my whole world” (234). Whereas up to this point she has continually made clear her desire to experience all that the world has to offer, she was now willing to settle for the world in one person and exclude all else. Eventually, however, Jane will resist the temptation to be consumed by another.

The day after his proposal, Rochester gives Jane a new name—Jane Rochester—which, to her, “seems so strange” (220). This is the first of several instances contributing to Jane’s breaking point in resisting the threat of oppression inherent in a marriage to
Rochester. Immediately, Jane offers up her resistance to the new and foreign self Rochester is now attempting to force on her. He offers up jewels and beauty, both of which Jane resists; they are incongruous with her very being: “Jewels for Jane Eyre sounds unnatural and strange: I would rather not have them. . . . Don’t address me as if I were a beauty; I am your plain, Quakerish governess” (220). Additionally, he attempts to dress Jane in finery, a fate she also resists:

‘I will attire my Jane in satin and lace, and she shall have roses in her hair; and I will cover the head I love best with a priceless veil.’

‘And then you won’t know me, sir; and I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin’s jacket,—a jay in borrowed plumes.’ (220)

Though Jane felt Rochester was “either deluding himself, or trying to delude” (221) her with what she viewed as acts of pretense, letting him know “in very straightforward terms that she will not be his plaything, Rochester never really hears her” (Ross 69). He effectively ignores her desires.

Gilbert and Gubar note that in the weeks preceding Jane’s marriage, she experiences “a fragmentation of the self” (359). In this case, their meaning of fragmentation is not disintegration but rather a division, a “frightening series of separations within the self” (359). This is similar to Lacan’s mirror stage and the fragmentary real, only this time rather than it being a fragmentation reflected visually it is reflected internally. Gilbert and Gubar give as one example Jane’s splitting off from Jane Rochester with the speculation about “one Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew
not [though] in yonder closet . . . garments said to be hers had already displaced [mine]:
for not to me appertained that suit of wedding raiment . . . I shut the closet to conceal the
strange, wraith-like apparel it contained” (235). While I recognize the possibility of this
fragmentation, I argue that rather than separating herself from Jane Rochester, what Jane
is actually experiencing is the threat of oppression involved in the possibility of a
complete disintegration of the self if she were to actually become Jane Rochester—not a
separation, but a complete and obliterating envelopment: the ultimate imprisonment.
Hers would no longer be a life of her own but that of another: “I thought of the life that
lay before me—your life, sir” (239). Now that she has obtained the possibility of
oppression, to remain true to her cycle of behavior she will then master it through
resistance and departure.

Had the marriage not been stopped by the revelation of Rochester’s current wife,
it is entirely probable, given Jane’s repetition compulsion of finding and then resisting
oppression and obtaining liberty, that she may not have gone through with the wedding.
On her way out of Thornfield Hall headed toward the church, she speaks to no one, her
hand held by Rochester with a “grasp of iron” and hurried along “by a stride I could
hardly follow” (245). Clearly Rochester wishes to rush the ceremony before his bigamy
is revealed, but the terminology used indicates that Jane is also not an entirely voluntary
participant in her impending vows. Further, it is of interest to note that Jane’s voice is
completely absent from the close of chapter twenty-four—the eve of her marriage—
through virtually the entirety of chapter twenty-five—the failed ceremony and the
revelation of Bertha. The marriage had not yet commenced and already Jane is silenced.
In fact, it is not until she is pronounced free of all blame in the bigamous matter and, therefore, free from an oppressive marriage to Rochester that Jane speaks, and it is with exhilaration at news of her uncle—a true relation. She has entered the verbal stage of resistance, and the resulting exhilaration in her liberation from what was sure to be an oppressed union. It is at this point that Jane confines herself to her room, a scene parallel to her confinement in the red-room in that she uses the opportunity to both reflect on and make life-altering decisions regarding her current situation. Just as in the red-room, Jane subsequently reaches her breaking point, resulting again in a yearning for departure.

Once back in her room at Thornfield Hall, just as in the other areas I have indicated throughout, her self-reflection is a prelude to her resistance and subsequent flight. Jane realizes that this is the first opportunity she has taken to think of and for herself: “And now I thought: till now I had only heard, seen, moved—followed up and down where I was led or dragged—watched event rush on event, disclosure open beyond disclosure: but now, I thought” (252). Jane’s conversion from bystander to participant through thought refers not only to her current situation but also to her life situation “till now.” She maintained perfect submission at Gateshead as she was ignored or ordered about and at Lowood as she willingly absorbed another’s personality as her own, both times in an effort to improve the status quo and in complete disregard for her true nature. She reached her breaking point through thought at both locations and sought liberty soon after. She anticipated liberty from Gateshead in favor of a new life at Lowood, and she looked toward liberty from Lowood in favor of a new servitude at Thornfield Hall. Now she is faced with liberty from Thornfield Hall, but for the first time there is no location to
pin her sights on, only the realization that she must leave. She has reached her breaking point.

Through her reflection she realizes the oppressive nature of the day and of the event she had narrowly escaped. Though earlier in the day she was “an ardent, expectant woman—almost a bride,” she was now a “cold, solitary girl again” with a “pale” life and “desolate” prospects (252). While pondering the bleakness of her present, Jane notes its verification in nature: “a white December storm had whirled over June; ice glazed the ripe apples, drifts crushed the blowing roses; . . . lanes which last night blushed full of flowers, to-day were pathless with untrodden snow . . . My hopes were all dead—struck with a subtle doom . . . I looked on my cherished wishes, yesterday so blooming and glowing: they lay stark, chill, livid corpses that could never revive” (253). Despite Rochester’s firm attempts to persuade Jane to stay on as his mistress, she will not endure and be oppressed by a role that is not her nature or her conscious choice to assume. She ultimately resolves that from Thornfield Hall and Rochester’s presence “I must go; that I perceived well” (253). Jane flees Rochester and, after four days of wretched hopelessness, she ultimately locates shelter—and another new beginning—at Moor House.

With the Rivers, Jane is thrust into life amongst her peers and finds the experience to be entirely liberating: “now that I had once crossed the threshold of this house, and once was brought face to face with its owners, I felt no longer outcast, vagrant, and disowned by the wide world” (287). Once she learns of her inheritance and of the true identity of the Rivers, Jane’s desires have been fully realized. She has her liberty through
her financial independence; she has a family through ties to the Rivers; she has a home through the availability of Moor House; and, she has action through readying Moor House for the return of Diana and Mary. It is St. John, however, who badgers the point to Jane that she should not be morally content in merely confining herself to rest on such selfish pursuits as relations and decorations. She must think beyond Moor House to more Godly pursuits. In response, Jane states that she is “disposed to be as content as a queen, and you try to stir me up to restlessness” (333). He succeeds, for although she contents herself in refurbishing Moor House, she also places herself quite literally back into the red-room as she refurnishes the spare parlor and bedroom “entirely with old mahogany and crimson upholstery” (334)—the same material found at Gateshead. The apparent absence of oppression at Moor House is met with Jane’s physical design of a room that has been unconsciously marked by oppression. Because she has not overcome the trauma of the red-room, however, she is compelled to repeat the experience. In the absence of actual oppression, she will replicate its residue.

Along with the symbolic return to the red-room at Moor House comes the repetitive threat of oppressive objectification as she finds herself faced with someone else who wishes to control her completely—St. John:

By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: his praise and notice were more restraining than his indifference. . . . I was so fully aware that only serious moods and occupations were acceptable, that in his presence every effort to sustain or follow any other became vain: I fell under a freezing spell. When he said
'go,' I went; 'come,' I came; 'do this,' I did it. But I did not love my servitude: I wished, many a time, he had continued to neglect me. . . . I felt as if [his] kiss were a seal affixed to my fetters. (339)

Jane is drawn into St. John's confining gaze and manner because it is consistent with her unconscious and compulsive need to repeat a pattern of confinement and liberation. St. John's eyes search Jane, attempting to judge “her inner nature, seeking means to bend her to his will” (Momberger 367). He wishes to relegate control over Jane by manipulating her into yet another role that shall displace her natural being: “He appeals to Jane’s sense of self-abnegating duty and . . . to her fear of damnation in order to usurp her freedom and impose an alien role upon her, that of the missionary’s wife” (Momberger 367).

When St. John proposes, Jane knows she cannot accept him, for it would be at the expense of her natural self:

As his curate, his comrade, all would be right . . . I should still have my unblighted self to turn to: my natural unenslaved feelings with which to communicate in moments of loneliness . . . but as his wife—at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked—forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital—this would be unendurable. (347)

As Ross observes, although Jane protests St. John’s offer of marriage, he, like Rochester, fails to hear her. In keeping with her pattern of submission to the point of determined revolt, Jane again resists enduring placement in a role that shall envelop and disintegrate
her natural self. In another prevalently explicated passage, at the moment Jane is emotionally broken and bent to the point of surrender to St. John’s will in consenting to marriage, and absolute oppression, she hears the voice of Rochester on the wind crying out her name. Nature again reflects Jane’s inner tumult. Hearing Rochester’s voice brings Jane back to herself—“it had opened the doors of my soul’s cell, and loosed its bands” (358). Jane breaks free from St. John’s grasp, stating: “It was my time to assume ascendancy. My powers were in play and in force” (358). Gilbert and Gubar provide a representative critical perspective of this scene, identifying it as “needlessly melodramatic” and stating that Jane is “irrevocably freed from the burden of her past . . . [S]he had wakened to her own self, her own needs. . . . [T]he cry is merely a sign that the relationship for which both lovers had always longed is now possible. . . . For to the marriage of Jane’s and Rochester’s true minds there is now, as Jane unconsciously guesses, no impediment” (365-367). Looking at this scene through the lens of trauma theory, however, reverses the critical assumption that Jane is awakened, liberated by Rochester’s cries. Indeed, she revolts against her current situation, resisting the threat of oppression along with the certainty of a missionary’s death in India that would accompany a marriage to St. John. Her power, though, is fleeting. Jane must compulsively repeat a pattern of oppressive confinement and liberation until or unless she works through the core trauma of the red-room. Rather than assume complete ascendancy over oppression and use her financial independence to her advantage—fleeing both from the confining nature of St. John and from the threat of confinement with Rochester—Jane seeks a new servitude in deciding to create and accept the lesser of
two confinements in returning to Rochester. Through her flight, she is accepting that what the afar (vis-à-vis Rochester) has to offer is more pleasant, less restrictive than the near, the life she would lead were she to stay with St. John and become his wife. It is interesting to note that in Jane’s thought process regarding a marriage to St. John or a return to Rochester, she never considers staying at Marsh End after St. John’s departure as an option. It is at Marsh End that Jane procures all the desires that she has expressed throughout her narrative: a home among kin, a school of her own, and a financial independency. That she turns her back on what she most desires in place of a “new servitude” in caring for a crippled Rochester is further indication that Jane has yet to work through her trauma, and is again repetitively seeking oppression in order to gain liberation.

While at Ferndean, Jane becomes everything to Rochester, even the eyes of nature to him, due to his blindness: “I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand. Literally, I was (what he often called me) the apple of his eye. He saw nature—he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam—of the landscape before us; of the weather round us and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye” (384). In the end, the couple seems to have succeeded in their love for one another, or perhaps a better way of putting it would be their need for one another. Jane has been in need of human affection and emotion her entire life, as is evident from a conversation she has with Helen while at Lowood: “If others don’t love me, I would rather die than live—I cannot bear to be solitary and hated . . . [T]o gain some real
affection from [someone] whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken” (58). To all appearances, Rochester has provided that affection. In turn, Rochester has been in need of a true companion, one who is not mad or feigning interest to share his wealth, and for him Jane is that true companion.

At Ferndean, Jane and Rochester are living in a state of voluntary confinement at a house so “deep buried in a wood” that “even within a very short distance from the house you could see nothing of it; so thick and dark grew the timber of the gloomy wood about it . . . No sign of habitation or grounds was visible” (366). It is very likely that Jane and Rochester have experienced enough of the perils of the outside world to know that there is nothing left they wish to experience out in it, and their liberty now lies within one another: “To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company” (384). Jane paints a relatively content picture of her life at Ferndean with Rochester; however, it is odd for someone who repeatedly states her desire for “all of incident, life, fire, feeling” to portray herself as content in being sequestered at Ferndean (93). As noted by Melodie Monahan, without qualification, “Jane states that the intervening ten years of married life have brought ‘perfect concord’ (382). Yet below this apparent fulfillment resides ambivalence and hesitancy palpable in their living at Ferndean, the estate Rochester earlier confesses is too unhealthy to house Bertha, and in their being withdrawn from society, without the stimulus of urban life Jane has long since desired” (603). Further in support of this point are Jane’s recollections during her occasional wanderings to the third floor corridor at Thornfield Hall. As previously discussed, Jane would look out “afar over sequestered field and hill” longing for a
“power of vision which might overpass that limit.” She first looks out over the sequestered fields longing for what lies beyond, but now she is fully immersed in those same sequestered fields at Ferndean and presents herself as tranquil and content in being as such.

In retrospect, Jane appears hesitant in what she may now realize was a rapid resolve to marry Rochester, as seen shortly after their decision to marry. Rochester proclaims, “We must become one flesh without any delay” (380). Jane ignores his assertion and discusses the state of the weather, stating the sun has “declined” beneath the horizon (380). He is again objectifying Jane, ignoring her independence and attempting to subvert it. Rochester goes on to discuss the absence of finery and jewels for the ceremony, and Jane again diverts the subject to discuss the weather: “the sun has dried up all the rain-drops, sir. The breeze is still: it is quite hot” (380). This second proposal marks the first instance of sun or heat being discussed in the novel, and it is here used to indicate the degree of stagnation found in the lack of breeze. In keeping with Jane’s pattern of utilizing nature to indicate the promise of possibility, it also indicates the improbability of such promise in the way of future prospects—they are dried up, subdued under the oppressive heat of Rochester’s influence. Jane notes that Rochester “pursued his own thoughts without heeding me” (380). Just as he did during their first engagement, he is again acting to negate Jane’s desires through his ignorance of the same. Such negation has hitherto proven a breaking point for Jane in resisting such oppressive action, and her compulsive pattern of repetition indicates that this content submission in a marriage to Rochester shall not be endured.
As noted earlier in Jane’s defining perspective, she states: “millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine” (93). As spoken in the present tense, Jane is defining her life as a tranquil doom, the absolute stagnation she earlier notes as insufferable, indicating that life with Rochester in voluntary confinement at Ferndean is perhaps not the contented circumstance she claims. Tromly notes that “rather than beginning her life at Ferndean, [Jane] seems to be living her death instead” (61). Where is the action that she asserts human beings must have? Throughout their marriage, Jane’s relationship with Rochester “has continued to change . . . in response to his changing health and ideas,” but is Jane satisfied with this type of change for a ten year span? (Edwards 175). She claimed it was futile to say one should be satisfied with tranquility, yet she asserts such a satisfaction regarding her life at Ferndean. There is absolutely no indication in her autobiographic testimony that Jane is a woman who contradicts herself. However, there is indication, as presented herein, that Jane tends to follow a compulsive pattern of repetition involving endurance followed by resistance and liberation. She is but enduring her life with Rochester in absolute submission: “I will be your neighbour, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you” (370). She is willingly giving over all of herself, all of her existence, to maintain him. Jane earlier feared losing herself in being enveloped by Jane Rochester, yet she now willingly submits to such a fate, and as Jane emphatically indicates, we are meant to understand that she is content in doing so.
However, while Jane may portray herself as contented with a life consumed in
and by another, her compulsion to repeat evidenced over the course of her narrative
suggests that her pattern of perfect submission at Ferndean will inevitably be interrupted
by a burst of resistance and the attainment of liberty. The phrasing throughout the final
chapter, and noted above, indicates that Jane maintains her patterns of behavior, further
indicating that she has failed to master the trauma of the red-room and, therefore, remains
embedded in the traumatic event. But there is hope to be found in the mere fact that she
has chosen to write her autobiography. In keeping with her cycle of behavior, when
faced with oppression Jane enters a time of self-reflection followed by an attempt to
master the oppression through resistance and the elation found in liberty. Ten years into
her marriage with Rochester, Jane’s autobiography is this self-reflecting mechanism
through which she will again master oppression through resistance and secure the
liberating feeling of breaking away, of freeing herself from the bondage of her marriage
to Rochester enclosed at Ferndean. Whether or not Jane succeeds in complete mastery
wherein she ceases the cycle is perhaps speculative; however, she has begun this
autobiographical self-reflection with the core trauma that shaped the trajectory of her life,
indicating that she has identified the specific traumatic event where she has become
“stuck,” a realization as noted herein that van der Kolk and McFarlane state is critical to
mastering trauma.
Chapter 3

“Unobserved I Could Observe”: Lucy’s Isolation as Inclusion

Prevalent critical analyses of Brontë’s *Villette* center on either restrictive Victorian patriarchal overtones22 or some aspect of love sought after, desired, or averted.23 I contend, though, that the focus of *Villette* is not love or patriarchal oppression but rather traumatic loss. There is no question that Lucy Snowe, the heroine of *Villette*, sustained the trauma of great loss in her youth—the loss by death of both parents and all extended family, and the loss by forced alienation from her godmother in whose presence she knew comfort. Lucy’s familial blight and the silence of her inability to discuss her bereavement, for “Indeed, to whom could I complain?,” cause for her a


subsequent distortion of its origins (39)\textsuperscript{24}. Such distortion, according to Laub, only leads to further deprivation in the form of isolation:

Survivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly imposed ‘external evil,’ which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion. The ‘not telling’ of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor’s daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor’s conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual events. This power of distortion in present-day life is demonstrated by the loss of a sense of human relatedness. (64)

In not telling her story Lucy faces a distortion of memory in which she, in some way, feels a degree of responsibility for the trauma of loss that she has endured, and only in consigning her life to deprivation does she believe that she can prevent future sorrow: “to escape occasional great agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains” (42). The lack of human relatedness experienced in voluntary privation, an act Lucy intends as a defense against great emotional pain,\textsuperscript{25} actually further precipitates the initial trauma of loss.

\textsuperscript{24} Charlotte Brontë, \textit{Villette}, 1853, eds. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). All subsequent references to this work are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

\textsuperscript{25} Lucy’s defense here is similar to Crimsworth’s defense against affect discussed in chapter one of this study.
Fenichel points out that, “The simplest compromise between drive and defense consists of the anxiety that was the motive for the defense becoming manifest, whereas the reason for the anxiety is repressed” (194). Fenichel further states that in this type of anxiety hysteria the anxiety is “specifically connected with a special situation, which represents the neurotic conflict. If the ego that appraises the danger . . . intends to ‘warn’ in the same sense as a normal ego warns of a real danger, in anxiety hysteria this intention entirely fails. What was intended to prevent a traumatic state actually induces one” (194-195). In Lucy’s case, the danger referred to by Fenichel is that of loss inevitable in intimacy as well as the danger of disillusion immanent in hope, for indeed hope is a casualty of her consignment:

Alas! When I had full leisure to look on life as life must be looked on by such as me, I found it but a hopeless desert: tawny sands, with no green fields, no palm trees, no well in view. The hopes which are dear to youth, which bear it up and lead it on, I knew not and dared not know. If they knocked at my heart sometimes, an inhospitable bar to admission must be inwardly drawn. When they turned away thus rejected, tears sad enough sometimes flowed; but it could not be helped: I dared not give such guests lodging. (173)

Just as nurturing intimacy breeds loss, to cherish hope is to tempt fate; therefore, Lucy’s intent is to spurn these otherwise welcome stimuli and guard against initiating their presence in her life. Evidence of Lucy’s self-exclusion as an incidental rather than an inherent attribute, along with her forced intent to spurn hope, is seen in an observation
she makes on her first morning in London and on her subsequent voyage to Villette. She reveals:

My inner self moved: my spirit shook its always-fettered wings half loose; I had a sudden feeling as if I, who never yet truly lived, were at last about to taste life. . . . Who but a coward would pass his whole life in hamlets, and for ever abandon his faculties to the eating rust of obscurity? . . . I went wandering whither chance might lead, in a still ecstasy of freedom and enjoyment. . . [A] sky, solemn and dark-blue, and - grand with imperial promise, soft with tints of enchantment - strode from north to south a God-bent bow, an arch of hope. Cancel the whole of that, if you please, reader - or rather let it stand, and draw thence a moral - an alliterative, text-hand copy: ‘Day-dreams are delusions of the demon.’

(108-110)

Just as she attempts to enjoy the liberty of an unfettered existence, free from the constrains of duty, Lucy pulls herself back in, enforcing her obscurity in excluding herself from the joys of liberty while recognizing the danger of loss that comes with hope.

Throughout her narrative, Lucy unobtrusively surveys events, observes reactions, studies character all as a means of obtaining involvement without being an active participant. In this veiled existence she can experience life but at a safe distance, in shadow, where “unobserved I could observe” (156). However, it is as a direct result of her silent surveillance, of her unassuming presence that she is drawn into each occasion
of action in her life. Lucy admits that she is incapable of provoking change on her own behalf: “To sit still in actual circumstances was my instinct . . . I must be stimulated into action. I must be goaded, driven, stung, forced to energy” (290, 42). Indeed, Lucy is consistently goaded into action both by circumstance and by false perception, as shall be discussed. The forced pretense of her shadowy existence and incessant need to spurn hope serve as defense mechanisms against the agony of deprivation. Mary Ann Melfi states that “Lucy’s unwillingness to face the reality of her past and break through her self-imposed taboo of silence, makes her unknowable to herself and to others, and assures her isolation” (111). I contend that Lucy, however, is not unwilling to face her past but is rather incapable of doing so as a result of its traumatic origins. Further, her silence does not assure her isolation; instead, isolation is a symptom of her inability to confront her past on a verbal and indeed a conscious level. In this chapter I will trace Lucy’s recurring patterns of exclusionary behavior, revealing her attempt at working through the trauma she experienced in childhood of extensive familial loss and her consequentially displaced and orphaned state. I will further argue that Lucy repetitively seeks and enforces self-exclusion by way of emotional and physical isolation only to then revolt against such exclusion by placing herself in situations where she can be goaded into action and intimacy. Like Jane, nature corresponds with these patterns, wherein moments of transition in Lucy’s life are often compared to or heralded by nature. This chapter will further contend that as isolation is presented literally with physical concealment, and metaphorically with emotional despondency, both are challenged by the turbulent
weather that mirrors Lucy’s inward tumult; stormy seas, ceaseless rain, and blasting wind often beget change for Lucy in their instigation of a call to action.

It is revealed early on that Lucy’s life has been defined by adverse circumstance: “there remained no possibility of dependence on others; to myself alone could I look. . . . [S]elf-reliance and exertion were forced upon me by circumstances” (40). She does not elaborate on the specifics of why she comes to stay at the Brettons’, her godmother having temporarily claimed her from the relations assigned as her guardians, but we are given the impression that it is to preserve her from unfavorable circumstance: “events . . . whose very shadow I scarce guessed; yet of which the faint suspicion sufficed to impart unsettled sadness, and made me glad to change scene and society” (8). Unlike Jane and Crimsworth, it is not known at what age or under what exact circumstance Lucy experienced the loss of her parents; this loss is only alluded to in the brief mention of her godmother “having come in person to claim me of the kinsfolk with whom was at that time fixed my permanent residence” (9) as well as in her statement that “Three times in the course of my life, events had taught me that these strange accents in the storm . . . denote a coming state of the atmosphere unpropitious to life. Epidemic diseases, I believed, were often heralded by a gasping, sobbing, tormented, long-lamenting east wind” (43). From this it can be presumed that Lucy’s six-month stay at the Brettons’ was as a result of quarantine in vouchsafing her health against the epidemic illness that was claiming the life of at least one of her guardians. She returns to her primary residence only to endure eight years of a protracted existence. This eight-year span of her life is not
detailed—similar to Jane, who also skips over eight years of her life—\textsuperscript{26}—but only alluded to with images of turbulent weather. Lucy, then, has procedural memory but not explicit memory of her traumatic past. She conceals the reality of this eight-year span omitted from her autobiography, allowing readers instead to draw their own conclusions:

I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass . . . Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft. However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen over-board, or that there must have been wreck at last. I too well remember a time - a long time, of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltiness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared . . . a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished. (39)

\textsuperscript{26} It is interesting to note that several critics see \textit{Villette} as a mere rewriting of Brontë’s as then unpublished work \textit{The Professor}. None, however, examines the more significant and indeed blatant parallels between \textit{Villette} and \textit{Jane Eyre}. When considered comparatively, I find that it is \textit{Jane Eyre} that most parallels events in \textit{Villette}: the allusions to nature, the omitted eight-year span, the empathetic and equal companion, the included scene of childhood experience, the mirror imagery, the attic, the scene of cross-dressing, and the included dramatic/vaudevillian scene, to name a few. I am currently working on an article wherein I further discuss the parallels between these two works, examining the significance of these comparisons both in terms of shared trauma and in relation to Brontë’s own frame of reference at the time each was written.
It is as Laub indicates, “the longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor’s conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual events” (64). Lucy has so dissociated herself from the tragic events of her youth that they are now relegated to allusions of weather. Her life has been affected by a loss which she never names explicitly but recurrently evokes in metaphors of sea storms and shipwrecks, and all attempts at progress in life are hindered by what appears more and more forcibly as a process of compulsive repetition that paralyzes her. Bertrandias notes that, “If outwardly, especially as far as social commitment is concerned, Lucy increases her capacity to become integrated, she is nevertheless still psychologically locked up in a permanent state of solitude, frustration, distress and guilt. She will remain incapable of ever giving expression to the original loss, to name its true nature” (131). The metaphor of the storm emphasizes a traumatic loss that was both experienced in the past and compulsively repeated since in nightmares and in the way Lucy lives her life in self-imposed isolation. Fenichel further comments on the significance of storms in revealing and coping with inner tumult:

If a [person] can feel some external anxiety, restlessness, noise, confusion around him, he may get rid of the anxiety, restlessness, noise, and confusion within. There are not only persons who have a thunderstorm phobia (which means those who have projected their sensations onto the thunderstorm, and who thus have externalized but not overcome their anxiety), but there are also persons who enjoy thunderstorms, because becoming aware of the external noise enables them to achieve the aim of
their projection: the actual noise outside makes them feel that there is no noise inside anymore, and that therefore they no longer need to be afraid.

(211)

A comment Lucy makes regarding one storm reinforces Fenichel’s position: “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” (120). Whereas Jane withholds to the point of bursting, Lucy reaches the point of bursting and then withholds in an attempt to prevent the agony of loss that life experience has taught her accompanies such moments of emotional release.

Several times throughout the course of her narrative, Lucy refers to death as a preferable alternative to the desolate life she leads. In one representative comment she states: “A sorrowful indifference to existence often pressed on me - a despairing resignation to reach betimes the end of all things earthly” (173). Rather than choose death, though, Lucy chooses a self-imposed exile, forgoing intimacy as a defensive response to loss: “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” (120). It is in this transfixed state that Lucy cultivates a seemingly retired existence. I say seemingly because events transpire in her narrative that prove she is not altogether content with isolation, but rather she subconsciously places herself in situations conducive to action.
It is evident from a remark concerning her youth spent with the Brettons’ that Lucy’s current emotional state as the “older narrator differs in no essential way” from the young woman she portrays in her autobiography (Carlisle 271): “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” (120). Lucy speaks of her past spent with the Brettons’ with a tone of nostalgia. In this instance, she is the only one of Brontë’s fictional autobiographers who displays a moment of missing her youth and the ability to “feel” that it invoked within her. Lucy does not, however, indicate this nostalgia during her early depiction of events at the Brettons’; her time spent there does not resonate with activity, affection, or stimulation. Indeed, Lucy’s self-assigned role as the “looker-on at life”—outside, ever watchful, ever observing but rarely participating, unnoticed, solitary—is introduced at the Brettons’, where even in the midst of company she is alone (211). As Gilbert and Gubar observe, Lucy becomes “a woman without—outside society, without parents or friends, without physical or mental attractions, without money or confidence or health” (400). Brenda Silver concurs with Gilbert’s and Gubar’s observation and further surmises that in Lucy’s “residing with unidentified kinfolk, picturing her stay at Bretton as a period of calm . . . Lucy has already acquired a sense of herself as an outsider, an observer rather than an actor” (95). I contend, though, that it is not so much that she has acquired a sense of herself as an outsider but rather that she has consciously and quite calculatedly enforced such an exclusionary existence. She recounts no interaction between herself and Graham—“a sort of screen of ice had hitherto, all through our two lives, glazed the medium through which we exchanged intercourse” (266)—and very little between herself
and Mrs. Bretton. Lucy’s relative silence during this portion of her narrative is an often explicated point in critical analyses of *Villette*. Nina Auerbach sees Lucy’s maintained marginality at Bretton as an act of detachment, with her “cut off even from the action of the story she herself is narrating” (208). Gregory O’Dea further attempts to account for this detachment in stating that “it was Lucy’s initial intent with this memoir to tell the story of Polly and her relationship with Graham Bretton. In telling that story, though, [Lucy] becomes sidetracked; eventually, Lucy becomes engrossed in her own physical and emotional history, relegating Polly to the role of the ‘mere foil’” (45). These representative assumptions are reversed through the application of trauma theory, wherein it is shown that each of Brontë’s fictional autobiographers opens their story with a day of significance in regard to their traumatic past. Crimsworth’s opens with his first day of employment under his tyrannical brother and the realization of the oppressive prospects before him along with his inherent dependent state. Jane opens hers with “that day” she is thrust into the red-room, the crux of her traumatic experience. While Lucy’s opening may be a bit more subdued—no harsh abuses, no vengeful tyranny—it is nevertheless significant and unquestionably the beginning of her story. While there is limited dialogue on Lucy’s part during her time at the Brettons’, this only serves to substantiate her self-exclusionary presence. Most significantly, it is here that we are introduced to her calm character and her preference for the serene:

When I was a girl I went to Bretton about twice a year, and well I liked the visit. The house and its inmates specially suited me. The large peaceful rooms, the well-arranged furniture, the clear wide windows, the balcony
outside, looking down on a fine antique street, where Sundays and holidays seemed always to abide - so quiet was its atmosphere, so clean its pavement - these things pleased me well. . . . The charm of variety there was not, nor the excitement of incident; I liked peace so well, and sought stimulus so little. (8)

Lucy begins her story on the day Paulina (Polly) Home arrives at Mrs. Bretton’s, ushering in a change of atmosphere to her quiet surroundings. This does not indicate, however, that it is meant to be Polly’s story. Rather this indicates Lucy’s first interaction with a person to whom she could empathize. Like Lucy, Polly is brought to the home of Mrs. Bretton under adverse circumstances. Her mother has just died, and she is now to lose her father to distance as he takes time away to grieve his loss. It is also the first time Lucy is called on as a comforting presence as she seeks to console Polly:

I saw the little thing shiver. 'Come to me', I said, wishing, yet scarcely hoping, that she would comply: for she was a most strange, capricious, little creature, and especially whimsical with me. She came, however, instantly, like a small ghost gliding over the carpet. I took her in. She was chill; I warmed her in my arms. She trembled nervously; I soothed her.

Thus tranquillised and cherished she at last slumbered. (38)

Lucy continues with a reflection on Polly’s future that could pertain to herself as well:

“A very unique child,” thought I, as I viewed her sleeping countenance by the fitful moonlight, and cautiously and softly wiped her glittering eyelids and her wet cheeks with my handkerchief. ‘How will she get through this world, or battle with this life? How will
she bear the shocks and repulses, the humiliations and desolations . . .?” (38). These questions are ones Lucy may ask herself as she too is set adrift without affection or influence. She closes her time at the Brettons’ with this moment between herself and Polly on the eve of Polly’s departure, followed by an omission of eight years in which Lucy will find herself entirely bereft of friends and family. The Bretton section that begins her narrative, then, is presented as a remembrance of “past days” when Lucy “could feel.”

Although we are granted little access to the events of her youth, we are granted enough to piece together that she neither led a “blissful” existence—“while all that was gone [of my youth] had passed, to say the least, not blissfully”—nor did she lead an altogether impoverished existence (40). Lucy did maintain a high status at one point, as indicated by her comment that she once retained a nurse as well as by her comment of her now differing social position from the old schoolfellow who is mistress of a “grand mansion” and who now retains this nurse as housekeeper (49). That she is forced to fend for herself after the death of her remaining relations indicates Lucy has not been provided for, causing a decline in her social position wherein she must forge her own way. It is in this diminished state that Lucy is offered a position as caretaker to Miss Marchmont, a circumstance that will ultimately initiate her pattern of isolation and ensuing action.

During her employ under Miss Marchmont, Lucy notes that she possesses “a calm which always blesses us when we are sensible that our manners, presence, contact, please and soothe the persons we serve” (41). She dutifully responds as caregiver to the elderly woman’s needs, and in return, she receives a portion of human affection in limited
companionship. Moglen suggests that with Miss Marchmont, Lucy “learns that she can be more than a self-effacing shadow, that she can be a rock upon which another’s life can rest: a source of comfort and aid” (202). While it is true that Lucy is a source of comfort for Miss Marchmont, just as she has been a source of comfort for Polly, she does remain a shadow and makes it clear that she is quite content in doing so. Lucy’s compulsion to repeat is shown here in her desire to preserve her seclusion in Miss Marchmont’s sick chamber:

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. All within me became narrowed to my lot. Tame and still by habit, disciplined by destiny, I demanded no walks in the fresh air; . . . she gave me the originality of her character to study: the steadiness of her virtues, I will add, the power of her passions, to admire, the truth of her feelings to trust. All these things she had, and for these things I clung to her.

For these things I would have crawled on with her for twenty years, if for twenty years longer her life of endurance had been protracted.

But another decree was written. (42)

Even though she wishes to remain isolated from the outside world in remaining with Miss Marchmont, Lucy knows that she cannot. She again reinforces her intent to spurn hope as it will surely be dashed by loss.
Gilbert and Gubar address Lucy’s position at Miss Marchmont’s as one who must suppress her individual existence in order to support herself: “[Lucy] is tormented by the realization that she has bought survival at the price of never fully existing, escaped pain by retreating behind a dull, grave camouflage” (400). It is true that initially Lucy is hesitant to accept a position as caregiver, but she soon displays her compulsion to repeat in choosing this exclusionary existence: “To live here, in this close room, the watcher of suffering, sometimes, perhaps, the butt of temper, through all that was to come of my youth . . . my heart sunk one moment, then it revived; for though I forced myself to realize evils, I think I was too prosaic to idealize, and consequently to exaggerate them” (40). Her heart is revived in her lack of idealization; she shall not be disappointed by her choice. Additionally, Lucy does not “escape pain” in her retreat, for she is deeply affected by the loss of Miss Marchmont: “My little morsel of human affection, which I prized as if it were a solid pearl, must melt in my fingers and slip thence like a dissolving hailstone” (42). However, in accepting this employment, Lucy is aware that she will indeed suffer the inevitable loss of her gravely afflicted employer. As such, she displays her pattern of behavior in seeking this exclusionary existence, placing herself in a situation where she must and will be goaded to action. In this instance, the stimulus is the death of Miss Marchmont.

Just as the departure of Miss Temple caused Jane to reevaluate her circumstances, the death of Miss Marchmont forces Lucy to examine her prospects. In both cases the new solitude is involuntary, and in both cases the pondering of a potential future culminates in a moment of epiphany ushered in by nature. The death of her parents and
of her remaining relatives was not a voluntary loss for Lucy; therefore, in her defense against the agony of loss, it is imperative that her isolation be of her own making:

“Overcast enough it was my nature often to be; of a subdued habit I was: but the dimness and depression must both be voluntary” (331). With the involuntary exclusion brought on by Miss Marchmont’s death, Lucy is goaded by circumstance to seek a new prospect. Lucy’s epiphanous moment comes as she wanders solitary through the wilderness pondering her lowly yet inviting circumstance:

   In spite of my solitude, my poverty, and my perplexity, my heart, nourished and nerved with the vigour of a youth that had not yet counted twenty-three summers, beat light and not feebly. Not feebly, I am sure, or I should have trembled in that lonely walk, which lay through still fields and passed neither village, nor farmhouse, nor cottage: I should have quailed in the absence of moonlight, for it was by the leading of stars only I traced the dim path; I should have quailed still more in the unwonted presence of that which to-night shone in the north, a moving mystery - the Aurora Borealis. But this solemn stranger influenced me otherwise than through my fears. Some new power it seemed to bring. I drew in energy with the keen, low breeze that blew on its path. A bold thought was sent to my mind; my mind was made strong to receive it.

   ‘Leave this wilderness’, it was said to me, ‘and go out hence.’

   ‘Where?’ was the query.

   I had not very far to look; gazing from this country parish in that
flat, rich middle of England - I mentally saw within reach what I had never yet beheld with my bodily eyes; I saw London. (48-49)

Lucy is energized by the breeze conducive to a natural wonder, the Aurora Borealis—an electrical phenomenon known to Brontë as possessing its ultimate energy source from the electricity driven solar winds flowing past the Earth (Faraday 187). Here, Lucy portrays herself as a conductor of these electrically charged winds, receiving enough strength from the Borealis to extract a response to her mental wonderings. This energy along with the potency of her youth are named as the providers of her strength to endure. This is the second time she refers to her youth as a positive indication of her prospects. In her time spent with Miss Marchmont, Lucy notes her reflection in the mirror as portraying “a faded, hollow-eyed vision”—similar to Jane’s description of her mirrored reflection in the red-room (41). Like Jane, Lucy recognizes the conflict between the external and the internal when she states that “Yet I thought little of the wan spectacle. The blight, I believed, was chiefly external: I still felt life at life’s sources” (41). Because she did still feel this life at its sources, Lucy made the most of her liberty brought on by Miss Marchmont’s death and removed herself for a short stay in London on her way to subsequent employment in Villette as teacher at Madame Beck’s Pensionnat (41).

Lucy’s initial contact with the stealth-like behavior of Madame Beck—“shod with the shoes of silence” (127)—finds Lucy amused. Entirely motivated by self-interest, Madame Beck rules over the staff and inmates of her boarding school “through espionage and surveillance” (Gilbert and Gubar 408): “woe be the man or woman who relied on her one inch beyond the point where it was her interest to be trustworthy: interest was the
master-key of Madame’s nature—the mainspring of her motives—the alpha and omega of her life” (136). According to Gilbert and Gubar, Madame Beck is a “symbol of repression, the projection and embodiment of Lucy’s commitment to self-control” (408). Surely she is a repressive presence due to her constant surveillance, yet rather than being the embodiment of Lucy’s self-control I instead see Madame Beck as the stimulus which goads her to action. On the night of Lucy’s arrival at the school, she owns a sense of curiosity as she feigns sleep to spy Madame Beck searching through her belongings and subsequently making wax imprints of her keys—for ease in gaining access to Lucy’s traveling trunks and various other compartments in future spying attempts. Lucy conceals herself from Madame Beck’s view in order to gain entrance into her actions. The second incident of such an intrusion on her privacy is met by Lucy with a “secret glee” as she again conceals herself to watch Madame Beck intrude upon her personal belongings (186). Thus far, as a “looker-on at life,” Lucy has experienced relative inaction, but at Madame Beck’s school, Lucy is thrust into the action through her own maneuvers of concealment and isolation. Moglen suggests that Lucy defeats loneliness “by learning to accept and even to reinvent herself” (199). I argue that she defeats loneliness through seeking stimulation and amusement in the actions of others.

Lucy is not taken aback by Madame Beck’s surveillance of her belongings; she is rather amused at the extent of the surveillance and is aware that such amusement shall add interest to her stay at the school. In order to nurture the surveillance, and in turn, keep her life somewhat interesting, Lucy again resorts to her compulsion for self-exclusion, thereby nourishing her isolation; in Madame Beck’s eyes, solitude behooves
secrecy. Lucy is aware that the manner in which she presents herself can prove beneficial: “I had a staid manner of my own which ere now had been as good to me as cloak and hood of hodden gray; since under its favour I had been enabled to achieve with impunity, and even approbation, deeds that if attempted with an excited and unsettled air, would in some minds have stamped me as a dreamer and zealot” (49). It is, then, through concealment and isolation that Lucy actually encounters the primary actions of her life.

The garden, Lucy’s intended site of solitude at Beck’s school—“the seclusion, the very gloom of the walk attracted me” (174)—is, in effect, the cause of most of her action. The onset of her activity occurs in a natural setting, the secluded garden just after a fierce storm. Moglen’s position regarding Lucy’s response to nature reinforces Fenichel’s as she recognizes the significance of storms for Lucy, stating that “the storm has always had a double meaning. Sometimes it has brought the horror of suffocation. At other times, it has stood for explosive transcendence. Always it has involved a terrible risk” (229).

Lucy recalls one storm that brings about a moment of transcendence: “I did long, achingly, then and for four-and-twenty hours afterwards, for something to fetch me out of my present existence, and lead me upwards and onwards... the cool peace and dewy sweetness of the night filled me with a mood of hope: not hope on any definite point, but a general sense of encouragement and heart-ease” (121). But true to form, Lucy quickly recognizes the futility in such hope: “Should not such a mood, so sweet, so tranquil, so unwonted, have been the harbinger of good? Alas, no good came of it! Presently the rude Real burst coarsely in - all evil, grovelling and repellent as she too often is” (121). In this particular incidence, Lucy has sought solitude from the storm in the garden of the school,
but her isolation is jolted by a casement dropped from a window above. The missile contained therein ultimately goads Lucy into action by circumstance, for rather than leave the casement alone and not read the letter contained within, she readily pores over its contents, placing herself in a situation where she invites herself into another’s confidence by reading innermost thoughts meant for another. However, this intrusion on another’s privacy soon initiates the first of several stimuli to action that Lucy shall experience in Villette.

Her reading and possession of the letter results in Lucy’s being brought into the confidence of the house doctor, Dr. John, whom Lucy, by this time, has recognized as Graham Bretton (the housemate of her youth), although the recognition is still entirely one-sided. Up to this point, according to Lucy, Graham “never remembered that I had eyes in my head; much less a brain behind them” (163). Now he must rely on her to keep the secret of Ginevra Fanshawe as the intended recipient of the note encased in the casket. As a result, she becomes a third-party confidante in the affair of Graham and Ginevra. Gilbert and Gubar recognize Lucy’s conflict “between engagement with life and retreat from it” and observe the consequence of Lucy’s confidence: “In responding to Dr. John, Lucy aids Ginevra, frequents the garden, and experiences her own freedom” (413). However, by the same reasoning, the garden soon loses the exclusionary appeal it held for Lucy. Her position as confidante not only increases Lucy’s communication with Ginevra (unsolicited as it may be) and Graham, but it increases suspicion on the part of

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27 Graham is assigned four identities in Lucy’s autobiography—Graham, Isidore, Dr. John, and the stranger who assists Lucy upon her arrival in Villette. I shall further reflect on the significance of these multiple identities in a future article. For sake of clarity, in this study I shall refer to Dr. John as Graham throughout.
Madame Beck that Lucy is in league with Graham and may very well be considered a rival for his affections. As a result, she tightens her surveillance on Lucy. The tightening of surveillance alters Lucy’s perception of the garden as a site of solitude; its seclusion “was now become precarious; [its] calm—insecure. That casement which rained billets, had vulgarized the once dreary nook it overlooked; and elsewhere, the eyes of the flowers had gained vision, and the knots in the tree-boles listened like secret ears” (183). Gilbert and Gubar refer to Lucy’s unobtrusiveness as a “nonexistence,” one in which she is condemned to “a suffocating burial,” yet I argue that it is only through such so-called nonexistence that Lucy is able to partake in the action of others that she would otherwise be prohibited from if her presence were more outstanding (416). In a sense, she is more active in her nonexistence than in her actual existence.

Lucy again experiences an involuntary loss while at the school—that of being left alone over the eight-week break—and her response to the loss is disproportionate to the event as she suffers a severe episode of hypochondria. As I discuss in chapter one regarding Crimsworth’s hypochondriac break, this exaggerated affect is a sign of displacement. Lucy is beside herself when what little attention that is bestowed upon her through Beck’s surveillance and her post as third-party confidante ceases temporarily during the school’s vacation: “a cruel sense of desolation pained my mind . . . I wanted companionship, I wanted friendship, I wanted counsel” (258). Left virtually alone at the school, Lucy even tries to imagine activity to bring herself out of isolation, but to no avail: “I would sometimes picture the present probable position of others, my acquaintance” (230). She works herself into a hypochondriac fever through want of
communication. Lucy pushes out hope in place of despair, and nature again reacts to her isolation:

My heart almost died within me; miserable longings strained its chords. How long were the September days! How silent, how lifeless! How vast and void seemed the desolate premises! . . . Even to look forward was not to hope: the dumb future spoke no comfort, offered no promise, gave no inducement to bear present evil in reliance on future good. . . the raging storm and beating rain crushed me with a deadlier paralysis than I had experienced while the air had remained serene: but so it was, and my nervous system could hardly support what it had for many days and nights to undergo in that huge, empty house. . . . [F]or nine dark and wet days, of which the hours rushed on all turbulent, deaf dishevelled - bewildered with sounding hurricane - I lay in a strange fever of the nerves and blood. . . .

Indescribably was I torn, racked and oppressed in mind. (173-176)

In desperation Lucy, a Protestant, seeks counsel in the Catholic confessional. Père Silas listens to at least a partial testimony of Lucy’s past, and though we are not made privy to the confession, Silas’ response indicates that the traumatic events she has endured are comparatively shocking:

I said I was perishing for a word of advice or an accent of comfort. . . . I had a pressure of affliction on my mind of which it would hardly any longer endure the weight.

‘Was it a sin, a crime?’ he inquired, somewhat startled.
I reassured him on this point, and, as well as I could, I showed him the mere outline of my experience.

He looked thoughtful, surprised, puzzled. ‘You take me unawares’, said he. ‘I have not had such a case as yours before: ordinarily we know our routine, and are prepared; but this makes a great break in the common course of confession. I am hardly furnished with counsel fitting the circumstances.’ (178)

Lucy’s relieved response to her testimony is not singular, as the action of providing testimony is often associated with a feeling of alleviation: “the mere relief of communication in an ear which was human and sentient, yet consecrated - the mere pouring out of some portion of long accumulating, long pent-up pain into a vessel whence it could not be again diffused - had done me good. I was already solaced” (179). It is no coincidence, however, that after her confessional Lucy collapses. The release of her story is too much for her to endure mentally, emotionally, and physically. She awakes from her collapse in the familiar setting of the Bretton home (now located at La Terrasse in Villette). Not only does this provide a solace for the emotional upheaval she has just experienced, but it provides the goading she needs to stimulate her into action.

Monica Feinberg states that Lucy’s episode of hypochondria enables her to “penetrate the La Terrasse home” and propels her forward “only by presenting her as needy, as someone in need of institutionalization” (180). I contend, conversely, that Lucy’s hypochondria does not present her as needy but rather propels her forward through opening a dialogue of activity between herself and those with whom she felt the
most comfort in childhood. Mrs. Bretton invites Lucy’s confidence in asking to hear of the time between their last meeting. Lucy, however, declines to bear all, replying only that she had “suffered a good deal, especially in mind”:

Further, on this subject, I did not consider it advisable to dwell, for the details of what I had undergone belonged to a portion of my existence in which I never expected my godmother to take a share. Into what a new region would such a confidence have led that hale, serene nature! The difference between her and me might be figured by that between the stately ship cruising safe on smooth seas, with its full complement of crew, a captain gay and brave, and venturous and provident; and the life-boat, which most days of the year lies dry and solitary in an old, dark boat-house, only putting to sea when the billows run high in rough weather, when cloud encounters water, when danger and death divide between them the rule of the great deep. No, the Louisa Bretton never was out of harbour on such a night, and in such a scene: her crew could not conceive it; so the half-drowned life-boat man keeps his own counsel, and spins no yarns. (202)

Lucy uses a sea metaphor to rationalize her self-excluding impulse to refrain from providing Mrs. Bretton the details of her life. She earlier provides Graham with a bit more detail. It is revealed to Graham at La Terrasse that the teacher he has brought into his confidence is none other than Lucy Snowe, a housemate from his youth. Lucy recognizes in him the intimacy of a childhood acquaintance (Graham) and the sensibility
of a physician (Dr. John); as such, she seizes the opportunity of revealing to him her present difficulties: “My days and nights were grown intolerable; a cruel sense of desolation pained my mind; a feeling that would make its way, rush out, or kill me—like (and this you will understand, Dr. John) the current which passes through the heart” (176). He clearly responds, however, as a clinician rather than as an empathetic listener, declaring “Change of air—change of scene; those are my prescriptions” (177). Just as Lucy was a routine parishioner for the priest, she is a medical case for Graham, “who remains blind to his personal implication in her physical collapse” (Park 247). Lucy’s attempt to confide in Graham is unsuccessful. Prior to the revelation of Lucy’s identity to Graham, he allotted such notice to her that he would afford “to unobtrusive articles of furniture, chairs or ordinary joiner’s work, and carpets of no striking pattern” (162). As she is wont to do in compulsively seeking a self-exclusionary existence, Lucy conforms to Graham’s shadowy image of her and, at one point, acknowledges her pleasure in doing so: “I liked entering his presence covered with a cloud he had not seen through” (248). Graham takes it upon himself to become her primary companion during her convalescence at La Terrasse. He prescribes and administers the cure for Lucy’s hypochondria—subjection to “cheerful society” and be “as little alone as possible” (257). This prescription is effective until Lucy must leave the Brettons’. Although Lucy’s “retreat to La Terrasse . . . is a time of peace and fulfillment, it renders more unbearably the present solitude and struggle which she must endure” at the Pensionnat (Carlisle 268).

Once back at Madame Beck’s school, Lucy again faces isolation. A few highly anticipated letters from Graham breed hope for Lucy:
So little had I hoped, so much had I feared; there was a fulness of delight in this taste of fruition - such, perhaps, as many a human being passes through life without ever knowing. The poor English teacher in the frosty garret, reading by a dim candle guttering in the wintry air, a letter simply good-natured - nothing more; though that good-nature then seemed to me godlike - was happier than most queens in palaces. Of course, happiness of such shallow origin could be but brief; yet, while it lasted it was genuine and exquisite. (272)

Lucy again faces the need to spurn hope to prevent agony when her relationship with Graham is effectively terminated by his romantic pursuit of Paulina, reinforcing her compulsion for isolation. Lucy’s isolation finds its truest symbol in the image that has received some of the most critical attention in the novel—the appearance of the nun. Much has been conjectured regarding the role of the nun, including the nun as a “projection of Lucy’s desire to submit in silence, to accept confinement, to dress in shadowy black, to conceal her face, to desexualize herself” (Gilbert and Gubar 426); a device “employed to show that Lucy’s sensations of persecution and imprisonment are to some extent figments of her own imagination” (Björk 113); and a “Gothic motif” that is a “function of human fear” responding to “assertions of human will” (Moglen 220). An application of trauma theory reverses these assumptions, as I contend that the nun merely asserts isolation as inclusion and the differing perceptions of reality. The initial appearance of the nun finds Lucy in solitude reading her much anticipated first letter from Graham. Lucy’s glimpse of the letter is wholly influenced by what she chooses to
see (the unreality), and she goes on to acknowledge the possible reality of it: “To my checked, bridled, disciplined expectation, it seemed very kind; to my longing and famished thought it seemed, perhaps, kinder than it was” (272). In being startled by the nun, Lucy hastily seeks assistance in verifying the intruder, thereby bringing a crowd of onlookers to “the frosty garret” that she sought out specifically to read the letter in solitude. Her self-exclusion is broached by the appearance of the nun, causing Lucy’s inclusion in a crowd of activity and speculation surrounding the appearance. With each subsequent appearance, Lucy ventures closer to the nun and, consequently, closer to reality. Her final contact with the nun has Lucy putting aside isolation and attempting to confront the specter: “‘Who are you? And why do you come to me?’” (381). Based on the circumstance of its presence, the nun represents variations of Lucy’s unreality. For instance, when the nun interrupts Lucy’s reading of Graham’s letter it represents the unreality of an affectionate relationship with Graham. It is significant that Lucy attempts to confront the nun when it appears just after she buries Graham’s letters; in burying Graham’s letters Lucy is burying a symbol of unreality, the hope of a closer relationship with him. Therefore, in confronting the nun Lucy is confronting unreality. It isn’t until Lucy brings Monsieur Paul into her self-exclusionary existence that the reality of the nun is revealed to her: “all the movement was mine, so was all the life, the reality, the substance, the force” (569).

One of the driving forces in the novel that compels Lucy to seek action is M. Paul. Prior to Graham’s retraction of companionship, his active compelling of Lucy to interact in society was sufficient enough to lead her closer to M. Paul: “discovering by some
surreptitious, spying means, that I was no longer so stationary as hitherto, but went out regularly at certain hours of certain days, [he] took it upon himself to place me under surveillance” (386). So not only was she the subject of Madame Beck’s surveying eye, but she was now the subject of M. Paul’s as well. Attempting to draw her out of herself, M. Paul forces Lucy to perform in the vaudeville at the school during a yearly celebration of festivities, compelling her to take a man’s role. Lucy had prepared for the day by having a purple-grey dress made for her, despite the fact that the rest of the students and female staff would be wearing white muslin. Lucy states her purpose in choosing a different color: “in this same gown of shadow I felt at home and at east; an advantage I should not have enjoyed in anything more brilliant or striking” (145). However, as the only darkness in a field of light, Lucy would stand out more in this dress than she would in something more striking. This is an indication that she does indeed want to be noticed, to be expelled from the shadows. M. Paul recognizes this in Lucy and does just that in forcing her participation in the vaudeville: “I will not have you shrink, or frown, or make the prude. I read your skull that night you came; I see your moyens: play you can; play you must” (148).

The role in and of itself is of little significance compared to the act of dressing for the part. It is announced that Lucy is to be dressed as a man, to which she refuses: “I had consented to take a man’s name and part; as to his dress—halte là!” (208). When her hand is actually forced in the matter, she looks to M. Paul for the final word, who then asks, “You do not like these clothes?” to which Lucy replies, “I don’t object to some of them, but I won’t have them all” (208). I see this scene as running much deeper than a
discussion of clothing; it is a discussion of Lucy’s imperative that her isolation be of her own making. If she is to be paraded in front of the school in a role not her own, she will at least retain what she can of her isolation in a voluntary act of somewhat partial exclusion—this partial exclusion being that of male wardrobe to match her forced male role. Looking at it in this light, M. Paul questions whether Lucy likes to take on false attributes, and Lucy responds that she does not object to taking on some, but she will not submit herself entirely to a false persona. The discussion continues with M. Paul remarking, “How must it be, then? How, accept a man’s part, and go on the stage dressed as a woman?” (208). Beneath the surface of the question, M. Paul is questioning how she can accept false attributes in retaining isolation and yet still be able to retain her true identity? Lucy replies, “[I]t must be arranged in my own way: nobody must meddle; the things must not be forced upon me” (208). She must retain control over her isolation; it must not be forced upon her.

Following the vaudeville, M. Paul provides the necessary goading for her to take an active interest in her life; he sees her as no one else has: “You are well habituated to be passed by as a shadow in Life’s sunshine: it is a new thing to see one testily lifting his hand to screen his eyes, because you tease him with an obtrusive ray” (421). Though she refers to him early on as “a dark little man” who is “pungent and austere,” Lucy is amused by M. Paul’s character and eventually finds that she has difficulty isolating herself from him (197). M. Paul sees through Lucy’s forced exclusion: “A resolute compression of the lips, and gathering of the brow, seemed to say that he meant to see through me, and that a veil would be no veil for him” (128). Such description draws
similarities to *Jane Eyre* in the piercing gaze of Rochester, for like Rochester, the purpose of M. Paul’s gaze is to search one’s true nature. Later Lucy remarks how the majority of people at Beck’s school maintain an inaccurate impression of her nature and her faculties, but M. Paul does not fall in with the majority:

What contradictory attributes of character we sometimes find ascribed to us, according to the eye with which we are viewed! Madame Beck esteemed me learned and blue; Miss Fanshawe, caustic, ironic, and cynical; Mr. Home, a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet . . . the pink and pattern of governess-correctness; whilst another person, Professor Paul Emanuel, to wit, never lost an opportunity of intimating his opinion that mine was rather a fiery and rash nature—adventurous, indocile, and audacious. I smiled at them all. (386)

From Lucy’s smile we do not receive the sense that she truly possesses any of the attributes assigned to her; however, from what she has revealed of her life since her initial departure from the Brettons’—an impulsive journey to London, a subsequent journey and move to Villette, developing a plan to get on in life, her forthright behavior with Ginevra and many others at Madame Beck’s school—we see that M. Paul’s opinion may be quite accurate. As far as the features of her character, though she claims truthfulness—“I always, throughout my whole life, liked to penetrate to the real truth” (564)—she lives a forged and isolated life assigned by her own defense against loss and finds pleasure in clever banter that keeps the truth at bay. The topic of identity in a conversation she has with Ginevra is a prime example of Lucy’s evasiveness:
‘Who are you, Miss Snowe?’ she inquired. . . .

‘Who am I indeed? Perhaps a personage in disguise. Pity I don’t look the character.’ (393)

But with her dark clothes and shadowy form she certainly does “look the character.” Lucy goes on to state that “it quite sufficed to my mental tranquility that I was known where it imported that known I should be” (394). As Monica Cohen observes, “knowledge appears now for Lucy a question of privacy” (63). I contend that this is conducive to her quest for isolation and exclusion.

Monsieur Paul enjoys goading Lucy—“He now thought he had got the victory, since he had made me angry. In a second he became good-humoured” (429)—and the feeling is mutual—“I had a certain pleasure in keeping cool, and working him up” (277). Tromly addresses such irritation when she notes that M. Paul “arouses in Lucy the desire to tease, challenge, and vex” (76)—in short, the desire to express herself. From what is revealed of his character, I would add to Tromly’s observation that only Lucy is able to arouse the same reactions from M. Paul as well. He waivers between affection and tyranny in his behavior towards Lucy; indeed “throughout most of the book, [he] is perceived in warring extremes of tyranny and soft benevolence. In chapter 30, he is Napoleon Bonaparte, and in chapter 35, he is a Christian knight” (Auerbach 210). Lucy accounts for these extremes during a statement she makes regarding Dr. John: “I give the feelings as at the time I felt it; I describe the view of character as it appeared when discovered” (266). It is not until she discovers the true character of M. Paul—that he is a benevolent and constant man—that Lucy’s view of him changes from tyrant to knight,
and her actions towards him change as well. It is also at this point that M. Paul begins to express himself in more benevolent terms: he begs her friendship and trust, sets her up in a school of her own, and asserts himself towards Madame Beck on Lucy’s behalf. Lucy tells her reader that M. Paul “deserved candour, and from me always had it” (538).

When Lucy learns of the school that M. Paul has set up for her at the Faubourg Clotilde, she is overcome with emotion in the realization of a dangerously hoped for liberty and must share her thoughts with M. Paul as he urgently solicits her confession—“‘Speak, Lucy; come near; speak’” (471):

I spoke. All escaped from my lips. I lacked not words now; fast I narrated; fluent I told my tale; it streamed on my tongue. I went back to the night in the park; I mentioned the medicated draught — why it was given — its goading effect — how it had torn rest from under my head, shaken me from my couch, carried me abroad with the lure of a vivid yet solemn fancy — a summer night solitude on turf under trees, near a deep, cool lakelet. . . . All I had encountered I detailed, all I had recognised, heard and seen; . . . the whole history, in brief summoned to his confidence, rushed thither, truthful, literal, ardent, bitter. (471)

Unlike Dr. John and Père Silas, M. Paul is a faithful, empathetic witness to her tale:

“Still as I narrated, instead of checking, he incited me to proceed; he spurred me by the gesture, the smile, the half-word” (471). It is M. Paul who ultimately recognizes Lucy’s need for a witness—this comes only as a result of their shared experience in that he too has intimate knowledge of loss. Through his actions towards Lucy, M. Paul has proven
himself the bearer of all that Lucy desired in another—friendship, companionship, and counsel—and through the revealed events of his life, Lucy sees in him an empathetic witness to her traumatic past: “Before I had half done, he held both my hands, he consulted my eyes with a most piercing glance . . . I was full of faults; he took them and me all home. . . .These words caressed my ear: -- ‘Lucy, take my love. One day share my life. Be my dearest, first on earth.’” (471). As Melfi notes, however, she still “does not articulate the significant darkness that needs articulating. . . . He has broken through her willful emotional starvation and offered sustenance for her spirit. But he cannot help her exorcise the original and crippling lie because Lucy chooses to keep it buried and unarticulated” (116). Just as in her confession to Père Silas, Lucy still only imparts an outline of her traumatic testimony.

The conclusion of the novel, and the ambiguous ending of M. Paul, has been the subject of much critical discussion. Feminist critics like Gilbert and Gubar find that the ending “reflects Lucy’s ambivalence, her love for Paul and her recognition that it is only in his absence that she can exert herself fully to exercise her own powers” (438), while O’Dea sees the “rushed and anguished” ending as an “attempt [by Lucy] to choke back her own misery” (46). Bertrandias looks upon the loss of M. Paul as one that ensures Lucy’s progression towards relief: “Becoming in his turn the victim of a shipwreck, Paul Emmanuel finally allows Lucy to grieve, and one can picture her, solitary but at peace, entering at last into what was hitherto impossible for her, a process of mourning with her autobiographical tale as its privileged expression” (137). Through the application of trauma theory, I argue that the ending is not a privileged expression of her mourning, a
reflection of her ambivalence, or an anguished expression of misery but rather a
testament to her continued struggle with trauma inherent in the repetitive patterns of
behavior that exist throughout her narrative and persist in her conclusion. Surely, if her
narrative were an expression of the process of mourning, Lucy would not omit large
portions of her traumatic past, nor would she state that the three-year span of time in
which M. Paul was absent from her were “the three happiest years of my life” (543).
Once she learns of his apparent loss, Lucy again alludes to the reader, letting him or her
draw his or her own conclusion as to M. Paul’s fate and her own reaction toward that
fate. As Carlisle suggests, “Here again memory too painful for expression must be
evasively cloaked in vague generalizations and patently ironic statements of resolution”
(287):

And now the three years are past: M. Emanuel’s return is fixed. . . . My
school flourishes, my house is ready: I have made him a little library,
filled its shelves with the books he left in my care. . . . I thought I loved
him when he went away; I love him now in another degree; he is more my
own. . . . Frosts appear at night; November has sent his fogs in advance;
the wind takes its autumn moan; but -- he is coming. The skies hang full
and dark -- a rack sails from the west; the clouds cast themselves into
strange forms -- arches and broad radiations; there rise resplendent
morning -- glorious, royal, purple as monarch in his state; the heavens are
one flame; so wild are they, they rival battle at its thickest -- so bloody,
they shame Victory in her pride. I know some signs of the sky; I have
noted them ever since childhood. God, watch that sail! Oh! guard it! That storm roared frenzied for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks: it did not lull till the deeps had gorged their full of sustenance. Not till the destroying angel of tempest had achieved his perfect work, would he fold the wings whose waft was thunder -- the tremor of whose plumes was storm. . . . 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. (546)

Ultimately, “Paul’s ship is both destroyed and preserved, as the reader likes it” (Auerbach 211). Peeck concedes this point while drawing on Lucy’s earlier storm imagery in saying that “the reader is given the choice of either believing that M. Paul returns or that he is shipwrecked, not metaphorically, as Lucy was, but literally. So Lucy’s ‘shipwreck’ points forward to the shipwreck at the very end of the novel. By that time, of course, the attentive reader intuits that M. Paul will not be returning, and that there will be no living happily ever after” (225).

Lucy has consistently needed to be drawn out of her self-imposed isolation because she is incapable of doing it herself; she must be goaded into action. She has learned through past loss that it is safer not to form close associations, because these associations will be broken through death or estrangement. It is only M. Paul who
consistently cares enough to draw her out of herself, and now he is lost as well. Her response to his loss can be seen in her reaction to the vaudeville in which he forced her to participate:

What I felt that night, and what I did, I no more expected to feel and do, than to be lifted in a trance to the seventh heaven. Cold, reluctant, apprehensive, I had accepted a part to please another: ere long, warming, becoming interested, taking courage, I acted to please myself. Yet the next day, when I thought it over, I quite disapproved of these amateur performances. . . . I took a firm resolution never to be drawn into a similar affair. A keen relish for dramatic expression had revealed itself as part of my nature; to cherish and exercise this new-found faculty might gift me with a world of delight, but it would not do for a mere looker-on at life: the strength and longing must be put by; and I put them by, and fastened them in with the lock of a resolution which neither Time nor Temptation has since picked. (211)

This is a most telling indication of Lucy’s consistent need to spurn hope and encourage exclusion. Indeed, she brings this statement into the present with her phrasing that “neither Time nor Temptation has since picked,” indicating that the Lucy of the present remains a mere “looker-on-at life.”

In Lucy’s comment pertaining to the absence of M. Paul as the three happiest years of her life, her happiness is evidently “more contingent on her establishment as directress of her own school than on M. Paul Emanuel’s love” (Hoeverel and Jadwin
However, despite her newfound independence, hard work, and happiness, *Villette* does end with a storm; this storm, though, is not metaphorical. As Vrettos notes, “the violence of weather that affects Lucy’s nerves throughout the text is no less disruptive in its conclusion. Once again Lucy’s rhetoric erupts into hysterical violence as the storm rages out of control” (577). This alludes to repetition in her patterns of behavior. Once again, the wind provides an analogue of Lucy’s traumatic past: “the violence of the tempest is transformed into narrative expression, challenging Lucy’s placid claims of health and happiness. Brontë leaves us in the midst of this emotional and meteorological outburst, thereby extending her portrayal of neurosis beyond the boundaries of the text and refusing either narrative or interpretive closure” (Vrettos 577). Bertrandias sees “Lucy’s autobiography as the tale and the speech of a survivor,” but I argue that as a survivor’s tale it is incomplete (137). Yes, technically, Lucy has physically survived trauma, but she is also continually and compulsively reliving the trauma of loss through her repetitive patterns of behavior in an attempt at working through her traumatic past.
CONCLUSION

What Brontë creates or projects in *The Professor, Jane Eyre*, and *Villette* as fictional autobiographies reveals a core trauma behind the feigned normalcy of the selves constructed in the context of their unfolding narrative. I have shown that the development within the plot is less progressive, less developmental than it is circular, revolving around the traumatic memory repetition or residue that invariably surfaces in their life stories.

Momberger remarks that “The world gives the Brontë hero nothing; he is defined—and becomes aware of himself—in terms of what he lacks” (354). I would say Brontë’s fictional autobiographers are defined not in terms of what they lack, but of what they gain. Indeed, the narrative testimonies of *The Professor, Jane Eyre*, and *Villette* serve to elucidate a truth central to each of these novels. A comment Bertrandias makes regarding *Villette* can actually be said to pertain to all of these fictional autobiographies: “In those Memoirs, there stretches and lengthens and reiterates a sadness, a secret wound and guilt, and the unsaid is omnipresent, but all this is cautiously kept at a distance by an expert and sly narrative authority who subtly handles duplicity for the purpose of irony” (137). The portraits I have set forth depict individuals who are quite aware of themselves but who are kept down by trauma and resulting circumstance; they are not deficient of awareness, rather their traumatic circumstance prohibits the capacity of self-revelation. Through repetitive patterns of behavior evident of a working through of trauma, Brontë’s
autobiographers work toward a regeneration of self with greater or lesser degrees of success within their autobiographies as testimony of their ongoing struggle.

Hoeveler and Jadwin remark that “Surviving trauma and living to tell the tale are repeated images in Brontë’s novels” (43). I further this argument by stating that the autobiographies serve as testimony to the trauma that is depicted within the narrative, thereby rendering the reader as witness to the traumatized lives presented therein.

Crimsworth reasons that he is writing his narrative for public consumption for the very purpose that perhaps someone who has been through similar circumstances may reflect upon those experiences within the narrative: “My narrative is not exciting and, above all, not marvelous—but it may interest some individuals, who, having toiled in the same vocation as myself, will find in my experience, frequent reflections of their own” (12).

Robert Polhemus remarks on the ability of a narrative to live within its reader:

A narrative lives when people can read it so as to find in it their particular sense of life, their passions, and their secrets both represented and reformed. And what turns a narrative into a complex is the relevance for living human beings of its broad-based, lasting analogical power—its felt quality of distilling for many over a long time a paradigm of experience that directly or indirectly shapes their minds and the minds of those they touch. . . . A ‘complex’ is, then, a complex narrative that, in one way or another, has sunk deeply into people over the years. (Polhemus 7)

In presenting their lives for public consumption, the narrators of these fictional autobiographies allow the reader to act as witness to the testimony of their traumatic past.
As Douglass and Vogler point out “To accept the role of reader . . . is to accept a responsibility and obligation, to take one’s place in a series of readers whose attention keeps the witness alive” (45). As such, it is the successive readers of these novels whose witness is an essential process in the working through of the traumatic testimony.

While they each provide testimony in the form of an autobiography, a primary difference between Jane, Crimsworth, and Lucy is that Lucy wants to tell her story within her narrative, finding a witness in both Père Silas and M. Paul. Jane and Crimsworth do not seek such outlets within their narratives. They are silent and proficient in solitary suffering and solitary solace. With them we, as readers, are the sole witnesses to their traumatic testimony. As discussed in chapter three, though not a Catholic, Lucy seeks the confessional because she must speak of the pain of her past. She also selects M. Paul as witness of her testimony as she tells him everything, pouring her heart out to him. She now turns to us, the readers, wanting to tell us everything yet she does not. The portions of her life imparted on Père Silas and M. Paul are left out of her narrative, only alluded to with vague images of nature and stormy seas. Lucy’s unwillingness to share full details of her traumatic childhood is in keeping with the format of all of Brontë’s fictional autobiographers. This is perhaps an indication that her autobiographers have yet to fully master their trauma.

Crimsworth, Jane, and Lucy each draw the reader in to their testimony. Each instance in Lucy’s autobiography where she refers to the reader to think what he or she may is an instance of her restricting the contents of her life. This dialogue with the reader is not unique to Lucy, for all of Brontë’s narrators breach the page by addressing the
reader, encouraging their involvement in the scenario; however, Lucy’s is the only incidence of such dialogue serving as a restriction wherein she does not provide the reader with the results of a given situation or circumstance. The encouragement of Crimsworth is given in the form of conversational inclusion serving as asides that lead into a larger point—“Now, reader, during the last two pages I have been giving you honey fresh from flowers, but you must not live entirely on food so luscious” (The Professor 252); “Do not mistake me, reader, it was no amorous influence she wished to gain” (The Professor 118). Lucy’s and Jane’s encouragement more actively involves the reader in the plot. Aside from drawing the reader back to specific incidences in her life, Jane invites the reader to partake of her revelations: “Stay till he comes, reader; and, when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence” (Jane Eyre 235); “romantic reader, forgive me for telling the plain truth!” (Jane Eyre 93); “reader, to tell you all, in the midst of this calm, this useful existence . . . I used to rush into strange dreams” (Jane Eyre 312). Lucy invites the reader in with such consistency that the reader can hardly help feeling a high level of involvement; however, though involvement is present, disclosure is not easily ascertained.

Disclosure of origin is also at a minimum in The Professor and Villette, which must give us pause as we wonder conversely at the laborious development by Brontë of Jane Eyre’s familial and social origins. In the midst of producing Villette, Brontë comments to one of her publishers, W.S. Williams, on the absence of Lucy’s origins as well as her morbid nature:
You say that she may be thought morbid and weak, unless the history of her life be more fully given. I consider that she is both morbid and weak at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength, and anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid. It was no impetus of healthy feeling which urged her to the confessional, for instance; it was the semi-delirium of solitary grief and sickness (Letters vol. 4 p. 18 Nov. 6, 1852)

Brontë makes a calculated choice to exclude the history of Lucy’s life, instead allowing the reader to see Lucy through what she, as fictional autobiographer, chooses to present—a character whose life is conducive to morbidity. Thomas comments that Lucy’s identity “seems to be steadfast throughout the novel; she appears not to change in any significant way. Among the prominent features of Lucy’s character are reticence and a desire to be truthful. Lucy’s reticence . . . is the result of continued self- and other-repression, but when she narrates her story, Lucy is no longer restricted” (568). Just as it is impossible to ascertain Crimsworth’s growth due to his lack of a chronicle of origination, to say that Lucy’s identity remains steadfast implies that we are aware of her identity to begin with, which we are not. Lucy gives clues to and hints of her identity throughout the novel, but because she does not lay it out for us at the start it is difficult to ascertain whether or not she really does remain steadfast.

While interpretations based on gender, feminist perspectives, or biographical analyses seek to reveal aspects of Brontë’s novels that may not be altogether evident, I argue that greater revelation is found in the application of trauma theory. In analyzing
patterns of behavior we see the testimonial significance of their individual narratives. Looking at Brontë’s fictional autobiographies as acts of testimony, wherein repetitive patterns of behavior provide evidence of a working through of trauma, reveals aspects of her narrators that have yet to receive critical recognition. For instance, rather than the popular stance of looking at Crimsworth as a self-made man, my application of trauma theory reveals him as a manipulative presence whose desire for control masks his inherent state of dependency; his only power rests in what he can acquire from the assistance of others. While prevailing analytical positions on Jane Eyre see Jane’s and Rochester’s transformations as conducive to matrimonial bliss, I reveal it as an indication that Jane is anything but content and is indeed continuing to seek out oppressive situations in order to rebel and seek liberation. Similarly, Lucy is looked upon as an unreliable narrator due to her omissions and revisions, but the use of trauma theory shows that these omissions are evidence of an exclusionary life wherein silence must be fostered to defend against the pain of loss with her voluntary concealment revealing a preference for finding action in the shadows.

The conclusions reached herein provide new interpretations as well as raise new questions for further exploration of the role of trauma in Brontë’s novels. Furthermore, the narrators of these fictional autobiographies open a direct dialogue with the reader, implying that they felt the testimony of their life worthy of reading and desired it to be witnessed by the public eye, perhaps the final act of revelation on a grand scale. When considering her novels outside the prevalent realm of critical analyses that end up obscuring much of their entrenched core, one can arrive at a better understanding of the
depths of Brontë’s protagonists and the significance of their traumatic past in shaping their testimonial present.
Bibliography


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