



Wasted Space: The Suffering Female Body in the Works of Emily and Charlotte Brontë

by

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Abstract

This thesis presents an analysis of the suffering female body in *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853) by Charlotte Brontë and *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë. In so doing, I uncover those aspects of female subjectivity, both in the Victorian era, and more broadly throughout history, that are written on the suffering bodies of the protagonists. Both authors use the Gothic, particularly Gothic space, to explore experiences of imprisonment, oppression and intrusion, demonstrating the myriad ways in which the Victorian world affects and imposes upon the female literary body, causing it to suffer. The suffering female body is shown to be an acquiescent body, which manifests as the result of normative Victorian social and literary gender formations. Conversely, the pathological behaviours and suffering bodies exhibited by the protagonists may also be viewed as forms of nonconformity or rebellion: the female body is shown to be a disruptive and eruptive force, capable of deviant communication and outright rebellion. Finally, I look to genre in order to understand the possibilities imagined for female corporeality by Emily and Charlotte Brontë. Though each author gestures simultaneously toward both conformity to and subversion of Victorian discourse and ideology, I suggest that it is in their relationship with the Gothic and realist modes that Emily and Charlotte Brontë are most subversive and innovative. Through illustrating the omnipresence of the Gothic and the constant pushing back of the Gothic mode against the realist text, they demonstrate the way in which realism is not spacious enough for female Victorian writers, or for female bodies.

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Sarah Pearce

Signed.....

Date.....

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Introduction

The nineteenth century is arguably the era of the modern novel. High Victorian fiction manifested in recognisable forms such as the industrial novel, social problem fiction, and bourgeois or domestic realism. It is the Victorian novel's preoccupation with domestic life that made the form particularly suitable for Emily and Charlotte Brontë, and of particular significance for feminist critics. The body of Brontë scholarship is both vast and wide-ranging. Over almost two centuries of literary criticism, this body has morphed and expanded to reflect the interests and preoccupations of each era. *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë and *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853) by Charlotte Brontë have each been examined as canonical examples of Victorian fiction, Victorian realism, female *bildungsroman* and female Gothicism. Within such a vast body of Brontë scholarship, I seek to uncover the significance of the suffering female textual body.

Although first wave feminism did not gain significant social traction until the late nineteenth century, the antecedents for this movement were sown much earlier in the century. Various Victorian female authors, including Emily and Charlotte Brontë, have been viewed as anticipating feminism in some important ways. Jane Eyre, for example, in her impassioned speech regarding female lives, identifies key arenas such as education, property, law, family and service that were central to expanding roles for women in Victorian England (Schor 175). Emily Brontë similarly engages with Victorian social and legal discourse surrounding marriage and rights for the wife, through the various failed marriages in *Wuthering Heights* and Heathcliff's detailed understanding of marriage law.

Feminist literary criticism of the 1970s and 1980s, perhaps exemplified by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), tended toward psychoanalytic and symbolic, almost archetypal readings of these Brontë

texts.¹ Gilbert and Gubar identified in nineteenth-century women's writing key tropes such as madness, monstrosity, domesticity and escape, starvation and burial. Bertha Rochester, the prototypical madwoman, was interpreted as a classic manifestation of the Victorian woman's (and woman author's) repressed rage.

As the collection of essays in *Gilbert and Gubar's 'The Madwoman in the Attic' after Thirty Years* (2009) demonstrates, Gilbert and Gubar's analysis is now regarded as somewhat limited in scope, though undeniably significant in terms of twentieth-century feminist criticism. As Carol Margaret Davison has pointed out, *Madwoman* is primarily a study of nineteenth-century female Gothic texts, but Gilbert and Gubar fail to acknowledge this. Accordingly, they omit Ann Radcliffe, arguably the mother of their Victorian madwoman, from their analysis (*Ghosts* 204), thus missing a crucial opportunity to explore those ways in which nineteenth-century female Gothic authors engaged in active conversation with their literary predecessors and developed the mode.

Critics such as Sally Shuttleworth and Patsy Stoneman have highlighted the shortcomings of traditional feminist readings of texts such as *Jane Eyre*. Though feminist criticism has often figured Bertha Rochester as an overt critique of repressive Victorian attitudes toward female sexuality, the figuration of woman as a sexualised and mad creature explicitly inscribes Victorian ideology, rather than moving beyond it (Shuttleworth 164; see also 148). More recently, Stoneman has pointed out that reading Jane's story as a journey toward self-knowledge, as Gilbert and Gubar do, is somewhat reductive. Such an interpretation relies on a kind of universal womanhood and thus discounts the specificities of Jane's experience. Moreover, as I address in greater detail in chapter 3, reading Bertha as the singular manifestation of Jane's rage disregards Jane's own capacity for raging rebellion (Stoneman *Charlotte* 34, 39).

¹ Other significant contributions to feminist literary criticism during this time include *Literary Women* (1977) by Ellen Moers and *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) by Elaine Showalter.

Perhaps most importantly, critics have tended to both de-historicise and de-politicise Charlotte Brontë's works (Shuttleworth 1-2). Gilbert and Gubar's style of psychoanalytic approach views the symbolic, or repressed, level of the text as both more significant and more 'real' than the manifest level. Accordingly, this kind of approach is more interested in psychological than social conditions. However, Charlotte Brontë's depictions of the individual female psyche are observably informed by contemporary social and political debate (Shuttleworth 3). For this reason, traditional feminist analyses such as *Madwoman* can be usefully supplemented by more historical and more recent readings (Fraiman 30-1).

Recent studies of the Brontës, such as Heather Glen's meticulously researched *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (2004), have focussed more on specific historical details than symbolic elements. Significantly, Glen highlights the way in which Charlotte Brontë invokes and plays with an array of different nineteenth-century discourses, thus avoiding the presentation of a single discursive message (3). This multiplicity gains particular significance for this consideration of the suffering female body and those various, sometimes contradictory, discourses and ideologies embodied by the form.

This thesis seeks to uncover the multiple significances of the suffering female body in these Brontë novels. I focus on key ways in which women suffer, particularly the refusal of food, wasting and various kinds of illness that pervade these three texts. Key examples include Jane Eyre's wasting in the absence of love, Lucy Snowe's psychological deterioration and Catherine Earnshaw's tuberculosis. Like Helena Michie in *The Flesh Made Word* (1987), I examine the significance of the female body within a Victorian context. Where Michie focuses on *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, and the shrinking heroine as expression of dominant discourse, I look also to *Wuthering Heights* and Emily Brontë's presentation of female illness. Though Emily and Charlotte Brontë present illness in strikingly different ways, there are important continuities to be observed. The central thread of food refusal or denial and the consequent wasting of the body is one such continuity, linking the raging, self-starving Catherine with both Jane and

Lucy, who waste away in isolation and emotional deprivation. In focussing broadly on the suffering female body, this thesis draws links between Charlotte Brontë's shrinking heroines and Emily Brontë's mad and wild Catherine, who is eventually domesticated into the role of domestic angel and invalid. The consideration of *Wuthering Heights* alongside both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* enables a fresh perspective on female suffering and illness in these texts.

The notion of dichotomies or paradoxes surrounding the female body forms a central thread of this thesis. Gilbert and Gubar famously defined the nineteenth-century literary woman as existing within the dichotomy between angel and monster, witch, bitch or whore. As I discuss in detail in chapters 2 and 3, the 'good' woman existed within the domestic sphere as the morally pure wife and mother. Paulina Home, the tiny and passive child-wife, provides an exemplary representation of idealised Victorian femininity. Conversely, women who did not conform to this idealised form were constructed as monstrous and deviant, such as the grotesque and dehumanised Bertha Rochester. This split is also reflected in Victorian ideology surrounding female embodiment and illness. Female invalidism during the Victorian era was both prized as a marker of ideal femininity and feared as a sign of the fundamental instability of the female body. Women were both expected to be ill and reviled for their presentations of illness, and there existed both 'good' and 'bad' kinds of sickness. This split is manifested in contrasting responses to Catherine Earnshaw's various illnesses: tuberculosis is perceived as a spiritualising process that renders her more beautiful, whereas her hysteria is treated with revulsion. In this way, the cult of invalidism reflects the dichotomous construction of Victorian womanhood.

In this examination of the suffering female body, I consolidate a range of theories surrounding female illness and female food refusal, both within the Victorian era and throughout history. Various critics have highlighted important continuities in experience between ill and suffering women from the early medieval period in

Europe, through the nineteenth century, to the present day.² I consider these Brontë bodies as being inscribed by both Victorian discourse and more general, even ahistorical, discourse surrounding femininity and embodiment.

This analysis of the suffering female body extends the work of critics such as Glen and Michie by considering the female body as Gothic object. The early 1990s saw a resurgence in Brontë interest, but from a Gothic perspective. Eugenia DeLamotte (1990), the late Diane Long Hoeveler (1995) and Alison Milbank (1992, 2009) each provide feminist critiques of representations of femininity and female experience in Gothic texts, including the works of Emily and Charlotte Brontë.

A definition of traditional Gothic, as represented by key texts of the 1790s such as *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe and *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Lewis, might describe a mode characterised by the use of key themes and tropes such as the haunted castle, confinement, intrusion, live burial, spectrality and the supernatural. The Gothic mode particularly suited female writers of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century, providing an outlet for the expression of anxieties, criticism of wider social issues and boundaries, and the exploration of female experience, sexual oppression and sexual difference (see Botting 1, 19; Hoeveler 4). As Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith discuss, many critics have interpreted the female Gothic as “a politically subversive genre articulating women’s dissatisfaction with patriarchal structures” (2; see also Hoeveler 4-5). Female Gothic literature can be seen to both interrogate and challenge those forms of fiction dominated by patriarchal ideology and assumptions (Botting 19; Fleenor 13). Juliann Fleenor suggests that the female Gothic is, in part, a form created by those tensions created by interactions between patriarchal society and the role of women, and the contradictions and limitations inherent to both (15-16).

² See, for example, *Unbearable Weight* (1993) by Susan Bordo, *Fasting Girls* (1988) by Joan Jacobs Brumberg and *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls* (1994) by Walter Vandereycken and Ron van Deth.

The Gothic genre, like nineteenth-century conceptions of femininity and female invalidism, is defined by one basic dichotomy: angelic heroines conform to culturally-defined normative constructions of femininity, whereas women who deviate from these norms are depicted as monstrous or evil (Fleenor 9, 15; see also Gilbert and Gubar 17). In terms of literary representations of femininity, whether constructed 'ideal' femininity or more subversive and monstrous forms, the Gothic forms a particular crystallisation of various social and ideological discourses.

During the nineteenth century, female embodiment became a core concern for female Gothic writers, who began to explore the dangers and pitfalls of femininity, particularly sexuality and childbirth (Botting 19; Fleenor 7, 13). Physiological dread began to characterise female Gothic writing, as a deep ambivalence toward femininity took root in the female Gothic imagination (Fleenor 6, 11). This physiological dread, and the resulting construction of entrapment within the female body as a central fear for female Gothicists, becomes of crucial importance for my analysis of the suffering female body.

Though *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Villette* each fit somewhat uneasily into a tradition of female Gothic, the Gothic mode is undeniably present in each text through traditional tropes and set-pieces such as the locked attic and the spectral nun, and key themes such as confinement, intrusion and burial alive. Moreover, given the centrality of the female body within female Gothic authorship, any consideration of the female body, particularly the suffering body, in these texts is justifiably placed within a Gothic framework.

Both Emily and Charlotte Brontë expanded the Gothic mode in important ways. The last decade of the eighteenth century may be viewed as the heyday of traditional Gothic fiction. By the early nineteenth century, in *Northanger Abbey* (1817), Jane Austen had already begun to satirise Radcliffe's Gothic, indicating a growing awareness of the limitations of traditional Gothic for both female character and author. Both Emily and Charlotte Brontë can be seen to reference or even revisit Radcliffe's Gothic, but the complicated ways in which they utilise

the Gothic also differentiate their novels from this more traditional form of the mode. Both Emily and Charlotte Brontë fuse elements of the Gothic mode with Victorian bourgeois or domestic realism, thus forcing the reader to consider the 'real' nature of traditionally Gothic narrative elements for Victorian women. *Thornfield*, for example, occupies a dual narrative space as both Gothic mansion and domestic idyll. This fusion has important implications for the interpretation of these texts as socially realist. Moreover, female suffering sits at the core of each novel, however its presentation is less voyeuristic and positive than Radcliffe's depictions of sweetly suffering heroines. In this way, by presenting female suffering as inherently painful and messy, as both angelic and monstrous, both conformist and subversive, Emily and Charlotte Brontë move the Gothic conversation forward, raising important questions about the nature of female suffering and those possible 'endings' available to the suffering female body.

This thesis seeks to uncover the multiple significances of the suffering female body in the works of Emily and Charlotte Brontë, and ultimately those possibilities imagined for this body by the authors. In so doing, I analyse their use of the Gothic mode as well as their engagement with Victorian discourses surrounding the female body and femininity. I also utilise recent feminist theory regarding the female body and particularly female illness and fasting. In this way, my research extends the work of critics such as Michie, Milbank and Elaine Showalter. Like Glen, I seek to ground my analysis in Victorian historicity, but I depart from her approach in my combination of Gothic criticism with Victorian social criticism and feminist discourse on the body.

Feminist critiques of the Victorian novel have often sought to answer decisively whether or not female characters support or subvert dominant Victorian paradigms of femininity and expected behaviour (Jaffe 430). More recently, however, critics have begun to read multiple, contradictory narratives into these same texts. Susan Fraiman, for example, suggests that both docility and defiance were available to Charlotte Brontë as strategies for exploring gender within a literary and social context (31). In their discussion of food and the female body in nineteenth- and twentieth-century women's writing, Tamar Heller and Patricia

Moran highlight the ways in which female wasting, illness, and death can form the manifestation of both acquiescence and resistance to domesticity (25).

In this thesis I explore the extent to which Emily and Charlotte Brontë subvert dominant tropes regarding female embodiment and subjectivity, and the extent to which they replicate such tropes. Unlike more reductive analyses, which view the protagonists as either deeply conforming or deeply rebellious, I explore the ways in which the female body may gesture, in the same experience or moment of suffering, simultaneously toward both acquiescence and subversion. For example, a woman might starve herself in capitulation to social expectations of the slender and wasting women. However, self-starvation may also manifest as a kind of rebellion against circumstance, a desperate grasp for control. As I demonstrate throughout the second and third chapters of this thesis, female pathology is indeed a contested phenomenon. It is for this reason that I examine some examples of embodied suffering in both the second and third chapters of this thesis; these examples may manifest both conformity and subversion of expectations. Catherine's death, for example, is an intensely contested gesture; in dying, she both becomes an angel and bodily rejects the restrictive society around her. I use examples such as these to construct competing arguments, in order to highlight the paradoxical nature of the suffering female body, which may gesture simultaneously toward acquiescence and rebellion. In this way, I seek to complicate the conversation surrounding female embodiment in the works of the Brontës, by demonstrating that these authors exhibit both conformity and rebellion in their depictions of female characters.

Finally, I look to the Gothic to uncover the ways in which Emily and Charlotte Brontë developed the Victorian Gothic novel through their depictions of the suffering female body. It is through their use of the Gothic that these authors were able to make some definitive claims regarding female subjectivity: to suggest a possible alternative fate for the female body, in the case of Charlotte Brontë, and to wholly condemn domesticity and normative femininity, in the case of Emily Brontë. Moreover, each author uses the Gothic, in relation to the female body, to fracture and thus expand the realist novel form, suggesting that

realism was not broad enough to capture the sufferings of Victorian femininity. The Gothic emerges as inescapable; it permeates the very fabric of Victorian female subjectivity, as written by the Brontës.

In terms of textual focus, my choice of these particular three texts will enable new insights into the ways in which Emily and Charlotte Brontë conceived of and constructed the female body and female subjectivity in literary form. Few critics have considered these three texts alongside one another. *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* have been analysed together, and so too *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. My analysis of *Villette* alongside *Jane Eyre* enables a consideration of the ways in which Charlotte Brontë's ideas surrounding domesticity, female happiness and the female body developed throughout her writing career. Moreover, my inclusion of *Wuthering Heights* enables me to uncover core similarities between representations of the female body in these otherwise radically different texts. Ultimately, I seek to move the Brontë conversation forward, by uniting threads of analysis identified by critics such as DeLamotte, Glen, Michie and Milbank. My focus on the suffering female body, as both Gothic and realist, monstrous and angelic, allows this thesis to occupy an important and unexplored space within the vast body of Brontë scholarship.

This thesis is not an exploration of Brontë biography or mythology. The interest of this thesis lies in the texts written by these authors and what the authors were able to achieve through their representations of the female body. Furthermore, I frame my analysis of the suffering female body primarily around the protagonists of these texts, but additional minor characters will necessarily enter the discussion from time to time, particularly in relation to different representations of femininity. As such, this thesis focuses on the body of the white middle-class Victorian woman.

The first chapter analyses how Emily and Charlotte Brontë put space to work in these narratives, focusing on the physical spaces inhabited by the protagonists. I chart the movement made by each female protagonist through the spaces of her respective Victorian world, and the ways in which she navigates these spaces,

from the institutional to the domestic. This chapter explores the range of ways in which these various spaces affect the female characters; of particular interest are the ways in which space imposes upon the female body, resulting in suffering. Chapter 1 firmly grounds *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Villette* within the Gothic mode, through demonstrating the ways in which the authors use Gothic spaces to articulate female subjectivity. For example, Lucy's bedroom at the school, which becomes increasingly spectre-filled, illustrates her experiences of surveillance and intrusion. Despite some significant differences in the utilisation of space, both Emily and Charlotte Brontë are shown to use architectural space to illustrate those key negative experiences of female protagonists: deprivation, control, imprisonment, intrusion and the violation of the moral body.

In the second chapter, I move from a consideration of architectural space to the female body itself. I explore patriarchal conceptualisations of the feminine, within both Victorian society and literature. Of particular importance are the ways in which social ideology regarding femininity plays out in relation to the suffering female body, and how this body manifests as a result of and embodies normative gender formations. The wasting and spectral bodies of the heroines of both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, for example, may be said to conform to normative gender formations. Crucially, both Emily and Charlotte Brontë demonstrate the ways in which ideal femininity is harmful or even fatal for these characters, linked as it is to wasting, illness and death.

Conversely, in chapter 3 I explore the ways in which the pathological behaviours and suffering bodies exhibited by the protagonists may be viewed as forms of nonconformity or rebellion. Beyond a discourse of feminine submission and victimisation, it may be possible to find power and meaning in female illness and starvation. I detail the ways in which female characters defy normative codes of femininity, and in doing so become 'monstrous'. For example, Catherine Earnshaw's hysterical breakdown forms a classic example of monstrous pathology. I demonstrate that the protagonists are each engaged in forms of bodily communication, as they struggle against the strictures of Victorian

femininity. The female body is shown to be a disruptive and eruptive force, capable of deviant communication and outright rebellion.

The fourth and final chapter turns to a consideration of literary strategy. Having demonstrated that the suffering female body manifests in response to architectural space and social constructions of femininity, and may gesture simultaneously toward both conformity and defiance, I consider the possibilities imagined for such a body by the authors. Like the female bodies of their protagonists, Emily and Charlotte Brontë gesture simultaneously toward both conformity to and subversion of Victorian discourse and ideology. However, I suggest that it is in their relationship with the Gothic and realist modes that the authors are most subversive and innovative. Through illustrating the omnipresence of the Gothic and the constant pushing back of the Gothic mode against the realist text, they demonstrate the way in which realism isn't spacious enough for female Victorian writers, or for female bodies. It is through this disruption of genre and the creation of 'new' forms of realism that Emily and Charlotte Brontë may be viewed as both proto-feminist and particularly innovative.

Chapter 1 – Physical Setting and Patriarchal Space

*...walls that cannot be penetrated become a prison... (Ellis
Contested 45)*

This chapter³ provides an analysis of how ‘space’ is put to work by Emily and Charlotte Brontë in their narratives of female suffering, focussing on the physical spaces created by the authors and inhabited by their female protagonists. I chart the movement made by each female protagonist through the spaces of her respective Victorian world, and the ways in which she navigates these spaces, from the institutional to the domestic. This chapter explores the range of ways in which these various spaces affect the female characters; of particular interest is how space imposes upon the female body, resulting in suffering. I also detail the ways in which the male characters direct female movement between spaces, exert control over female characters and are manifested in these very spaces. Of crucial importance are the kinds of spaces to which the female characters flee, in the face of oppression. In exploring the characters’ journeys through both physical spaces and subjectivities, this chapter interrogates the nature of the physical settings of the texts, from the public to the private spaces, the open to the closed spaces, masculine and feminine spaces, and the safe and unsafe spaces.

Of central importance to this analysis of space is a simultaneous consideration of genre. The Gothic mode, which reached its peak in popularity in the 1790s, is characterised in part by those archaic settings that characterise its narratives: gloomy castles; winding corridors; decaying abbeys and manor houses concealing deadly secrets. Architectural space thereby takes on special significance within the Gothic mode: physical settings are representative of people, histories and mysteries. The archetypal Gothic tale tells of a young

³ Material from Chapter 1 has appeared in ‘Confinement and Consumption: Reflections on the Gothic in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853)’, *Aeternum: The Journal of Contemporary Gothic Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2015, pp. 34-48.

woman, pure and suffering, who is forcibly imprisoned within a mouldering, labyrinthine castle and threatened with physical and sexual assault by an evil usurper. The castle represents family and inheritance, the heroine's own history, those hidden mysteries that she is locked out of, and the oppressive forces of patriarchy. Throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, Gothic texts written by female authors usually depicted those ways in which women were both confined and intruded upon by society. During the nineteenth century, the Gothic mode became somewhat modernised and Gothic tales were no longer confined to Gothic castles. Instead, heroines lived threatened lives within the most domestic of settings, such as the family home. As the Gothic is domesticated in this way, Gothic spaces begin to be characterised more by central themes and tropes such as confinement, intrusion and mystery, in addition to traditionally archaic settings and furnishings.

Physical settings are of central significance in the works of Emily and Charlotte Brontë. The authors create such iconic settings as Thornfield, the rambling manor house complete with mad wife hidden away on the third floor, and Wuthering Heights, populated by ghosts, ravening dogs and Heathcliff, the Gothic-Byronic anti-hero *par excellence*. Each of these spaces is deeply Gothic; broadly speaking, both Emily and Charlotte Brontë repeatedly make use of the Gothic mode in creating the physical worlds of their texts. This chapter therefore discusses the Gothic as it manifests in the physical and psychosocial spaces of *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Villette*, paying particular attention to those Gothic themes that are evoked in each space. Though each writer subverts the mode as much as they conform to it, it becomes clear that each uses the Gothic to reveal the horrors of everyday domestic spaces, particularly those ideologies of domesticity and heterosexual romance that become manifest in such spaces. The characters' journeys through subjectivity are mapped onto physical spaces or spatial configurations: the female Gothic mode, and particularly Gothic spaces, offers ways of exploring imprisonment, oppression and intrusion. The female Gothic 'feeds' the ideas of the authors, providing the kinds of settings that allow for conversations about female oppression and disempowerment.

This chapter begins by outlining Gothic literary norms relating to architectural space, particularly depictions of the spatial configurations of patriarchy. It then maps the ways in which Emily and Charlotte Brontë construct space, and in so doing engage with or deviate from Gothic norms. In both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, the female body is subject to surveillance, control, intrusion and deprivation, in various domestic settings. Gothic architecture is used as a warning, particularly regarding hidden mysteries and Gothic dangers such as burial alive. In both texts, Charlotte Brontë uses spatial imagery and metaphor to describe feelings of oppression and freedom. Space therefore functions on literal, metaphorical and imaginative levels to describe the experiences of the protagonists. In contrast, Emily Brontë presents Gothic space as 'safe' and seemingly non-Gothic, idealised domestic space as 'dangerous' for her heroine. In this way, Emily Brontë can be seen to reverse Gothic tropes in order to present the world of idyllic culture and the cults of femininity and domesticity as the most dangerous elements of Catherine's world. Marriage, for Emily Brontë, is the source of the most dangerous confinement of all. Despite significant differences between the texts, both Emily and Charlotte Brontë are shown to use architectural space to illustrate those key negative experiences of female protagonists: deprivation, control, intrusion and the desecration of the moral body. Domestic spaces in particular are shown, time and time again, to be places of confinement, limitation and suffering for the protagonists.

1.1 Gothic Space: Domesticity and Confinement

In analysing the physical and psychosocial spaces represented in the Brontë texts, it is necessary to consider the significance of 'space' within the Gothic mode. Gothic literature takes its name from Gothic architecture: the pointed arches and flying buttresses of European cathedrals, abbeys, churches and castles of the Middle Ages. During the eighteenth century, these architectural conventions are transposed into the literary, forming a visual indicator of the Gothic mode. As David Punter has pointed out, one central characteristic of the Gothic mode is the archaic setting (1). Typical architecture found in traditional

eighteenth-century Gothic literature includes castles, ruins, convents and prisons (Botting 2-3; Milbank *Daughters* 9; Punter 8-9). These kinds of settings “[hark] back to a feudal past associated with barbarity, superstition and fear”, and form the repository of both history and mystery (Botting 3; see also DeLamotte 16).

The Gothic is a literary form that unites the ruin, that link between past and present, with the imprisoned protagonist who seeks to escape (Milbank *Daughters* 8; see also Botting 3). In Radcliffe’s seminal Gothic novel, *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Emily St Aubert is forcibly taken to the “gloomy” and “awful” Udolpho castle, which is filled with seemingly dangerous mysteries and secrets (Radcliffe 227). Significantly, this castle is “inhabited by vice and violence” (Radcliffe 435). Emily is imprisoned against her will and subject to the threats of both physical and sexual violence, and the usurpation of her inheritance (Radcliffe 261-2, 380, 384-85, 430-31). In a traditional sense of the mode, then, Gothic fiction may be described as “the fiction of the haunted castle, of heroines preyed on by unspeakable terrors”, from the seemingly supernatural to the disturbingly real (Punter 1). This castle setting is inextricably tied to the heroine’s state and experiences within its walls.

Throughout the history of the genre, Gothic heroines have been under constant threat from villainous anti-heroes and usurpers, as well as broader structures of power. Female authors in particular have expanded upon this theme of threat from without by demonstrating the ways in which heroines may be confined and victimised by physical settings as well as physical figures (Fleenor 13; Nichols 187). The Gothic mode allows female authors to represent social and psychological confinement in recognisable tropes such as the locked attic or ancient, danger-filled castle. Such spaces are utilised to reveal the dynamics of gender and power operating on female characters: “the vast imprisoning spaces that appear so regularly in the Gothic as castles, monasteries, and actual prisons can be read as metaphors for women’s lives under patriarchy” (Ellis *Can You Forgive Her* 458). The castle in *Udolpho*, for example, stands as a metaphor for Emily’s entrapment under the guardianship of the usurper and Gothic villain, Signor Montoni, and her confinement within his designs for her marriage and

inheritance. In this way, the Gothic mode expresses the dual female fears of entrapment and intrusion, both within specific architectural spaces and within the female body (Wallace and Smith 2).

By the nineteenth century, the Gothic mode comes to refer not only to the aesthetic nature of buildings or rooms, but also the very nature of such spaces, particularly in relation to those who inhabit them. Where eighteenth-century Gothic literature used Gothic architecture as a visual marker of its Gothic nature, by the nineteenth century, the tropes and plots operating within such spaces marked them more firmly as Gothic. In *Northanger Abbey* (1817), Austen's expert satire of Gothic literary conventions, Henry Tilney laughingly warns Catherine Morland about the dangers of abbeys and lofty bedrooms, from the unlockable door to suggestions of haunting and mysteries (161-64). The notion of irrupting secrets, particularly those pertaining to the past, forms a central feature of Gothic space.

As the domestic sphere was idealised during the Victorian era, domestic ideology accordingly assumed a central position within the Gothic mode. Victorian Gothic became 'domesticated' as settings shifted from European mountainous castles and monasteries to the English home (Horner 108). Those villains of eighteenth-century Gothic literature—the demons, monsters, spectres and skeletons—were replaced by fathers, husbands and more mundane criminals as the bourgeois family became a crucial site of transgression, terror and anxiety (Botting 114). *Northanger Abbey*, for example, reflects this shift through Catherine Morland's outrageous suspicions regarding General Tilney and his deceased wife (Austen 193). During the early Victorian period, it is the English home as Gothic space that has become 'unhomely' and uncanny, as in both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* (Wolfreys 2006, cited in Horner 108). The Gothic house may be interpreted as both building and family line: Gothic plots occur in spaces belonging to particular families and are often structured according to issues emanating from the family tree (Botting 3; Williams *Art* 45). Owing to fusion of the Gothic and realist modes, "Gothic closets may be found... in the generally staid and calm manor house of Victorian fiction" (Davison *Victorian Gothic* 127).

Jane Eyre, in particular, makes consistent use of the Gothic room found within the ostensibly realist Victorian manor house. As this chapter demonstrates, these 'staid and calm' Victorian houses, belonging to others, are shown to be places of terror and threat for the heroine.

Victorian Gothic is preoccupied with the home, as exemplified by tropes such as the terror-filled manor and homeless protagonists. The Gothic novel of this era can be distinguished by the centrality of houses, in and out of which people are locked. Specifically, Victorian Gothic is obsessed with the 'fallen' home, within which innocent women are incarcerated. Escape from the 'fallen' home thus becomes of paramount importance for its heroines (Ellis *Contested* ix, 3, 48). As historians of the nineteenth-century house have identified, women were subservient to, utterly dependent on and "confined by their husbands even while they were protected by them" (Flanders 247-48; see also Branca 7-9). Much like these Victorian houses in reality, the Gothic domestic space may become "a prison rather than a refuge, a restricted space confined by a system of values that privileges the male and active world beyond the family" (Botting 58). Thus various domestic spaces may be viewed as both inherently confining and also as metaphors for broader systems of confinement (Wallace 29).

Both Emily and Charlotte Brontë make use of the female Gothic in order to articulate the nature of domestic spaces and their protagonists' experiences within them. *Jane Eyre*, *Catherine Earnshaw* and *Lucy Snowe* each inhabit a variety of domestic spaces, from schools and the homes of others, to the rooms within them such as attics and bedrooms. Within these settings, they are subject to the psychosocial influence of the spaces themselves, in addition to the powerful institutions and social forces operating upon those inhabiting such spaces. As I explore in greater detail in the following chapter, the ideal nineteenth-century woman, whether Gothic heroine, angel in the house or ailing invalid, was confined to the domestic sphere, and any woman in the home was subject to the strictures of domestic and feminine ideology. Emily and Charlotte Brontë each use confinement and spatial boundaries to figure the kinds of limitations placed on the female protagonists, and thus to critique the Victorian

middle-class cults of domesticity, femininity, relationships and marriage. As the final chapter of this thesis demonstrates, however, representations of domesticity and marriage in Charlotte Brontë's works (particularly *Jane Eyre*) are complicated and deeply ambivalent rather than straightforwardly critical.

In this way, Emily and Charlotte Brontë use Gothic literary architecture to explore male control over female subjectivity. Female Gothic authors figure the public realm as "a series of ideologically constructed masculine 'spaces'"; this figuration allows them to both criticise and fantasise about overthrowing society (Hoeveler 4). This chapter reveals some of the ways in which both Gothic and non-Gothic spaces affect, exert power over and ultimately confine female characters. Patriarchal or masculine spaces are governed by agents of a patriarchal social order and may be formed by male-governed architecture such as rooms, houses, cities and places of worship, and broader social institutions such as the church or marriage. These spaces are often desolate and dangerous for women, evoking the terror of Gothic themes. The female body itself constitutes a limited and limiting space, governed by external forces and even subject to invasion. The female body also forms a liminal space, situated halfway between life and death: a space that is susceptible to invasion and rupture from within.

1.2 *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre is plotted much like a Radcliffean Gothic: an orphan girl with few prospects moves from place to place in search of safety and love. Each of the core Victorian institutions is represented in *Jane Eyre's* physical spaces: the church, education and marriage. Within each of these spaces, Jane's safety and particularly her virtue are threatened; she is confined and subject to intrusion. Eventually, the heroine discovers her inheritance and gains the reward of marriage: a truly domestic happy ending. However, as I demonstrate, Charlotte Brontë uses the Gothic mode to undermine this idealised ending.

Gateshead Hall

The orphan Jane Eyre spends the early years of her life living at Gateshead Hall with her aunt (Mrs Reed) and her cousins (John, Eliza and Georgiana). Gateshead may be read as a nineteenth-century transposition of the traditional Gothic castle setting into the domestic sphere. Like Udolpho and Otranto, those prototypical eighteenth-century Gothic castles, this space is permeated by both history and danger. Gateshead is governed by the young John Reed: a Gothic villain cut from the same cloth as Signor Montoni or Manfred. Moreover, the outsider heroine, Jane, who is confined both within this household and within specific rooms therein, is subject to intrusion and violence.

Jane's years at Gateshead are characterised by isolation and misery. Jane is despised for her 'dependant' status and her temperament (*JE* 17). Jane describes herself as:

a discord... a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities; a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, or contempt of their judgement. (*JE* 23)

For these reasons, Jane is denied love and affection, and indeed any part in the family 'plot' at Gateshead (Milbank *Daughters* 143). In asking "why was I always suffering, always brow-beaten, always accused, for ever condemned? Why could I never please?" (*JE* 22), Jane demonstrates the misery and futility she endures living in this house. Her "habitual mood" therein is one of "humiliation, self-doubt, forlorn depression", and she is acutely aware of her perceived deficiencies (*JE* 23). In describing herself as a "useless thing" (*JE* 23), Jane indicates her own consumption and internalisation of gender conventions and social expectations.

At Gateshead, there is no space that Jane can call her own (Locy 108). The Reeds are forever present and forever critical. In response to the prying Reeds, Jane

retreats behind barriers, such as the window-seat in the breakfast room, and longs for escape (*JE* 14-15). Jane voluntarily encloses herself; this retreat affords a view of the outside world, and constitutes a place of some small freedom within the restraining walls of this confining house (Milbank *Daughters* 142). Paradoxically, Jane also longs to make herself known, thus ending her separation from a world that seems incapable of understanding her (DeLamotte 194). Jane's early reading of Bewick's *History of British Birds* alludes to the dangers of her world: solitude, imprisonment, pursuit, haunting, isolation, misjudgement and being "becalmed" (*JE* 14-15). For Jane, then, a state of stagnation or being 'becalmed' is a horror equal to those of isolation, imprisonment and death. Jane, it seems, both desires the protection of self-enclosure, and also suffers through being confined in her own body, and the space in society that it affords her (DeLamotte 195). Each of these fears is a core Gothic concern, particularly for those female writers preoccupied with themes of confinement.

One particular expression of Jane's ill-treatment at Gateshead is the continual torment she suffers at the hands of her cousin John: "he bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near" (*JE* 16). There is nowhere that she is safe from John: hiding in the window-seat, obscured by the curtain as she reads Bewick, Jane "feared nothing but interruption, and that came too soon" (*JE* 15). The window through which Jane longingly looks as she imagines travelling through the outside world suggests a female Gothic plot of escape (Milbank *Daughters* 143). However, John seeks Jane out, intruding upon and tormenting her by striking her and throwing a book at her head (*JE* 16-17). This attack is both a bodily invasion and an invasion of Jane's private and psychic space, as she sits thinking about the world and her place in it. This scene reflects a common Gothic concern of female authors: the threat from outside, or threat of invasion. Within the Gothic, especially female-authored Gothic, women are particularly vulnerable to intrusions from an outside world to which they have "frustratingly little access" (DeLamotte 26; see also 151; Ellis *Contested* 46; Moore 77).

Following this altercation with John, in which Jane is viciously attacked and therefore defends herself by striking back, Mrs Reed orders Jane to be locked in the 'red-room' (*JE* 18). The ensuing scene, in which Jane is haunted by the spectres of generation, childbirth and sexuality, is the first clearly Gothic set piece of the text (Hoeverler 210). The room is replete with Gothic imagery of oppression, religion, death and blood:

A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep-red damask, stood out like a tabernacle in the centre; the two large windows, with their blinds always drawn down, were half shrouded in festoons and falls of similar drapery; the table at the foot of the bed was covered with a crimson cloth. (*JE* 20-21)

Interior space within the Gothic often symbolises female sexuality and physiology (Fleenor 13). As Rosemary Moore has pointed out, the tabernacle is a trope for the female body, with its hidden 'niche'. The bed invokes those secrets of sex and sin, in relation to danger or even death (Moore 83). The red room thus warns of the dangers entailed by female adulthood, in relation to existing as a sexual subject and possessing a female body.

In this room, Jane herself resembles a supernaturally Gothic creature: "the strange little figure there [in the mirror] 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" (*JE* 21). Because Jane is denied a place in the Reed family, it comes as no surprise that she is only able to see a ghost or sprite, rather than her own image (Milbank *Daughters* 143). This "chill" and "silent" room is both grand and "lonely": a terrifying place for the young Jane to be incarcerated. The easy-chair resembles a "pale throne", suggesting the presence, or temporary absence, of some kind of king (*JE* 21). This is the room in which Mr Reed died, and lay before his funeral. Jane becomes increasingly distressed as she fears a visitation from her uncle's ghost: "my heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a

sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings: something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down – I uttered a wild, involuntary cry” (*JE* 24). Her description of being “oppressed” and “suffocated” draws attention to the limiting and oppressive nature of this space and her broader existence. In this space, everything suggests imprisonment, and Jane herself resembles a caged, distressed bird (*Locy* 108).

The ‘unhomely’ household and family, to whom the protagonist does not belong and is consequently at risk, emerges as a central theme of both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. The space of the family holds particular significance within the female Gothic: “the patriarchally marked family functions as a sacred totem in society, an order that is not only above the law; it is the basis of the legal system” (*Hoeveler* 188). A primary concern of *Jane Eyre* is those ways in which patriarchy manifests in specific familial structures (*Wood* 96). Jane Eyre’s distressing experience in the Red Room may be viewed as her confrontation with a series of patriarchal spaces and forces. The room itself is part of the house and household of her aunt, Mrs Reed. Though Mrs Reed is the nominal figurehead of this household, it is really her son John who wields the governing power in this space. Throughout his life, Mrs Reed capitulates to his every whim, and always takes his side over Jane’s (*JE* 17-18). This space therefore represents the expectations and limitations placed upon Jane as she lives within a family to whom she does not belong. The family, household and the physical space of the house form a series of interconnected patriarchal spaces, each colluding with the others in denying Jane love and affection. Jane’s experience in the Red Room at Gateshead also sets the scene for her experiences at Thornfield and at Marsh End, within alternative familial structures.

Despite the horrifying nature of Jane’s confinement therein, the Red Room and those aspects of Jane’s life that it represents are presented somewhat ambivalently. Jane’s experience in this space may undoubtedly be interpreted as an originating traumatic event, which is repeated in various ways throughout her life. Significantly, Jane encounters not only herself and her suffocating situation at Gateshead, but also her absent father figure, her uncle John Reed. The father-

daughter relationship is established as an ambivalent object of desire, in which the father figure is both desired and feared, a prototype that will shape Jane's subsequent relationships with men. Moreover, the sensuous descriptions of the Red Room complicate a simplistic reading of the space as a grim prison of patriarchy, forcing the reader to look beyond a simplistic model of patriarchal incarceration as trauma. In fact, Mr Reed's care for Jane may recast the patriarchal home as a place of shelter and protection. A connection therefore emerges between patriarchal enclosure and home: despite her repeated and restless desire for freedom, Jane demonstrates an equally powerful desire for love, which is repeatedly expressed in relation to some male figure (Wood 95-99). This pattern, the daughter who longs and searches for but is fearful of the lost father figure or lover (or family more generally) is repeated throughout the novel in different settings and with different men, such as Dr Lloyd, Mr Brocklehurst, Rochester, St John and her uncle in Madeira (Hoeveler 205; Wood 101). Because she is enclosed not only by patriarchal structures, but also by the patterns of her own desires, Jane herself perpetuates the conditions that create her liminal psychological and social state (Wood 95).

Many critics suggest that the red-drenched room is also the space wherein Jane's "dangerous double consciousness", her rebellious rage, emerges (Gilbert and Gubar 343). This rage is depicted most fully when she confronts Mrs Reed, following her unfair description of Jane to Mr Brocklehurst. Jane feels that "*Speak I must: I had been trodden on severely, and must turn*" and berates Mrs Reed for imprisoning her in the red room; she condemns her as "bad and "hard-hearted", explaining that she does not love her and is glad they are not related by blood (*JE* 45-6). According to Jane, this voicing of her true feelings "was the hardest battle I had fought, and the first victory I had gained" (*JE* 46). Following this exchange, Jane experiences a sense of transcendental freedom (*JE* 46). However, within moments, this feeling changes:

A ridge of lighted heath, alive, glancing, devouring, would have been a meet emblem of my mind when I accused and menaced Mrs Reed: the same ridge, black and blasted after the flames are

dead, would have represented as meetly my subsequent condition, when half an hour's silence and reflection had shown me the madness of my conduct, and the dreariness of my hated and hating position. (*JE* 47)

Here, Charlotte Brontë presents Jane's rebellious rage as a negative force, leading not to transcendence and freedom, but rather to the transgressing of social bounds and dire consequences for Jane herself.

Gateshead Hall is thus the place where Jane learns that she is an outsider, that patriarchal forces rule women, and that she must fear the threat of invasion from outside. As a result of these encroachments upon her psychic and physical self, Gateshead is also the space in which she meets her own rage for the first time. However, it is not until later in the text that Jane learns to utilise this rage in her own self-service. *Jane Eyre* may be viewed as a novel of repeated enclosure and escape (see Gilbert and Gubar 339-41; Wood 95). During her time at Gateshead, Jane is enclosed within the Red Room, and the family home within which she does not belong. Following her fainting fit, she escapes the Red Room and, in turn, following her outburst and conversations with the doctor, Jane is able to escape Gateshead itself.

Lowood School

Though Lowood School offers an escape of sorts from Jane's oppressed existence within the Gateshead family, it is itself claustrophobic and limiting, characterised by rules and deprivation. This is a space within which orphaned girls are transformed into demure submissive subjects, through religious discipline and physical hardship. In the face of oppression and denial, Jane forges significant relationships with Helen Burns and Miss Temple, gains an education and ultimately also a vocation. The nature of these friends and role models is discussed further, in relation to notions of the ideal feminine, in the following chapter. Jane also learns, for the time being, to govern her rage, becoming quiet,

submissive, controlled and inhibited (Locy 111; see also Gilbert and Gubar 344). Within this confining Gothic setting, she learns to be a demure heroine.

Menacing weather marks Jane's arrival at Lowood; "Rain, wind, and darkness filled the air" (*JE* 52). A constant chill permeates Jane's descriptions of her first days at Lowood: this place is "bitter cold" (*JE* 54), both literally and figuratively. Though the garden might look pretty in summer, if it were full of flowers, now "all was wintry blight and brown decay" (*JE* 58). Imagery of chill and decay alludes to the deprivation endured by the female students: they are denied love, affection, warmth and even food in this space. The claustrophobic nature of the school's rules and regulations is reflected in the scenery. The refectory is described as a "great, low-ceilinged gloomy room" (*JE* 55), and the garden is "convent-like" (*JE* 59), "surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect" (*JE* 58). The school building and the convent-like garden form concentric symbolic circles of enclosure confining both child and woman (Henson 32). During winter, the "almost impassable roads prevented our stirring beyond the garden walls, except to go to church" (*JE* 71). Here, Jane highlights both the isolation and confinement of the pupils and the importance placed upon the girls' religious and moral education. Lowood, like Marsh End, represents the Victorian church.

At Lowood, Jane finds herself living in a space ruled by a malevolent male dictator: Mr Brocklehurst. The school provides a striking example of female malnourishment as a consequence of incarceration within a space governed by patriarchal authority. Repeatedly, Jane draws attention to the food at Lowood, which is poor in both quality and quantity. The "scant supply of food was distressing: with the keen appetites of growing children, we had scarcely sufficient to keep alive a delicate invalid" (*JE* 71): Jane often suffers from "the unsatisfied hunger which gnawed me within" (*JE* 59). Accordingly, Jane and many of the other girls are "pale and thin" (*JE* 58). As she did in the window-seat at Gateshead, Jane seeks solace in enclosure or seclusion: she and Helen find both refuge and sustenance in Miss Temple's apartment, away from Brocklehurst's oppressive authority (*JE* 82-85; see Locy 111). In addition to

malnourishment, the girls are also denied adequate clothing to protect them from the cold (*JE* 71). The arrival of typhus at the school confirms the dangerous situation of these young girls: “semi-starvation and neglected colds had predisposed most of the pupils to receive infection: forty-five out of the eighty girls lay ill at one time” (*JE* 89). The illness and death of Helen Burns from tuberculosis condemns the school as an institution responsible for destroying the lives of young vulnerable girls. The dangers to female subjectivity and the overwhelming confinement inherent to Lowood School render the space inescapably Gothic.

Following the dismissal of Brocklehurst from any practical duties of governance, and his endangering focus on spiritual purification and physical denial, life at Lowood becomes more pleasant and safer for the students (*JE* 97). Brocklehurst is replaced by new school authorities, which “combine reason with strictness, comfort with economy, compassion with uprightness” (*JE* 97-98). Jane and her fellow pupils thus begin to be nourished, both physically and spiritually. Jane finds some pleasure in her education, and remains for eight more years, as a student and then as a teacher herself (*JE* 98). Jane also learns a new way of being from Miss Temple:

I had imbibed from her 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. (*JE* 98)

This description highlights the way in which the space of Lowood School, characterised by limitation and confinement and filled with exemplars of ‘regulated’ femininity such as Helen Burns and Miss Temple, has ‘worked’ upon Jane: her world has shrunk to that of the school and she has become the dutiful student of Lowood ideology. Unlike the fiery orphan at Gateshead, Jane does not rail against her confinement here: rather, she acquiesces to the limitations

placed upon her. The stultifying space of Lowood School appears to transform Jane.

Despite these years of subdued contentment, however, upon Miss Temple's departure, Jane is no longer satisfied with her lot at Lowood. In the absence of this particular feminine influence, Jane's true nature begins to re-emerge. The same day that Miss Temple leaves, Jane undergoes a transformation whereby she realises that:

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, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils. (*JE* 99)

This passage demonstrates the spatial nature of Jane's thinking. The space of Jane's inner world expands dramatically; in remembering how large the real world is, her thoughts and hopes expand also. In this way, Charlotte Brontë uses spatial imagery to reflect a shift in Jane's perspective. As a consequence, Jane boldly rejects domestic enclosure within Lowood (Henson 37). Desiring to see more of the world, and of life, it is clear that Jane's childhood passion for freedom has remained. Further, we may infer that Jane has here released the ladylike repression that she learned from Miss Temple. Rather, her way of confronting the world remains that of rebellion (Gilbert and Gubar 347). Jane wastes no time in advertising for and securing employment, engineering her own move from the public space of the school to a smaller, private household.

Thornfield

Thornfield, the almost archetypal Gothic mansion, represents domestic confinement for women, and also forms a space and source of equity, wealth and power for its master, Edward Rochester. Within this mysterious house, Jane

learns to desire and be desired, and is subject to the threat represented by union with him. The secrets pervading the Gothic manor are eventually revealed on Jane's wedding day, and Jane is forced to make a choice between her desires and morality. A union with Rochester could never be equal, due to his wealth and power, her dependent status, and his secret mad wife.

From Jane's lone and unknowing arrival in the middle of the night, the reader's first impression of Thornfield is of a deeply Gothic space. This "gentleman's manor-house", with battlements and a grey front, surrounded by "mighty old thorn trees" and "quiet and lonely hills", giving an air of "seclusion" (*JE* 114), obviously resembles those traditional "gothic mansions in which witless, innocent heroines are enticed and incarcerated" (Locy 112). Though the sitting room and Jane's bedroom are cheerful and warm, "a very chill and vault-like air pervaded the stairs and gallery, suggesting cheerless ideas of space and solitude" (*JE* 113). This 'air' conjures images of classic Gothic spaces such as vaults, sepulchres, tombs and churches, setting Thornfield within a lineage of menacing, secretive, death-associated Gothic spaces. On her very first night, Jane receives an "eerie" impression, suggesting that everything is not what it seems: that dark secrets are hidden within Thornfield (*JE* 113). The third floor, on which Bertha will be discovered to live, has "the aspect of a home of the past: a shrine of memory" (*JE* 121). This description alludes to the ghostly and Gothic return of some repressed secret or horror. Perhaps most tellingly, Jane compares this floor of the house to "a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle" (*JE* 122). *Bluebeard*, the old European folk or fairy tale, first published by Charles Perrault in 1697, describes a man who marries a succession of wives, telling each not to venture into a specific room but supplying them with the key and time to transgress this rule, and then beheading them when they inevitably do so (Hermansson 9). In symbolic terms, *Bluebeard* also forms a classic Gothic tale of a murderous husband, hidden secrets threatening an impeccable virgin heroine and the rescue of this same passive heroine by another. Jane thus lets the reader know that she may be stepping into a Gothic fairy tale and, consequently, may be susceptible to the dangers concealed therein. Of course, Brontë twists the

traditional tale by revealing the secret to be a live, 'mad' wife rather than a series of dead ones.

Despite the prevalence of Gothic tropes, Thornfield in fact occupies double status as both Gothic mansion and ordinary domestic space. Jane describes the scene of her arrival as a "beau-ideal of domestic comfort" (*JE* 110). In contrast with the terrors found in secret passages, heroines in Charlotte Brontë's Gothic also enjoy the delights and comforts of a cosy fireside (Milbank *Daughters* 143). Many domestic scenes follow, from Jane's daily instruction of Adèle to Grace Poole's calm sewing (*JE* 175) and the preparation of the household for the impending visitation by the Ingram family (*JE* 186). Brontë's simultaneous rendering of Thornfield as overtly real and realist allows her to depict aspects of normative domesticity and femininity as the central Gothic horrors of the text. Despite her threatening and seemingly supernatural presence when hidden, even the eventual discovery of Bertha's existence reveals her to be a wholly real being: she is merely a woman, not some kind of demon or supernatural creature. The threat she presents to Jane, standing between her and Rochester, is also wholly real. Bertha's status as a real figure thus disrupts the Gothic expectation of supernatural elements, as Brontë reveals that the biggest threat to Jane's wellbeing and happiness is the denial of love, resulting from male deceit and conceit. Like Radcliffe, who famously pioneered this narrative device, Brontë "[explains] the supernatural as the product of natural causes" (Miles 93). These infusions of realism into the Gothic novel point to the true subject of the text: women's ordinary lives.

To begin, Jane is content at Thornfield: she earns her keep, proves to be an adequate teacher and forms human connections with Adele, Mrs Fairfax and particularly Mr Rochester. However, she still looks out on the wider world and longs for more:

I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions 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. (*JE* 125)

Again, Brontë uses spatial imagery to illustrate the breadth of Jane's hopes and desires. Initially, unlike Lowood School, Thornfield does not seem to repress Jane's longings. Following the expression of this desire for activity and engagement, Jane muses upon the lot of women:

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 too narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to baking puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (*JE* 125-126)

Here Jane rails against both the expectations placed upon her gender by normative codes of femininity and against the specific 'becalmed' tedium of her situation at Thornfield (DeLamotte 204-5). Through Jane, Brontë criticises attitudes levelled against women who desire more than life has prescribed them: "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" (*JE* 126). However, it is significant that Jane's impassioned and longing response to enclosure occurs before Rochester's arrival. Following his entrance into the house, Jane ceases these proto-feminist musings and the narration centres more on pleasant, warm domestic spaces such as the red drawing room and purple dining room (Milbank *Daughters* 143). Thus, like Lowood School, Thornfield also exhibits some stultifying effects upon Jane, via training her to appreciate domesticity.

Paradoxically, Jane's encounter and relationship with Rochester seems to promise both escape (through fulfilment) and confinement. Jane and Rochester ostensibly begin their relationship as spiritual equals of a sort, who can see beyond each other's disguises, and address each other, "spirit to spirit" (*JE* 284). However, as both Jane and the reader will learn, there exist various impediments to their relationship. Rochester's impediment is his secret marriage and mad wife, confined to the third floor of Thornfield, whereas Jane's impediments are her lack of wealth and her own demon: rage (Gilbert and Gubar 352-54, 356-57). Rochester is not yet worthy of Jane because he must be punished for his participation in the corruptly sexual aristocracy (Hoeveler 213). Moreover, Jane and Rochester's relationship is in one sense doomed because neither of them truly sees the other. Both appear to see literary or fairy-tale conventions operating between them, and consequently insert the other into typical and complementary roles: to Jane, Rochester is a Byronic hero, and to Rochester, Jane is a fairy princess (Hoeveler 212).

Beyond these impediments, various critics have pointed to the combative nature of Jane and Rochester's relationship, which is repeatedly figured as the battle for conquest or dominion over the other, or for personal autonomy (Kucich 919; Shuttleworth 171). If Brontë's sexual equality is indeed based on 'equitable communication', then Rochester and Jane's relationship is problematised by the tenuous nature of the equality presented (Wood 102-3). This is particularly evident during their engagement. Upon accepting his offer of marriage, Jane is seen to deliberately exert a kind of power over Rochester by continually teasing and irritating him; "in the evening conferences I thus thwarted and afflicted him" (*JE* 307). Following her engagement to Rochester, Jane seems to fear imprisonment, by both her own passion for him and by his strong desire to possess her (Locy 114; Wood 103). This first attempt at marriage may be viewed as Rochester's bid for control, both interpretive and definitional, over Jane (Shuttleworth 171).

During the engagement, Rochester begins to treat Jane as a possession, almost a doll. In an overt display of dominance, he threatens to shower Jane with fine

clothes and jewels, to “clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings” (*JE* 291). The claspings of bracelets carries the suggestion of handcuffs, and the loading of rings alludes to the way in which Jane will be weighed down, or confined by the marriage. This is Brontë’s first suggestion that marriage will not deliver Jane to freedom, but rather confine her. Jane begins to fear being ‘born’ as Mrs Rochester, both wife and mother. Pregnancy in the Gothic may figure powerlessness and loss of self; the Gothic mother is in danger of being overpowered and eradicated by her child. Jane’s desire to love and be loved, to surrender sexually to Rochester, threatens to displace her desire for independence (Fleenor 16; Homans *Bearing* 89, 91; Stoneman *Charlotte* 43).

As Rochester’s secret wife, Bertha is a literal expression of his dishonesty and his impediment to their marriage. She also forms a metaphorically rich double for Jane, as I discuss in detail in chapter 3. Bertha may be interpreted as a monitory image for Jane, one that warns against the dangers of uncurbed rage and appetites: she provides Jane with an example of how not to behave, and of the potential consequences of such behaviours. Conversely, Bertha may function as a warning of what awaits a wife of Edward Rochester; “she represents the plight of the wife imprisoned within the home, silenced, and forced to live a half-life, half-death, like a ghost of herself” (Moore 81; see also Jafari 48). Incarcerated in the attic and separated from society, Bertha is both confined and silenced by her husband and those forces of patriarchy that he represents. In describing Bertha’s clothing, during the veil-rending scene, as “gown, sheet, or shroud”, Jane casts the mad woman as bride, as bedmate or as a dead woman (*JE* 317). These roles or states are an apt representation of the vocational possibilities available for women in the Gothic universe, and for Jane in her current universe (Hoeveler 217).

Despite the discovery of Bertha’s existence, Rochester begs Jane to stay with him. Jane describes her temptation to give in to Rochester’s demands in harsh terms: “I was experiencing an ordeal: a hand of fiery iron grasped my vitals. Terrible moment: full of struggle, blackness, burning” (*JE* 354). This language recalls

Jane's experience in the Red Room, described in similarly visceral metaphors of fire, heat and physical detainment; "My heart beat thick, my head grew hot... I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down" (*JE* 24). Jane's conflation of these two events signals the lesson learned by many Victorian angels of the house: that home may really be a prison (Botting 58; DeLamotte 187-88). In this case, the 'prison' is a union of inequality, wherein Jane does not get what she truly wants, and Rochester holds an unequal share of power. Thornfield is the seat of Rochester's equity and wealth, and a relationship between them in this space could never be equal. Moreover, bigamous union with Rochester would contravene Jane's morals. It is clear for Jane that union with Rochester, under these conditions, is not possible. The space of Thornfield itself may therefore be seen as a representation of Rochester, the patriarchal mastery that he wields, and his threat to Jane's moral safety. Following agonised soul-searching, Jane flees this possibility, re-enacting once more the central motif of enclosure and escape (*JE* 335-60). Jane's flight may be interpreted as an attempt to escape from (immoral) sexuality, from patriarchal conceptions of hetero-normative romance, and from patriarchy itself (Milbank *Daughters* 11, 140). Jane flees to the moors, and the first extended depiction of nature in the text follows.

The moors

At various points in their respective texts, both Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe flee from those domestic spaces in which they live. They each leave closed domestic spaces such as the home and the school, running toward open, public spaces such as the moors or the city streets. This desire for open space, as demonstrated by their flight destinations, reflects a yearning for freedom: from their domestic situations and from the expectations and structures imposed upon them. As a result of the longstanding association of nature with the feminine and culture or civilisation with the masculine (Showalter *Female* 3-4), there is a sense that the moors, or greater nature, represents a space of feminine dominance, a safe place in which to retreat. Conversely, the city forms a masculine, constructed space.

In response to Rochester's immoral proposal, Jane seeks open space and freedom upon the moors. This place represents the polar opposite to the enclosed space of Thornfield, and the repressive confinement enacted by the secrets and desires of its patriarch. These open moors are beautiful and seem to promise to take care of Jane: "I touched the heath: it was dry and yet warm with the heat of the summer-day. I looked at the sky; it was pure: a kindly star twinkled just above the chasm ridge" (*JE* 363). Jane constructs nature as both feminine and maternal: "Nature seemed to be benign and good; I thought she loved me, outcast as I was; and I, who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, insult, clung to her with filial fondness" (*JE* 363). Jane is thus able to find some solace in the open spaces of Mother Nature, in addition to glorying in her splendour. Jane's positioning of nature as feminine reflects a Western dualist dichotomy, within which culture is male and nature is female.

However, despite the beauty and promise of these moors, Jane remains destitute and hungry for days as she roams the surrounding villages. As Jane wanders through the moors and nearby villages, she suffers greatly from lack of food and companionship. Though on the first night Jane is able to forage some wild bilberries, she remains devastated; her "sad heart... plained of its gaping wounds, its inward bleeding, its riven cords" (*JE* 364). Over the following days, Jane is too ashamed to ask for food, though she may "faint with hunger on the causeway" (*JE* 365-6). Gradually, her exhaustion and hunger increase, until she deigns to beg from shopkeepers and farmers alike, even eating cold porridge intended for the pigs (*JE* 368-9). During the night, she is soaked to the skin, falls into bogs and becomes so tired that she sinks repeatedly to the ground (*JE* 371). Jane's apparent freedom seems to be partially illusory. In this hamlet, and on the open moor, Jane is indeed free of Rochester's ideals and his blasphemous marriage proposal. However, she suffers greatly in return for this freedom; it seems that the shackles of patriarchal control are not to be thrown off lightly, even in this place of apparent feminine power. Upon fleeing Thornfield and becoming immediately destitute in addition to bereft, "her terrible journey across the moors suggests the essential homelessness—the nameless, placeless, and contingent status—of women in a patriarchal society" (Gilbert and Gubar 364).

During these wanderings, Jane lacks both a speak-able past and an imaginable future (Homans *Bearing* 94): she has been effectively silenced by her experience at Thornfield. Through this episode on the moors, Charlotte Brontë demonstrates that even nature is a dangerous space for the orphaned woman with no prospects. However, Jane's wanderings eventually come to an end, as she throws herself upon the mercy of the Rivers family at Marsh End and enters a domestic space once more.

Marsh End

Marsh End, like Gateshead Hall, is a family household that Jane enters as a dependent. However, she does 'belong' to this one, and presently discovers both her family and an inheritance. In this space, she gains independence, however she also risks imprisonment due to moral pressure. Upon arriving at Marsh End, following her flight from Thornfield and days in the wilderness, Jane is drenched, starved, "trembling, sickening; conscious of an aspect in the last degree ghastly, wild, and weather-beaten" (*JE* 377). However, Jane also finds solace, even before having been welcomed into the home: "Somehow, 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" (*JE* 378). The space of Marsh End in fact forms 'home' in a way that no other space has in Jane's life thus far. Though she has made it to this household by her own means, Jane is now entirely dependent on the benevolence of St John Rivers, as the gatekeeper to this appealing space. As Jane eventually learns, these people are in fact her cousins: she has effectively traded the romantic companionship of Rochester for familial companionship. At first, this familial space is both nourishing and free from danger. However, Jane soon discovers that the dangers represented by Rochester and romantic union threaten her in this space too.

When Jane has recovered enough from her ordeal to enter the household, she discovers that this space is a domestic heaven: the kitchen is "full of the fragrance of new bread, and the warmth of a generous fire" (*JE* 381). Jane quickly takes her place in the kitchen and in the domestic rituals performed by Diana

and Mary (*JE* 383, 391). Like Thornfield, Marsh End is a space in which Charlotte Brontë demonstrates the appeals of domesticity. Another appeal of Marsh End for Jane is its isolation; she “felt the consecration of its loneliness” (*JE* 391). Like the window-seat and Miss Temple’s apartment, this enclosed space offers Jane refuge, from a dangerous world and from the dangers of Thornfield and Rochester. After escaping the enclosure of Thornfield into the also threatening moors, she has now escaped the moors into the seemingly safe enclosure of Marsh End.

Marsh End is the place where Jane becomes empowered, through gaining both wealth and family (*JE* 426, 429), and eventually becoming able to again reject a marriage comprising inequality and self-destruction (*JE* 467). However, prior to this rejection, Jane is acutely vulnerable to patriarchal power once more, and the dangers involved in acquiescing to this power. St John, her cousin, is an overtly religious figure who exerts significant influence over Jane. From their first interactions, he is a didactic voice in Jane’s life, and she quickly falls under his power:

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 could no longer talk or laugh freely when he was by; because a tiresomely importunate instinct reminded me that vivacity (at least in me) was distasteful to him. (*JE* 443)

Jane’s interactions with St John demonstrate her “tendency to debase herself before an ambivalently loved and hated authority figure” (Hoeveler 220). Jane comes to deny more and more of her nature, in the effort to satisfy him, thus embodying an attitude of self-abnegation:

As for me, I daily wished more to please him: but to do so, I felt daily more and more than I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, force myself

to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation. (*JE* 444)

As St John pushes Jane more and more, the full force of his power over her becomes evident: “I, like a fool, never thought of resisting him – I could not resist him” (*JE* 445). At one point, Jane begins to cry during a lesson and he responds thus:

‘We will wait a few minutes, Jane, till you are more composed.’
And while I smothered the paroxysm with all haste, he sat calm and patient, leaning on his desk and looking like a physician watching with the eye of science an expected and fully understood crisis in a patient’s malady. (*JE* 445-46)

This incident demonstrates St John’s disregard for Jane’s wellbeing, and draws a connection between the deaf ears of Victorian (male) doctors and his inability to hear Jane’s misery. In this scene, Charlotte Brontë draws attention to the way in which patriarchal ears, whether religious, medical or otherwise, are so often deaf to women’s distress.

Though he offers her marriage, St John in fact threatens to disrupt Jane’s experience of domestic enclosure and happiness. Jane’s behaviour upon receiving her inheritance is of particular note; she immediately assumes the role of head of the family, stops working and begins creating a domestic heaven. St John’s plan to take her to India is unacceptable because Jane would lose her other cousins, Moor House and everything the space represents: the delicate place Jane has found for herself within Victorian bourgeois society (Wood 107).

When St John asks Jane to accompany him to India as his ‘missionary wife’, she feels his control over her in an embodied way: “I shuddered as he spoke: I felt his influence in my marrow – his hold on my limbs” (*JE* 452). Despite this hold he has over her, Jane remains able to see the dangers inherent in acquiescing to the wishes of this driven man who does not love her:

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. (*JE* 453)

St John is a manifestation of patriarchal misogyny, and the marriage he offers is even more unequal than Rochester's: it represents "her absolute exclusion from the life of wholeness toward which her pilgrimage has been directed" (Gilbert and Gubar 366). Jane identifies that as his wife, she would be restricted and confined, even down to the expression of her true nature. Fundamentally, St John represents the threat painted by many female Gothic authors: "an intrusion, a violation of her psychic privacy" (DeLamotte 217). Furthermore, the repression required to please him and fulfil the role of wife would 'consume' her inwardly: her inward fire would be fatally suppressed (Stoneman *Charlotte* 46). With him, Jane would perpetually be at risk of intrusion and her silenced, inner self would become a force of self-destruction, much like the confined Bertha whose passionate energies eventually consume her (DeLamotte 219). Acquiescence to male desire, even desire motivated by lofty spiritual ideals, would in this case deprive Jane of emotional nourishment and she would, in a sense, be 'consumed' or 'starve'.

Charlotte Brontë uses the spaces of both Thornfield and Marsh End to illustrate the dangers of domesticity, particularly for a dependant woman. Male desire is shown to imprison the female and threaten both her physical and spiritual health. Both Thornfield, the Gothic mansion, and Marsh End, the domestic idyll, are shown to be unsafe for Jane. Accordingly, much as she did at Thornfield, Jane must reject St John and the missionary life he offers. Jane finds the strength to do this upon hearing Rochester's cry upon the wind: "it was *my* time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play, and in force" (*JE* 467). The next day, she explains that:

The wondrous shock of feeling had come like the earthquake which shook the foundations of Paul and Silas's prison; it had opened the doors of the soul's cell, and loosed its bands – it had wakened it out of its sleep, whence it sprang trembling, listening, aghast; then vibrated thrice a cry on my startled ear, and in my quaking heart, and through my spirit. (*JE* 469)

The language Jane uses to describe her emotional and spiritual state exhibits a spatial dimension, highlighting once more the significance of boundaries and containment for this heroine. As she does during Jane's musings on the third storey at Thornfield (*JE* 125), Charlotte Brontë uses spatial imagery to figure the limitations placed upon female lives, and the way that female desire and independence may transcend these very limitations. St John's proposal, and his intention to confine Jane within his ideal of domestic marriage, is represented as a 'cell', and Rochester's cry, coupled with Jane's desire, as that force which opens the door and looses the bands. This cry has been interpreted as a sign that the relationship of equality for which both lovers have longed is now finally possible, due both to Bertha's death and Jane's own financial and familial empowerment. In rejecting St John, Jane once more rejects an image of domesticity that would prohibit her happiness. Moreover, she escapes a space that, like Thornfield, offers only danger and confinement.

Jane does return once more to Thornfield, upon escaping Marsh End and St John's despotic plans. Rather than the stately house she expects, she finds that the Gothic mansion has been reduced by fire to ruins (*JE* 472): "In 'female' Gothic fashion the house that proved a prison has become a ruin" (Milbank *Daughters* 145). The reader may well imagine that Jane escaped her own certain death at Thornfield by fleeing the space. Charlotte Brontë thus demonstrates that Thornfield was never destined to be a space of domestic happiness for Jane. It could only be destroyed, eventually, by the secrets incarcerated within by its master. As Jane learns, Bertha lit this fire (*JE* 474), demonstrating her literally destructive potential. Bertha's death may be seen as "a sacrifice to purge Rochester's house of the stain of sexual sin" (Moore 81). If Jane had stayed with

Rochester, as his illicit lover, she would have been consumed by the situation, and become the “blackened ruin”, the burned-out husk (*JE* 472).

Ferndean

Thornfield as symbol of male domination and deception must be destroyed, and Jane must be empowered (through wealth and family) before she can return to Rochester at Ferndean (*JE* 472-78). In order to close the text successfully, Jane, like Gothic predecessors such as Emily St Aubert, must effortlessly secure an estate, thus proving her value on the marriage market. In so doing, she will finally become strong enough to return to a chastened, tamed version of the patriarch: the blind and crippled Rochester (Hoeveler 219). Upon their reunion, now that all obstacles are ostensibly removed, Rochester proposes once again and they marry, ending the text in apparent domestic bliss. The reader may infer that Jane and Rochester have become equal to one another in some fundamental way (Weisser 71). With the obstacles of Thornfield and Bertha burned away, perhaps Jane and the maimed Rochester can move beyond the limitations of the patriarchal house, which disunites flesh and spirit and threatens female subjectivity (Milbank *Daughters* 148)?

Various critics view Jane and Rochester’s union in a positive light. Stoneman suggests that Jane’s negotiation of a companionate marriage, characterised by mutual desire, is a significant achievement for a nineteenth-century female protagonist (*Charlotte* 47). Gilbert and Gubar suggest that the physical isolation of Ferndean implies their spiritual isolation in a world that does not allow for such egalitarian marriages: in order to escape or circumvent the strictures of a hierarchical and patriarchal society, the lovers must withdraw into a remote forest wilderness (369; see also Moore 84). The paramount place of nature in this ending is significant: a natural paradise, rather than a Christian paradise, such as the one offered by St John, is the goal of Jane’s pilgrimage (Gilbert and Gubar 370). The very name ‘Ferndean’ highlights the connection to nature, literally meaning “fern valley”: ‘-dean’ comes from ‘-dene’, meaning “vale” or “deep narrow wooded valley” (“dene”). Significantly, then, the lovers are now

enclosed by 'feminine' nature, as opposed to masculine civilisation: like the moors, watched over by Mother Nature herself, Ferndean is a space of feminine power. This 'feminine' landscape may thus reflect Jane's newfound power and independence, and Rochester's dependence.

It is also possible that, rather than equal, Jane has finally become more powerful than Rochester and indeed all other male figures. Jane, the friendless, misunderstood and underappreciated orphan is finally vindicated, having bested patriarchy at its own game. In so doing, she achieves the Gothic feminist mission: she creates a new family, with herself at the head as the unchallenged and omnipotent matriarch (Hoeveler 222, 203). Hoeveler suggests that this is the sacred duty of the gothic feminist: to create middle-class families inhabited by strong women and men who have been safely tamed (214). At the close of the text, roles are reversed: Rochester, reduced to stasis and isolation, is emasculated or reduced to a typically female state, whereas Jane, in gaining power through family and wealth, takes the typically male position of initiative and dominance (Henson 54). In a reversal of conventions, Jane returns to rescue the novel's hero from "the Gothic perils that once menaced *her* in his house: self-enclosure, burial, and 'viewless fetters'" (DeLamotte 223). In one sense, then, Ferndean represents Gothic feminine power; within this space, Jane occupies a more powerful position than ever before. In terms of the powers of seeing and definition, she emerges triumphant: "Not only is Jane hidden, through Rochester's blindness, from the controlling power of his gaze; she holds interpretive authority over his entire world" (Shuttleworth 180). Jane governs this natural female Gothic world, and in so doing ensnares Rochester, who is unable to negotiate this external space in her absence.

Close attention must be paid, however, to the physical setting of this ostensible domestic bliss, particularly in light of Brontë's earlier depictions of Gothic spaces such as Lowood and Thornfield, both of which emerged as both mortally and morally dangerous. As Jane approaches Ferndean, her arrival is marked once again by miserable weather. The house is isolated, enclosed even: though nearby, "you could see nothing of it; so thick and dark grew the timber of the gloomy

wood about it" (*JE* 478). The forest presses in upon this space: there is "no opening anywhere" (*JE* 478). The house itself is "scarce, by this dim light, distinguishable from the trees; so dank and green were its decaying walls" (*JE* 479). There are no garden-beds and no flowers, and the house interior is just as "gloomy" and "neglected" (*JE* 481): the very space is suffused with desolation. The Gothic features of this gloomy and desolate space would seem to warn of danger, perhaps of the danger of enclosure here; it is reasonable to suppose that "the dark, overgrown enclosure of Ferndean reflects the narrowed expectations of the courtship" (Locy 118-19). Moreover, it cannot be forgotten that Rochester chose not to house Bertha at Ferndean because, having "a scruple about the unhealthiness of the situation, in the heart of a wood, made my conscience recoil from the arrangements" (*JE* 338). He even suggests, "those damp walls would soon have eased me of her charge" (*JE* 338). This place is, at least in Rochester's eyes, a place of mortal danger.

As suggested by the Gothic construction of this final resting place, the ending of *Jane Eyre* is not without problems. In spatial and metaphorical terms, Jane is reduced to her Gothic and gendered destiny. Jane's final triumph inscribes her ultimate desire to exist within, be accepted by and appropriate the power of patriarchal structures (Wood 100). Ferndean, and those aspects of domesticity that it entails, represents Jane's desire to conform to patriarchal expectations, in addition to her capitulation to the confines of the female body. Within this space, she submits to her gendered fate through marrying Rochester and bearing his child. Charlotte Brontë thus recreates "the familiar inevitable conclusion of the typical courtship novel of the period... the enclosure of the wife in the husband's home" (Locy 120). Despite her overt and specific portrayal of domesticity as a peril equal to "the worst Gothic nightmare of confinement", Charlotte Brontë ultimately defines Jane's highest desire, and woman's transcendence, as domestic enclosure (DeLamotte 226). An aware reader is forced to question whether Jane, this girl who so often longed for the wider world out there, and for something to fulfil her life, would truly be satisfied with the enclosure of domestic bliss in this isolated space. If Charlotte Brontë uses Gothic imagery to warn of limitation and isolation, it seems clear that this house can only offer such

to Jane. This ostensibly happy, though inescapably Gothic, domestic setting may turn out to be yet another manifestation of that same prison from which she sought to escape: another Lowood, Thornfield or Marsh End (DeLamotte 187-88).

Though, as Hoeveler suggests, Jane has become the Gothic matriarch and ostensibly wields power in this space, I suggest that she remains in danger. An optimistic reader might assume that because Jane is in charge, she is no longer at risk in Gothic spaces. However, a careful consideration of the later *Villette* in relation to *Jane Eyre* reveals the continued risk associated with such spaces. As discussed in the following section, Lucy Snowe ends *Villette* single, independent, and in her own resolutely non-Gothic space. I argue that Lucy's singledom and the pleasant, airy nature of her domestic space render Jane's marital home at Ferndean, by contrast, dark and inevitably dangerous.

This mapping of *Jane Eyre* has demonstrated the way the text is plotted as a series of enclosures in and escapes from various physical spaces, from rooms to houses and schools. Domestic spaces are shown to limit the female protagonist, resulting in confinement and malnourishment of various kinds. Moreover, domestic spaces are presided over by patriarchs who represent threat to the heroine's physical, emotional and spiritual safety. Some spaces have a stultifying effect on the heroine herself, as she absorbs the ideals and regulations presented in them. Much like her Radcliffean predecessors, Jane requires her inheritance in order to be able to choose the space in which she wants to reside, and to find her domestic reward. However, as I suggest, the overtly Gothic descriptions of Ferndean suggest that all is not well within this space of ostensible domestic and romantic bliss. As the next section demonstrates, Charlotte Brontë further explores both the nature of Gothic space and the dangers of heterosexual romance in her final novel, *Villette*.

1.3 *Villette*

Like Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe also journeys through a series of domestic spaces. Where Jane progresses neatly from one space to the next, Lucy's progress is marked by circularity and repetition, as she returns to spaces such as the home of the Brettons and the school. Like Jane, Lucy's safety is threatened in each of these spaces; however, unlike Jane, Lucy's morality or virtue is rarely under threat. The biggest threats to Lucy's health and happiness are isolation and her own mind. Unlike Jane and Radcliffean heroines, Lucy does not discover her inheritance and gain a husband; rather, she is gifted a school and home and she ends the text a single woman.

The pensionnat

From the moment Lucy decides to leave England and journey to Belgium by boat, she moves through a series of threatening urban spaces. At the wharf, she explains, her coach-driver "offered me up as an oblation, served me as a dripping roast, making me alight in the midst of a throng of watermen" (V 55). The urban environment is constructed as dangerous, and Lucy herself is vulnerable to violence, characterised as 'consumption', at the hands of male figures. As she stands on the deck of the ship, viewing Villette for the first time, "the lights of the foreign sea-port town, glimmering round the foreign harbour, met [Lucy] like unnumbered threatening eyes" (V 64). Upon arriving in Villette, Lucy is accosted by two men, "plebeian in soul", who "spoke with insolence". These "dreaded hunters" follow her until she passes a patrol, demonstrating once again the vulnerability of the young Lucy on the city streets (V 70). In this way, Charlotte Brontë transposes the terror-filled hallway in the Gothic castle down which the heroine flees, in order to preserve her psychic and sexual integrity, into the modern city streets. The labyrinthine streets of *Villette* become a psychic space as well as a physical space for Lucy: a space she must learn to navigate in order to preserve her own threatened female subjectivity (Avery 132-33). Each of

these urban episodes demonstrates that she is constantly under threat of intrusion, and the city becomes an extension of Lucy's own mind.

Upon arriving in Villette, Lucy finds work as an English teacher in Madame Beck's school. Gothic imagery foreshadows some of the experiences Lucy will have in this space. On her first night, she is led through "the queerest little dormitories" that had once been nuns' cells, through "a long, low gloomy room, where a crucifix hung, pale, against the wall, and two tapers kept dim vigils" and to the "oppressive" apartment where Lucy is to sleep (V 75). As discussed earlier in this chapter, the convent is a prototypical Gothic setting: much like the asylum, prison or 'fallen' castle, the monastery represents an inversion of the companionate ideal of domestic life: a space within which fear and danger, rather than happiness and fulfilment, reign (Ellis *Contested* 47). In Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), the young, sweet Agnes is imprisoned within a convent, poisoned by the evil Prioress and presumed dead for some time, before being discovered "wretched... emaciated... [and] pale", hidden away in a dungeon (47-49, see also 165, 209, 221, 351-54, 368-69). Agnes' time in the convent proves to be fatal for her illegitimate child, and Agnes herself nearly dies. In situating Lucy within a convent, Brontë recalls a literary tradition that posits this kind of space as dangerous for women.

The Roman Catholic nature of Belgium and therefore Villette is also relevant to this discussion of the school. The Church of Rome does not belong to the familiar landscape of England, and therefore symbolises the (potentially dangerous) Other. Consequently, within the Gothic mode the Church may be used as a signifier of abuses existing in institutions such as the family or school. In Gothic novels, the Church is repeatedly aligned with the worst elements of such institutions (Ellis *Contested* 47-8). Lewis' Ambrosio, the violent and depraved monk, provides an excellent example of this. The buildings of Madame Beck's *pensionnat* used to belong to the Church and are thus haunted by the ghost of Catholicism (Ellis *Contested* 47). Through architectural settings such as the old convent, and the hints of danger or perversion suggested by the Church or Rome, Charlotte Brontë repeatedly invokes the Gothic (Milbank *Daughters* 149).

By the early Gothic novel, the convent had come to represent a place of confinement, thus doubling the sense of enclosure afforded by the school (Ellis *Contested* 47; Milbank *Daughters* 149). As both psychological and social space, the convent symbolises being hidden away: an allegorical picture of the psychology engendered by Lucy's social position. This figuration of the school as convent, representing both an alien society and Lucy's inner psychic space, warns of the danger of 'burial alive' within this space (DeLamotte 232-35). The Gothic metaphor of live burial is a powerful figuration of the erasure of the female self within patriarchal structures such as marriage, in which the nineteenth-century husband was the only person allowed legal existence and rights (Wallace 30; see also Massé 21). The metaphor may be extended beyond representations of marriage to include patriarchal institutions such as the church and broader society, in which women may disappear. In *The Monk*, another nun explains that Agnes' punishment for her sins was to be confined in a "private dungeon" within the convent, and "to lead a perpetual solitude, deprived of all society, and believed to be dead": she is buried alive (Lewis 351). In such contexts, women may disappear from society, never to be seen again: from their very lives. Certainly Lucy, with no family or friends to speak of, would not be missed if she never ventured outside the walls of this convent again, and was thus erased from life.

On this first night, a ghostly Madame Beck inspects Lucy and her belongings while she lies in bed, setting the scene for Lucy's watched existence inside the school (V 76). The school is a highly structured and deeply patriarchal space, governed by Madame Beck who, wielding masculine power (V 86), is an agent of broader society and representative of patriarchal space herself. As Lucy points out, she "could have comprised the duties of a first minister and a superintendent of police" (V 82). As a teacher at the school, Lucy is subject to restriction and confinement in the form of Madame Beck's "surveillance" and "espionage" (V 80). In contrast to the overt dominance of authority presiding over Jane's schooling, Lucy is the object of covert surveillance and manipulation. Madame Beck would "glide ghost-like through the house, watching and spying

everywhere, peering through every key-hole, listening behind every door" (*V* 81). Consequently, the school is "a strange house, where no corner was sacred from intrusion, where not a tear could be shed, nor a thought pondered, but a spy was at hand to note and to divine" (*V* 258). This literal degree of restriction and confinement echoes the broader ways in which Lucy is confined throughout her life and during her time at the school. Beyond Madame Beck's specific forms of surveillance and control, Lucy is subject to the personal and institutional operations of educational, professional, religious and medical surveillance (Shuttleworth 219-20). Though Lucy watches back, performing surveillance on various other characters, she remains a spectator rather than a "shaping observer" like Madame Beck (Glen 223). Consequently, much like Jane at Gateshead, Lucy both fears and is continually the object of surveillance and intrusion (Hoeveler 233). Shuttleworth, for example, suggests that Lucy's greatest fear is "the subjection of the self to a male authority consequent on the revelation of the inner self" (226).

Over time, Lucy learns that the school used to be a convent, and "that something had happened on this site which, rousing fear and inflicting horror, had left to the place the inheritance of a ghost story" (*V* 117). This story tells of a ghostly nun who is sometimes seen within the school grounds. The legend goes that a particular stone slab, under a dying pear tree in the garden, is:

the portal of a vault, imprisoning (sic) deep beneath that ground, on whose surface grass grew and flowers bloomed, the bones of a girl whom a monkish conclave of the drear middle ages had here buried alive, for some sin against her vow. (*V* 117-18)

The existence of such a story adds to the Gothic atmosphere of Lucy's new home. Though Lucy herself dismisses such tales as "romantic rubbish" (*V* 118), Brontë here foreshadows Lucy's own sightings of a ghostly nun, as well as broader themes of repression, Gothic return, and the oppression of women within marriage. Once again, Lucy's Gothic descriptions bespeak the dangers of being

buried alive within this space, much like the young nun described in the legend. This story also echoes that of the young nun Agnes in *The Monk* who, as described above, was effectively buried alive for a time.

Like the prototypical Gothic castle, this school is permeated by secrets. Wandering one night in the garden, Lucy accidentally intercepts a private letter, from Graham to Ginevra. As they discuss the letter, Lucy and Graham are almost discovered by Madame Beck as she patrols the garden (V 122-24, 126-27). Lucy's cherished place in the garden, and her time spent there "had acquired a new, but not a pleasant interest; their seclusion was now become precarious; their calm – insecure" (V 128). The presence of secrets, as well as the intrusions of both Graham and Madame Beck into Lucy's beloved garden, render this space unsafe: "That casement which rained billets, had vulgarised the once dear nook it overlooked; and elsewhere, the eyes of the flowers had gained vision, and the knots in the tree-boles listened like secret ears" (V 128). In this scene, Charlotte Brontë demonstrates once again that Lucy is subject to intrusion within the space of the school. As in the scene where Vilette's glittering lights resemble threatening eyes, the space of the garden is anthropomorphised in order to designate danger. These examples of pathetic fallacy are used to demonstrate the power of architectural space to influence and exert power over the protagonist: Lucy is threatened by the physical space surrounding her.

Paradoxically, Lucy is under constant threat of *both* intrusion and isolation (Weisser 82). While at the school, she, like Jane Eyre, desires more out of her life: "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*" (V 121; my emphasis). In contrast to Jane Eyre's expansive horizontal vistas, Lucy repeatedly figures freedom in metaphors of upward trajectory. In particular, Lucy longs for human connection and suffers extremely during periods of isolation and loneliness. Lucy describes this longing variously, using metaphors of starvation, burial and solitary confinement, which may send a prisoner mad (see Stoneman *Charlotte* 72). As I discuss in detail in the following

chapters, Lucy is left alone during the school holidays and experiences a bout of horrendous physical and psychological illness.

During her isolated vacation, Lucy seeks the outdoors, gradually venturing further and further from the Rue Fossette: she “often walked all day, through the burning noon and the arid afternoon, and the dusk evening, and came back with moonrise” (V 175). Lucy wanders due to her isolation at the school during this time, and the feelings of confinement attendant on this isolation: “a fever forbade me to rest; a want of companionship maintained in my soul the cravings of a most deadly famine” (V 175). Unfortunately, this daily wandering does not prevent ensuing psychological, nervous and physical illness.

Following nine days in bed, Lucy, like Jane, flees from an untenable situation:

The solitude and the stillness of the long dormitory could not be borne any longer; the ghostly white beds were turning into spectres – the coronal of each became a death’s head, huge and snow-bleached – dead dreams of an elder world and mightier race lay frozen in their wide gaping eye-holes. (V 177)

Once again, architectural space is anthropomorphised and turns malevolent. Whereas Jane is often made the victim of circumstances entailed by specific spaces, Lucy becomes the victim of the spaces themselves: the city, the garden and now her bedroom threaten her very safety. This vulnerability to space itself also suggests, as I discuss in the following chapters, the heroine’s vulnerability to her own mind.

Lucy flees this lonely and malevolent Gothic prison, desiring open space:

...insufferable thought of being no more loved, no more owned, half-yielded to hope of the contrary – I was sure this hope would shine clearer if I got out from under this house-roof, which was crushing as the slab of a tomb, and went outside the city to a certain quiet hill, a long way distant in the fields. (V 177)

Lucy's linkage of the roof with tomb imagery reveals the way in which she is crushed by her confinement within the walls of the convent-school. In this space, Lucy's hope is suffocated and she is constantly in danger of being buried alive: *entombed* and erased. Brontë highlights once again the oppressive and repressive atmosphere of the school: Lucy must escape this space in order to cradle hope. Like Jane, she seeks solace in nature. Rather than gaining the 'quiet hill', however, she is drawn inside a church and speaks to Père Silas, who attempts to convert her. Following her relatively unproductive interaction with the priest in the man-made space of the church, Lucy exits onto the streets once more. Unfortunately, "the wild longing to breathe this October wind on the little hill far without the city-walls has ceased to be an imperative impulse" (V 180). Lucy's "Reason" comes into authoritative power, crushes hope, and directs her to turn homeward (V 180).

Though the reader might initially assume the streets to be less confining than the *pensionnat* or other man-made buildings such as the church, they soon become threatening to Lucy. In releasing the desire to reach the hill, Lucy catalyses a dangerous situation. In the absence of hope, particularly the hope of open space outside this masculine city, Lucy becomes lost in "a part of the city with which I was not familiar; it was the old part, and full of narrow streets of picturesque, ancient, and mouldering houses" (V 180). The "ancient" and "mouldering" buildings and "narrow" claustrophobic streets signal the return of the Gothic. As Fred Botting describes, by the mid-nineteenth century, the gloomy, labyrinthine modern city became a place of horror, violence and corruption in the Gothic (114). As Lucy moves through the urban matrix of Villetta, she is confronted with dream-like experiences, threats to her sexual integrity and a sense of alienation expressed in overwhelmingly Gothic terms. In this claustrophobic and Gothic city, Brontë draws upon the angst experienced by the modern female urban dweller (Avery 132).

Lucy's response to the fierce oncoming storm demonstrates her desire to escape the claustrophobic streets; "I only wished that I had wings and could *ascend* the gale, spread and repose my pinions on its strength, career in its course, sweep where it swept" (V 181; my emphasis). Like Jane, Lucy expresses her desire for freedom in spatial terms and terms relating to nature. However, as previously indicated, Lucy locates freedom in an upward trajectory, in contrast to Jane's horizontal imaginings. However, amongst these old and decaying houses, in a space devoid of nature, Lucy begins to falter, becoming cold and powerless. She "tried to reach the porch of a great building near, but the mass of the frontage and the giant-spire turned black and vanished from my eyes. Instead of sinking on the steps as I intended, I seemed to pitch headlong *down an abyss*" (V 181; my emphasis). Perhaps the open spaces of the hills, or the heights of the sky, would have offered Lucy some solace or safety, but it seems clear that this Gothic city, filled with huge buildings and men who attempt to foist themselves and their beliefs on her, presents a threat to her subjectivity. Her fall into unconsciousness, represented as the vast open space of the abyss, may therefore represent an attempt to escape this threatening place. Alternatively, this fall also represents a downward trajectory, and thence the very opposite to freedom.

Following her breakdown, Lucy awakens in the home of the Brettons for the second time, though the house has been re-established in Villette. Though the pleasantly domestic setting seems almost anti-Gothic, the repetition and circularity marks Lucy's narrative as inescapably Gothic. It is worth noting the recursion of space in *Villette*: Lucy spends time in the home of the Brettons as a child, before coming to their new home in Villette; similarly, she returns to the *pensionnat* following her sojourn at the Bretton house. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane moves through a series of places, rarely returning to any of the spaces she has escaped or outgrown. This paints a picture of female development as somewhat linear or accumulative. In *Villette*, however, Lucy's progression through the narrative is presented as circular or even regressive. This recursion of space seems to suggest the difficulty or even impossibility of linear female development. By further developing or extending the narrative of female development as presented in *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* becomes a less typical depiction of female life.

Despite her fond feelings for Graham Bretton and his mother, it is clear that Lucy does not belong in this family; they cannot give her what she longs for. Lucy's sense of un-belonging marks the household space as uncanny. Consequently, this ostensible return to childhood entails a return to a bodiless self, a shadow in a place that is not her own. In order to regain, or perhaps gain for the first time, a sense of self, Lucy must return to the Gothic enclosure of the *pensionnat*. Upon returning to the school, Lucy begins to establish herself at night in a series of "Gothic nooks and crannies", such as the attic and the *allée défendue* in the garden (Milbank *Daughters* 152). In this Gothic world, seclusion and self-withdrawal become the sites of desire, in scenes that are played out in spaces such as these Gothic 'nooks' (Milbank *Daughters* 152).

Much like Jane Eyre at Lowood School, the space of the *pensionnat* exerts a repressive effect on Lucy. A fortnight after her return, she is "getting once more inured to the harness of school, and lapsing from the passionate pain of change to the palsy of custom" (V 265). However, during the night, Lucy's imagination and desires are given somewhat freer reign. Upon receiving a letter from Graham, Lucy waits until dark and retreats to "the deep, black, cold garret" with its "worm-eaten-door" (V 272). As she reads the letter in this very Gothic space, Lucy is suffused with intense feeling; "there was a fullness of delight in this taste of fruition – such, perhaps, as many a human being passes through life without ever knowing" (V 272). Her happiness is "genuine and exquisite: a bubble – but a sweet bubble – of real honey-dew" (V 272). It is significant that these feelings only emerge during the night and in these isolated and Gothic spaces.

Furthermore, it is these kinds of feeling that Lucy, and indeed the very space of the *pensionnat*, generally suppresses on a daily basis. Several pages later, Lucy taps in to her "Feeling" and begins to write Graham a letter expressing her "closely-clinging and deeply-honouring attachment". However, soon "the doors of my heart would shake, bolt and bar would yield, Reason would leap in, vigorous and revengeful, snatch the full sheets, read, sneer, erase, tear up, re-write, fold, seal, direct, and send a terse, curt missive of a page" (V 282). In this way, Lucy's psyche intrudes upon *itself*; "Reason" conducts surveillance and invasion, much like Madame Beck in the space of the *pensionnat*. Moreover, this

intrusion of reason closely mirrors the intrusion of the most Gothic figure of the text: the ghostly nun.

It is while reading this letter that Lucy glimpses the nun for the first time:

Something in that vast solitary garret sounded strangely. Most surely and certainly I heard, as it seemed, a stealthy foot on that floor: a sort of gliding out from the direction of the black recess haunted by the malefactor cloaks. I turned: my light was dim; the room was long – but, as I live! I saw in the middle of that ghostly chamber a figure all black or white; the skirts straight, narrow, black; the head bandaged, veiled, white. (V 273)

Again, Charlotte Brontë echoes *The Monk*, which tells the legend of the Bleeding Nun: a ghost-woman clad in religious habit, with veiled face and a blood-stained dress (Lewis 138). This nun appears several times in the narrative and is finally dispelled as a phantom, albeit once a live and tormented woman (Lewis 159-61, 173-75). The nun in *Villette*, however, is a far less concrete figure, until almost the close of the text. This nun appears on a number of occasions and is a site of crucial interpretive conflict (Shuttleworth 220). The spaces and circumstances in which the nun appears are deeply significant. In this first instance, the nun appears connected to Lucy's emotions, or perhaps her desires, or to Graham and his correspondence with Lucy. Graham suggests that the nun is a product of Lucy's "nerves", and Lucy herself remains unsure as to the nun's origin (V 277).

Though Graham writes to Lucy for a time, sustaining her and maintaining their connection, he ceases his correspondence upon his reunion with Polly. This cessation of letters has a deleterious effect upon Lucy: her loneliness increases and she begins to waste away once more (V 296-97). In order to free Lucy from this situation of unrequited love, Brontë makes use of spatial metaphor once again. Lucy buries Graham's letters under the pear-tree in the *allée défendue*: "I was not only going to hide a treasure – I meant also to bury a grief" (V 328). With this burial she symbolically buries a part of herself, that she is unable or

unwilling to voice: her love or desire for Graham (Milbank *Daughters* 153), and the misery resulting from his inability to love her. Lucy's desires are 'buried alive'; in this case, the live burial metaphor figures the repression or sublimation of desire. The story of 'burial alive' thus concerns not only domestic or marital confinement and erasure, but also women's forced concealment of the suffering that such states caused—her lack of voice (DeLamotte 150-51, 173).

Following her interment of the letters, Lucy is suffused with intense feeling, partially relating to memories of times past; she "felt, not happy, far otherwise, but strong with reinforced strength" (V 329). It is at this moment that the nun appears once again: "a tall, sable-robed, snowy-veiled woman" (V 329). The veiled nun is "mute" and "had no face – no features" (V 329). Once again, the nun has appeared at a time of high emotion, specifically emotion and consequent repression relating to Graham. It is only at night and in these specific Gothic corners of the school that Lucy's true feelings are allowed to surface, whether affection, desire or grief. The nun appears at these times, in connection to Lucy's emotions or, indeed, to their repression.

Though ghostly nuns featured in Gothic sensation novels, Brontë uses this clichéd motif in a "new and disturbing way" (Stoneman *Charlotte* 71). For much of the novel, the nun may be supernatural; a hallucination borne of psychological tension; or a rational and material being. These different explanations are incompatible, yet each remains a simultaneous narrative possibility until near the end of the text. The figure of the nun functions as the confluence of Gothic metaphor, spiritual expression and medical diagnosis, and Charlotte Brontë demonstrates the way these competing discourses can share the same rhetorical and imaginative spaces (Stoneman *Charlotte* 71; Vrettos 69).

Following the symbolic burial of her feelings toward Graham, Lucy is free to develop feelings of affection for M. Paul. Despite their obvious affinity, however, M. Paul remains a problematic lover. M. Paul represents various patriarchal forces, institutions and doctrines and exerts a controlling influence upon Lucy: he attempts to police and confine her according to patriarchal standards of the

ideal female (Kim 418). Much like Madame Beck, he places Lucy under surveillance within the school and within her own classroom, watching her and searching her possessions regularly: “the hand of M. Emanuel’s was on intimate terms with my desk... it raised and lowered the lid, ransacked and arranged the contents, almost as familiarly as my own” (V 380). In this way, M. Paul invades Lucy’s private psychic space. Further, he places restrictions upon her intellectual consumption in the form of directing and controlling her education: “he generally pruned before lending his books, especially if they were novels, and sometimes I was a little provoked by the severity of his censorship, the retrenchments interrupting the narrative” (V 385; see also 390). This kind of censorship places limitations upon Lucy’s intellectual and psychic space.

In a key episode of the text, M. Paul literally imprisons Lucy. Early in the text, upon enlisting her involvement in the school play, M. Paul determines that she must “withdraw” in order to learn her lines, and locks her in “the solitary and lofty attic” (V 148). M. Paul thus echoes Lucy’s own tendencies toward seclusion. This space is deeply Gothic:

The attic was no pleasant space... old dresses draped its unstained wall – cobwebs its unswept ceiling. Well was it known to be tenanted by rats, by black beetles, and by cockroaches – nay, rumour affirmed that the ghostly Nun of the garden had once been seen here. A partial darkness obscured one end, across which, as for deeper mystery, an old russet curtain was drawn, by way of screen to a sombre band of winter cloaks, pendant each from its pin – like a malefactor from his gibbet. (V 149)

Lucy remains here for many hours, growing ever more hungry in the absence of any sustenance. In the evening, M. Paul returns to set her free. He leads her down to the kitchen and feeds her: “The cook was imperatively ordered to produce food, and I, as imperatively, was commanded to eat” (V 151). M. Paul exerts complete control over Lucy in

this scene: “M. Paul superintended my repast, and almost forced upon me more than I could swallow” (V 151).

Though Milbank characterises M. Paul’s enclosures of Lucy as “benevolent though irritating” (*Daughters* 154), I argue that the reverse is true. His enclosure of Lucy, in addition to starving her, demonstrates that Lucy is clearly at risk from M. Paul himself, who may be represented by the “malefactor” described in the attic. M. Paul is a controlling and perhaps dangerous presence in Lucy’s life. As in *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë employs a reference to *Bluebeard*, as M. Paul defends himself: “You will set me down as a species of tyrant and Bluebeard, starving women in a garret; whereas, after all, I am no such thing” (V 151). In denying this charge, however, M. Paul draws attention to the very possibility of its truth (see Kim 417-18). Once again, Brontë uses this reference as a warning: that the heroine may be stepping into a Gothic fairytale, in which she is at risk from a male oppressor/lover. Despite the monitory aspect of the *Bluebeard* reference, the scene also contains a clue regarding M. Paul’s suitability as a lover. Unlike Graham, who can never return Lucy’s feelings for him and thus relegates her to an asexual “maiden retreat”, M. Paul detains Lucy within a Gothic prison, which carries the suggestion of sexuality, albeit dangerous sexuality (Milbank *Daughters* 153). In this way, unlike Graham, M. Paul may give Lucy’s passions life.

This attic-scene is a microcosm, a spatial representation, of nineteenth-century female subjectivity, in which women are expected to perform whatever roles men dictate and are confined and controlled, even down to what they put in their mouths. The relation of food to bodies, whether through consumption or denial, is fundamentally about power (Probyn 7). In this scene, eating is cast as a sign of male privilege, and starvation as a sign of female powerlessness (Silver 102). The scene functions as a warning regarding Lucy’s later relationship with M. Paul: he inevitably seeks to control and limit her identity, shaping it through what he allows her to consume, from the literal to her education. Lucy’s time in the attic

serves as a metaphor for her existence at the *pensionnat*, trapped within its walls and starved for emotional nourishment. It is Lucy's female body that dictates the limitations placed upon her by the outside world: her gendered destiny. The attic may therefore reflect a sense that she is imprisoned within her own inescapably female body (Silver 103; see also Vrettos 63).

Thus it can be seen that the various spaces within the *pensionnat* to which Lucy retreats and within which she is imprisoned reflect the dangers that surround her in this space. The school itself is a manifestation of confinement, isolation and repression. Within the spaces of the school, Lucy is subject to surveillance and intrusion: her psychic privacy and safety is threatened. The Gothic corners of the school are where Lucy's emotions are allowed greater freedom, but are also deeply tied to her extreme repression. Moreover, spaces such as her bedroom and the garden are anthropomorphised and grow malevolent, demonstrating Lucy's vulnerability to her own mind as well as outside forces. Finally, the scene in which M. Paul imprisons her suggests that Lucy is also vulnerable to threat from specific people.

The 'Junta'

Throughout the text, an interconnected trio of figures threatens Lucy's happiness and thus her health. Together they represent various interests and forces, but particularly the Catholic Church. As discussed earlier, Madame Beck is an intrusive force in Lucy's life. In league with Père Silas, the priest, and Madame Walravens, a rich widow, she seeks to keep Lucy and M. Paul apart, for financial and religious reasons. Lucy often finds herself within spaces governed by each of these figures, such as Madame Beck's *pensionnat*, the church of Père Silas and the home of Madame Walravens. The spaces through which Lucy moves are inextricably tied to, and form manifestations of, these figures and those forces represented by them.

As a devout Protestant, Lucy is positioned outside the Catholic Church, but not outside its sphere of influence. The Church is presented in *Villette* as a vast and

opulent institution, which tries to control Lucy by converting her and by obstructing her relationship with M. Paul. During the vacation, as Lucy desperately seeks solace within the church, she ventures into a confessional with Père Silas, who promptly tries to influence her faith:

...it is my own conviction that these impressions under which you are smarting are messengers from God to bring you back to the true church. You were made for our faith: depend on it our faith alone could heal and help you – Protestantism is altogether too dry, cold, prosaic for you. The further I look into this matter, the more plainly I see that it is entirely out of the common order of things. (V 179)

Père Silas is not the only one concerned with Lucy's conversion to Catholicism. At one stage, M. Paul gives Lucy a pamphlet on Catholicism: "The Protestant was to turn Papist, not so much in fear of the heretic's hell, as on account of the comfort, the indulgence, the tenderness Holy Church offered" (V 457). Lucy surmises that Père Silas "had darkly stigmatised Protestants in general, and myself by inference" (V 463), and this is why M. Paul has alternately tried to convert her and put distance between them.

Despite their best efforts, however, Lucy remains devoutly Protestant. She is taken to Mass but remains unmoved:

...doubtless there were errors in every Church but I now perceived by contrast how severely pure was my own... I told him how we kept fewer forms between us and God; retaining, indeed, no more than, perhaps, the nature of mankind in the mass rendered necessary for observance. (V 466)

Using spatial terms once again, Lucy criticises the distance between Catholic devotees and their God, thus valourising the puritan proximity of her own Protestant God. Despite the evident might and opulence of the Catholic Church,

Lucy remains ever critical of this institution. In refusing to be swayed by Catholicism, Lucy invites further interference from Père Silas, Madame Beck and Madame Walravens. Though they are also financially motivated, religious concerns play a part in their efforts to keep Lucy and M. Paul apart. In this way, the Catholic Church, represented by the largely 'masculine' figures of this trio (DeLamotte 254, 258, 260, 263), seeks to control not only Lucy's faith or spiritual sustenance, but also her emotional life or emotional sustenance.

Each member of this trio, or 'junta', represents a social institution and plays an allegorical role in the psychomania of Lucy's inner world. Brontë's depiction of the 'junta' suggests that Lucy is threatened both by internal and external, psychological and social forces: the psychological forces they represent belong also to Lucy herself. Madame Beck is a figure of education, representing modesty, the tendency to wall oneself in and the primacy of reason over emotion. Père Silas is a religious figure, who represents the temptation of privation, and the retreat from both activity and desire. The wealthy Madame Walravens is a social or economic figure representing both Lucy's tendency to collaborate with oppressive forces, and the end result of a life lived by the rules of the 'junta' (DeLamotte 253-54, 258, 260, 263). The school, which is ruled by Madame Beck and permeated by the influence of both Père Silas and Madame Walravens, is therefore a physical space that represents the influence and coercion of each of these institutional and psychological forces operating on Lucy. The social forces threatening Lucy have frightening power within her psychic realm because she has internalised their repressions. By portraying the 'junta' as allegory of Lucy's psychology, Charlotte Brontë acknowledges that the evil Other of this Gothic tale may be the heroine herself (DeLamotte 264-65). Due to her internalisation of social expectations surrounding femininity, Lucy may in fact be her own worst enemy: more so than any member of the 'junta', Lucy exerts extreme repressive force upon herself.

Lucy's excursion to the home of Madame Walravens further demonstrates the power embodied by this trio of figures. Toward the close of the text, Madame Beck asks Lucy to take a basket of fruit and flowers to the house of Madame

Walravens (V 428). This reference to *Little Red Riding Hood* warns of danger and subterfuge. As she nears the house, Lucy finds herself entering a most Gothic space: the “dark, half-ruinous turrets” of a church overlook the deserted square in which the house sits. She observes that “wealth and greatness had long since stretched their gilded pinions and fled hence, leaving these their ancient nests, perhaps to house Penury for a time, or perhaps to stand cold and empty, mouldering untenanted in the course of winters” (V 429-30). Brontë here uses Gothic imagery of decay, antiquity and the absence of warmth to suggest that this space is dangerous for Lucy.

When Lucy is granted entrance to this house, Madame Walravens herself emerges from behind a picture frame (V 431). The scene is drenched in Gothic imagery:

...to my bewilderment, it shook, it sunk, it rolled back into nothing; its vanishing left an opening arched, leading into an arched passage, with a mystic winding stair; both passage and stair were of cold stone, uncarpeted and unpainted. (V 431)

Hoar enchantment here prevailed; a spell had opened for me elf-land – that cell-like room, that vanishing picture, that arch and passage, and stair of stone, were all parts of a fairy tale. Distincter even than these scenic details stood the chief figure – Cunegonde, the sorceress! Malevola, the evil fairy! (V 431)

The emergence of Madame Walravens herself from a hidden space alludes to the presence of other secrets connecting Madame Walravens and Lucy. Walravens herself is a hideous creature, a “symbol of the anarchic gothic energies upon which the city is built” (Avery 133). Her grotesque, jewel-covered body (V 431-32) represents the spiritual and moral vacuum faced by inhabitants of this modern city (Avery 133). Moreover, the name “Malevola” is a feminised form of ‘malevolent’, indicating her intention to bring harm unto others. Their brief encounter, in which nothing concrete is really said, is cast by Lucy as a magical

Gothic tale: “The tale of magic seemed to proceed with due accompaniment of the elements. The wanderer, decoyed into the enchanted castle, heard rising, outside, the spell-wakened tempest” (V 432). Here, Charlotte Brontë gives Lucy “all the raw material of the Gothic... for her imagination to work upon”: the ancient prison-like house; secret passages; and the grotesque and ghastly figure of Malevola herself who, whether spectral or real, is equally terrifying (Milbank *Daughters* 154).

Significantly, Lucy is not part of the plot of this house; as visitor and observer, she is denied a place as active protagonist (Milbank *Daughters* 155). On her way out, Lucy is met by Père Silas, who informs her of M. Paul and Justine Marie’s prior relationship and his resulting unavailability (V 433-37). Lucy comes to understand that she has been led or manipulated by Madames Beck and Walravens, and Père Silas himself, in order to be in this space to hear this story: she feels “passed under discipline, moulded, trained, inoculated, and so on” (V 437). Thus we see that the house and this malevolent witchy woman who lives therein are intimately connected to the *pensionnat* where Lucy is employed, as well as to the Catholic church, so much so that the house seems almost an extension of this space. Like Madame Beck’s school, this house is governed by a single female figure and pervaded by Gothic imagery. Lucy is a passive observer in both of these spaces, and subject to machinations beyond her knowledge. The same networks of surveillance and subterfuge operating on Lucy inside the school are at work on her in this space too. The house of Madame Walravens forms the embodiment of Gothic secrets, as well as economic self-interest.

Thus it can be seen that figures of power manifest in specific architectural spaces, in order to exert control over Lucy. These figures also represent powerful psychosocial institutions such as the Church. On a personal level, these figures also form outward manifestations of aspects of Lucy’s psyche. In this way, external figures metaphorise Lucy’s inner spaces, as well as those broader social spaces operating on Lucy. Crucially, none of the spaces through which Lucy moves is ‘innocent’; everywhere she goes, she is observed and controlled, and often subject to designs she knows nothing about.

New School

In the penultimate chapter of the text, Lucy enters a new space, wherein she will end the narrative. M. Paul gifts her with a schoolhouse (V 536-37): the means to support herself on her own terms and a place to live, away from the repressive environment of Madame Beck's school and each of the institutions operating within (Stoneman *Charlotte* 78; see also Milbank *Daughters* 157; Torgerson 86). M. Paul then disappears from the text: his fate is ambiguous, but he never returns to Lucy (V 546). Unlike Jane Eyre, then, Lucy is not enclosed within the space of marriage and the associated domestic role. She is the matriarch of her own home and workplace, much like Madame Beck. Perhaps most significantly, this space is explicitly non-Gothic.

Lucy's new schoolhouse appears as antithesis to Ferndean in *Jane Eyre*, as well as the *pensionnat* where Lucy has spent much of the text. In contrast to the Gothic convent-school, this "pleasant" house is "freshly and tastefully painted; its vista closed in a French window with vines trained about the panes, tendrils, and green leaves kissing the glass" (V 534). The 'trained' vines suggest that this space is unthreatening: it is under control and, unlike the garden at the *pensionnat*, will not transform into a menacing and Gothic space. Moreover, the 'kissing' leaves, combined with the "walls... tinged like a blush" and the open, crimson *chiffoniere*, suggest sexual and romantic invitation (Milbank *Daughters* 156-57). The house thus forms the embodiment of desire fulfilled. Lucy's use of words such as 'fresh' and 'pleasant', in addition to descriptions of fine furniture and bountiful greenery, depict a welcoming and non-threatening space. The descriptions of open and light space suggest relief from the dangers of 'burial alive' that Lucy experienced at the *pensionnat*. These descriptions of the schoolhouse evince no hint of the Gothic. Charlotte Brontë thereby demonstrates that this is a safe space for Lucy: a refuge from Madame Beck's oppressive and confining, gloomy Gothic institution, and from the constant threat of surveillance and intrusion therein. Moreover, unlike Jane, who until the end exists within her husband's house, Lucy has found a space of her own. The absence of Gothic architecture suggests that Lucy has found a better, perhaps safer, home than Jane.

The blushing, non-threatening space of Lucy's new home, which will also remain devoid of a male figure, suggests that Lucy's desires have been fulfilled: she has gained the love of M. Paul, as well as her independence and her own space. Moreover, M. Paul's absence may be connected to the non-threatening nature of the space: we may assume that without him, Lucy will be freer. After showing Lucy the building, M. Paul instructs Lucy to serve him chocolate, and she responds in a strikingly feminine way: "with what shy joy I accepted my part as hostess, arranged the silver, served the benefactor-guest" (V 538). Lucy easily slips into the domestic role of subservient female, in servitude to the male figure in her life. Despite the happy overtones used by Lucy, I suggest that this scene functions as a warning, of the kind of domestic enclosure and subordination that Lucy might expect in a union with M. Paul. Given Lucy's intellect, powerful imagination and skill at teaching, it seems clear that the role of a housewife would be reductive. Luckily, M. Paul will never return and the space will remain Lucy's own, in which she is subordinate to no one.

This tracing of Jane Eyre's and Lucy Snowe's respective movements through and existence within specific spaces has illustrated the ways in which Charlotte Brontë uses architectural space to represent those dangers that threaten female subjectivity in her Victorian world. Within institutions such as schools and houses, the female body is subject to surveillance, control, intrusion and deprivation. Gothic architecture is used as a warning, particularly regarding hidden mysteries such as Rochester's secret wife and the machinations of Madame Beck and her 'junta', and Gothic dangers such as 'burial alive'. Both Jane and Lucy use spatial imagery and metaphor to describe feelings of oppression and freedom. Space therefore functions on literal, metaphorical and imaginative levels to describe the experiences of the protagonists.

Jane Eyre is particularly threatened by those male figures, along with their ideologies and desires, who preside over spaces such as Lowood School, Thornfield and Marsh End. In *Villette*, Brontë's treatment of space demonstrates that while Lucy is threatened by specific figures, such as the members of the 'junta', she is also vulnerable to the forces of specific institutions, such as the

Catholic Church, and herself. Lucy is threatened by the very spaces themselves, as they turn malevolent, indicating her vulnerability to her own mind, as I discuss further in the following chapter. In *Villette*, then, Brontë develops her use of space, in addition to her views on heterosexual romance and marriage. Unlike Jane, who is finally enclosed in an overtly Gothic domestic space, Lucy is finally able to escape Gothic domains and find, as Virginia Woolf would put it a century later, 'a room of one's own' (1929).

1.4 *Wuthering Heights*

One of the most famous scenes in *Wuthering Heights* occurs at the beginning of the text, as Lockwood is visited by the ghostly Catherine Earnshaw, knocking at the window of Wuthering Heights. This scene exemplifies Emily Brontë's interest in divisions (Willis 24; see also Nestor xxvi), revealing the significance of boundaries between, to name a few examples, the dead and the living, inside and outside, the Grange and the Heights or moors, adulthood and childhood and male and female.

Unlike both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, *Wuthering Heights* is not plotted through a progression of spaces, in turn reflecting the development of the protagonists. Rather, the characters inhabit two significant spaces in the text: Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. The analysis of *Wuthering Heights* here presented is therefore shorter than those of either *Jane Eyre* or *Villette*, due to the relative comparative paucity of different physical spaces. As this chapter has demonstrated, for Charlotte Brontë, Gothic tropes and Gothic spaces are used to warn of danger, particularly those of limitation, confinement and 'burial alive'. Emily Brontë, however, reverses these tropes: the Gothic space of Wuthering Heights is presented as idyllic and conducive to strong female identity, whereas Thrushcross Grange, in all its cultured glory, is harmful to female identity and represents the confinement of domesticity and marriage. Both the Heights and the Grange act upon their inhabitants in different ways and produce different kinds of subjectivities, the former through direct violence and the latter through

indirect and invisible discursive practices (Ellis *Contested* 209). Though Charlotte Brontë can be seen to question domestic ideology in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, it is Emily Brontë who uses the reversal of Gothic tropes to enact a direct criticism and dramatic subversion of domestic ideology.

Wuthering Heights

Unlike both Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, Catherine spends all of her childhood and early adolescence in her own family home: Wuthering Heights. Though she is within the bosom of her family, Catherine does not fit in and finds the closest kinship with her adopted brother and ally, Heathcliff. Like Jane, she is subject to various impositions upon her behaviour; she is however sometimes able to escape these confining limitations through her connection with Heathcliff and her access to the moors. During childhood, the indoor world is the space of early socialisation, and particularly of parental love given and withheld (Ellis *Contested* 213). Within this indoor world, Catherine is denied love by her father and deceased mother, and later by her brother Hindley; instead, she finds love in Heathcliff.

The reader's first impression of the deeply Gothic Wuthering Heights, years after Catherine's death, is mediated via Lockwood's narration. The place is named for the "atmospheric tumult" common to those parts, and is surrounded by "gaunt" and "stunted" trees (*WH* 4). The threshold is covered with "grotesque carving", and the interior contains guns, "primitive" furniture that stands in the shadows, and "haunting" dogs who are quick to attack the defenceless Lockwood (*WH* 4-5). Through these descriptions and Lockwood's apparent apprehension and fear, Emily Brontë creates an air of menace and animosity in this space. However, contrary to natural expectations and despite the Gothic construction of this space, Catherine's childhood here is relatively happy. The death of her mother and father and her brother's tyranny upon becoming patriarch of the house are obviously difficult, but her dual relationships with Heathcliff and with the moors seem to sustain Catherine. She is exposed to the brutality of male violence in this space, but seems able to give as good as she gets and remains hearty and healthy.

Through her own expression of identity and through Heathcliff's devotion, Catherine wields power in this space: "the boy would do her bidding in anything" and Catherine is a "bold, saucy" (*WH* 43), "mischievous and wayward" (*WH* 38) girl.

The physical space of *Wuthering Heights* is a place wherein women defy conventional expectations regarding female behaviour. Chronologically, the first instance of such defiance comes in the form of the young Catherine Earnshaw. As I explore in greater detail in chapter 3, Catherine is a clear departure from contemporary femininity. For Catherine, *Wuthering Heights* is the beginning or home, but it also represents those subversive aspects of her character which are apparent from a young age and which remain with her as she moves through other spaces in the text.

For other women, *Wuthering Heights* becomes a destination. Both Isabella Linton and Catherine Linton move to the Heights and then begin a process of learning to defy conventional expectations regarding female behaviour. *Wuthering Heights* thus becomes a space wherein women learn about the violence of the world and of men, but also learn to both protect and free themselves, to varying degrees, from the stifling confines of conventional femininity. *Wuthering Heights* therefore appears to be a place that foments rebellion and defiance in women. It is also the place in which both Isabella Linton and Catherine Linton shed their more angelic selves and become subversive forces in their own right. These transformations are discussed further in chapter 3.

Wuthering Heights is closely associated with the natural space of the moors. Much as they do for *Jane Eyre*, the moors represent a place of freedom for Catherine Earnshaw. As a child, she flees to the moors for some escape from the dreary regulation of life at home at *Wuthering Heights*. To Lockwood, a manifestation of culture and privilege, the moors surrounding *Wuthering Heights* are a frightening and dangerous place: "sky and hills mingled in one bitter whirl of wind and suffocating snow" (*WH* 14). However, to Catherine, the

moor is not dangerous in the least. Catherine's childhood, in which she found both freedom and happiness, is inextricably tied to the spaces of Wuthering Heights and the moors. As children, she and Heathcliff are linked to nature—they run away to the moors for entire days (*WH* 46), enjoying their childhood but also avoiding those aspects of domestic life that would confine them within structures of conformity, power and gender (Torgerson 95). Like Wuthering Heights itself, the moors represent an untamed and perhaps primal way of being: they are bleak and violent, but also represent passion and freedom. To Catherine, the moors symbolise the freedom of a space unadulterated by society's gender roles and divisions (Ellis *Contested* 213; see also Davison *Victorian Gothic* 131).

Thrushcross Grange

Catherine's relatively content life at Wuthering Heights begins to change when she is first introduced to the cultured space of Thrushcross Grange. The reader's first glimpse of Thrushcross Grange establishes it as the antithesis to Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff describes it thus:

...ah! it was beautiful! - a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers.
(*WH* 48)

This "heaven" (*WH* 48) is light-filled and gorgeous, a representation of gentility and culture that stands in opposition to that representation of wild and violent nature: the menacing and gloomy Heights. Thrushcross Grange is a locus of domestic femininity, whereas the Heights is home to violence, particularly violent masculinity (Ellis *Contested* 214).

Upon her first visit to the Grange, spying through the window with Heathcliff, Catherine is bitten by the Lintons' dog and thence spends several weeks recuperating with the family (*WH* 48-53). This dog bite acts as a warning

regarding potential harm to Catherine. The event has also been interpreted as the onset of menarche, or female adulthood (see Gilbert and Gubar 272). Catherine bleeds, thus entering the world of adult womanhood and becoming vulnerable to its structures and methods of control and oppression. It is important to note that this recuperation is not by choice. Rather, the Lintons seize Catherine and hold her within their world of culture. The way in which they feed, wash and dress her is somewhat sinister, resembling an initiation ritual (Gilbert and Gubar 273). This visit to the Grange indoctrinates Catherine into the cults of adult womanhood, domesticity and culture. Catherine's eventual alienation from both Heathcliff and the Heights therefore begins early in her life, at the hands of both the Linton family and her own family, who are content to leave her in this space (Willis 26).

Upon her return to the Heights, as discussed in the following chapter, the change in Catherine is obvious:

instead of a wild, hatless little savage jumping into the house, and rushing to squeeze us all breathless, there lighted from a handsome black pony a very dignified person, with brown ringlets falling from the cover of a feathered beaver, and a long cloth habit which she was obliged to hold up with both hands that she might sail in (*WH* 53).

Though she soon reverts to a kind of double life, manifesting the lady or the "wild, hatless little savage" depending on company (*WH* 53, 67), this initial transformation distresses Heathcliff and disrupts their relationship. Thenceforth, demonstrating her new link to the world of culture, Catherine maintains a friendship with Edgar and Isabella Linton, who come to visit her at the Heights (*WH* 58-60). This intrusion of the children of culture upon the Heights echoes the way in which the Grange has changed, or 'infected' Catherine. This ladylike transformation turns Catherine into an object of culture, distancing her from Heathcliff and her true self, and eventually killing her (Homans *Dreaming* 278).

Though the Heights seems to be a place of power for the young Catherine, her time at the Grange infects her and she brings this infection home. Everything begins to change from this point, eventually culminating in the disappearance of Heathcliff (*WH* 83). In his absence, *Wuthering Heights* is no longer a place of safety for Catherine and she sickens dramatically. Catherine recovers and recuperates at home, before taking a course of action with incredible spatial significance: she marries Edgar and moves to the Grange (*WH* 89). From this point forward, her life is dogged by illness and misery and she eventually dies there (*WH* 166). Catherine's marriage, and her resulting entrance to the Grange, is thus an incredibly significant event in terms of her health, life and death.

Catherine's physical move from the Heights to Thrushcross Grange entails a move from the space of relatively free childhood to the social space of marriage and domesticity. Marriage is inextricably tied to the physical setting of the Grange, and interior spaces such as the attic. Emily Brontë uses these spaces to articulate Catherine's experiences and her suffering, as a result of her decision to marry Edgar. Catherine's marriage to Edgar Linton and her entrance to Thrushcross Grange may be seen as an attempt to conform to codes of ideal femininity, and thus enter 'heaven'. However, as the reader learns, her marriage and move introduce one central conflict of the text: the desire to be both within and outside the law (*Homans Bearing* 74). Catherine's dream about heaven, related to Nelly prior to accepting Edgar's proposal, reveals something significant regarding the life of an ideal woman. "If I were in heaven", Catherine suggests, "I should be extremely miserable". Her dream is deeply revealing:

...heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on the top of *Wuthering Heights*; where I woke sobbing for joy... (*WH* 81)

Emily Brontë uses the spatial metaphor of the afterlife to both articulate the options facing Catherine on earth and foreshadow the problems she will encounter as Edgar's wife. This dream indicates her attachment to the moors and

her home, and the happiness she finds there. Perhaps more significantly, it functions as a warning about the consequences of entering heaven and leaving Wuthering Heights and the moors. Finally, leaving no room for doubt, she states: "I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven" (*WH* 80). It is clear that Catherine is unsuited to the normative nineteenth-century roles of wife and mother; she does not belong in the cultured domestic 'heaven' of Thrushcross Grange, and is consequently miserable there. Kate Ferguson Ellis, for example, locates in female Gothic texts a subversive impulse to undermine the construction of the home as a place of peace and happiness (*Contested* 219). Through Catherine's move from the Heights to the Grange, Emily Brontë reverses the conventions of sentimental female Gothic: heaven, or marriage, brings immanence and destruction, rather than fulfilment and transcendence (DeLamotte 191). As discussed in greater depth in the following chapters, Catherine's misery during her life at the Grange is written upon her body in numerous ways, from starvation and wasting to psychological disintegration.

Female Gothic texts often attempted to answer and thus counter male writings of women, most notably the Eve of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Fleenor 8).

Consequently, *Wuthering Heights* may be positioned as a corrective, revisionist rewriting of *Paradise Lost*. Catherine's move from the Heights to the Grange may be interpreted as a fall, from 'hell' into 'heaven', or from nature into culture; in order to become an angel, she leaves behind her monstrous childhood. However, in an inversion of Judeo-Christian ideology, 'hell' is where Catherine finds her joy. The wild and free 'hell' of Wuthering Heights is really Catherine's 'heaven'; in this place she radiates being and wields power. Correspondingly, the cultured and repressive 'heaven' of Thrushcross Grange is really her 'hell' (Gilbert and Gubar 252-55, 260, 266). Gilbert and Gubar cast Catherine's defection to the Grange, beginning with her dog bite and the cakes she is offered by the Lintons, as her consumption of "the poisonous cooked food of culture" (303). Sadly, by the time she closes her mouth on this particular morsel, it is too late: its poison will inevitably kill her.

Upon entering the Grange, Catherine seems relatively healthy for a while. However, Heathcliff's return after several years of absence catalyses Catherine's breakdown and descent into invalidism and death. Catherine's most significant breakdown begins as she flees to the attic at Thrushcross Grange, and is thus closely associated with this space.

The Attic

Much of Catherine's experience at the Grange and the psychological impact of her life there are articulated during her period of illness, insomnia and mental disturbance in the attic. The attic is a prototypical Gothic space, within which secrets are hidden or female characters are incarcerated by villainous forces, as exemplified by Bertha Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. In *Wuthering Heights*, however, Catherine enforces her own imprisonment within the attic. During an argument with her husband over her 'friendship' with Heathcliff, Catherine flees and locks herself in her attic chamber, refusing to eat (*WH* 118-20). Following three days in this space, Catherine "unbarred" her door (*WH* 120); this action alludes to the incarceration she experiences at the Grange, and mimics through her own self-confinement. Here, Emily Brontë uses spatial imagery to illustrate Catherine's suffering. She invokes the Gothic theme of confinement in order to explicitly criticise domestic ideology and the valourisation of marriage.

Though she unbars the door and lets Nelly in to the attic, Catherine remains in this space. The scene that unfolds between Catherine and Nelly has strong Gothic undertones, from the haggard, white-faced raving Catherine, to the supernatural imagery evoked by Catherine: her bed is a "fairy cave" and Nelly is a "hag" collecting "elf-bolts" (*WH* 123). This Gothic imagery hints, to some extent, at Catherine's mental deterioration, but it also invokes a sense of fear and dread, in addition to the aforementioned allusion to Gothic themes of confinement. To Catherine, this room is "haunted" (*WH* 123), by her childhood and by her unfulfilled desires. Like Gateshead Hall for *Jane Eyre*, and the Bretton household for Lucy Snowe, Thrushcross Grange is a space to which the heroine does not belong, and is thus deeply uncanny.

The attic within which Catherine locks herself represents a series of male-governed spaces: Thrushcross Grange itself; the Linton family; and her marriage to Edgar. Catherine's self-confinement mimics the imprisonment she feels within these spaces. Her confinement also represents an attempt to shut herself away from the Grange and its inhabitants, in order to decrease their power over her (DeLamotte 191). Perhaps Catherine shuts herself in the attic because its Gothic nature, in connection with the Heights of her home, represents safety and power? Catherine's decision to marry Edgar confines her within the role of middle-class wife and expectant mother, which in turn enforces restrictions upon her behaviour and her social relations. Catherine's declaration during the episode in the attic demonstrates her social confinement and alienation:

But, supposing at twelve years old, I had been wrenched from the Heights, and every early association, and my all in all, as Heathcliff was at that time, and had been converted at a stroke into Mrs Linton, the lady of Thrushcross Grange, and the wife of a stranger; an *exile*, and outcast, thenceforth, from what had been my world. (*WH* 125; my emphasis)

Catherine's use of the word 'exile' is key; she uses this spatial metaphor to describe her alienation and her sense of being 'locked out' of her own life. Catherine elaborates further, emphasising the significance of childhood:

Oh, I'm burning! I wish I were out of doors – I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free... and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them!... I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills... (*WH* 125-26)

Once more, Catherine strongly associates space with state: 'out of doors' corresponds to childhood, strength and freedom. Catherine evidently locates her real or true self in childhood (Weisser 104). Her attachment and devotion to her childhood may be interpreted as a rejection of adult femininity and her own adult life. Having found freedom as a relatively androgynous young girl,

Catherine is reluctant to enter (or remain in) the world of socially constructed normative adult femininity. Childhood is thus figured as a place of safety: remaining a child would entail avoiding the dangers of adult womanhood, such as the transition from subject to feminine object or the bearing of children (Homans *Dreaming* 272). Ellen Moers suggests that *Wuthering Heights* should be read as “a statement of a very serious kind about a girl’s childhood and the adult woman’s tragic yearning to return to it” (106). Significantly, Catherine’s yearning to return to and merge with nature suggests that her childhood attachment to the natural world was merely suppressed rather than ever fully rejected. Thus her entrance into the symbolic order, through becoming a ‘lady’, was only ever unstable, temporary and superficial (Homans *Bearing* 76-77).

Some time later, Catherine reiterates her desire to be ‘out of doors’. Like both Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, she describes confinement and freedom in spatial terms:

...the thing that irks me most is this shattered prison, after all. I’m tired, tired of being enclosed here. I’m wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; but really with it, and in it. (*WH* 161-62)

The ‘shattered prison’ may refer to Thrushcross Grange; whatever initial hopes she had for marriage and culture have surely been shattered. Perhaps more crucially, the ‘shattered prison’ may refer to Catherine’s own ailing body. Catherine is confined and limited according to her gendered destiny, and thus inevitably feels imprisoned within her own body. As I discuss in further detail in the following chapters, Catherine is subject to a vast array of symptoms and illness both in the attic and following her breakdown. Imprisonment within the female body, with all that this entails, is a central Gothic fear for women authors.

Emily Brontë thus uses architectural space to articulate the stark differences between girlhood and adulthood, childhood and marriage, nature and culture.

Though Thrushcross Grange corresponds to the idealised 'heaven' of domestic ideology, Catherine's Gothic experience in the attic demonstrates the dangers lurking within this space. Unlike the natural Gothic hell of *Wuthering Heights* (or the moors), in which Catherine feels strong and free, the Gothic space lurking within Thrushcross Grange bespeaks only confinement and suffering. The attic as metaphor for Catherine's married life at the Grange illustrates the way in which marriage is itself confining; it reduces the prospects of the female life, and reduces the space that the female body is allowed to occupy.

Emily Brontë's depiction of marriage is one of the most subversive elements of *Wuthering Heights*: she subverts the ideal of romantic love through the unhappy coupling of Catherine and Edgar, which is mirrored in those of Isabella Linton and Heathcliff, Catherine Linton and Linton Heathcliff (Weisser 94-5). For Emily Brontë, unlike earlier Gothic authors such as Radcliffe, marriage does not resolve conflict. Rather, it takes the place of the period of fearful physical confinement generally found in the middle of the traditional Gothic novel (Conger 92), such as Emily St Aubert's confinement in Udolpho castle. In the traditional Gothic plot, as indeed for the ideal nineteenth-century woman, marriage and domestic life represent the ultimate goal or reward for the heroine's struggles against the forces of darkness. The Gothic has been viewed as a quest-form; however, the heroine of the female Gothic, according to feminist critics such as Fleenor, strives for "a false ideal created by a patriarchal society" (11). Indeed, this false ideal offers the very opposite of happiness and fulfilment, for Catherine and for other Gothic heroines. Emily Brontë's depiction of Catherine's marriage thus violates both the Gothic genre and contemporary romantic ideology. This subversive re-ordering of Gothic tropes allows Emily Brontë to criticise contemporary ideals of femininity and domestic married life, particularly in relation to confinement, limitation and lack of freedom.

Emily Brontë uses the marriages of both Isabella Linton and Catherine Linton to reiterate the link between marriage and confinement. Isabella's belief in the romantic myth of heterosexual love blinds her to Heathcliff's true nature and the real possibilities entailed in a union with him. Far from finding domestic and

romantic bliss, Isabella becomes a victim of Heathcliff's "murderous violence" and is forcibly confined at Wuthering Heights, until she runs away (*WH* 171-72, 174). Heathcliff justifies his decision to keep her at home, explaining that he wishes to prevent her from "[disgracing]" him (*WH* 149). Further, as Heathcliff intimates to both Nelly and Isabella herself, her very marriage to him provides the grounds for his imprisonment of her: "I, being your legal protector, must retain you in my custody" (*WH* 151). This comment suggests that Emily Brontë had a clear understanding of marriage law and uses this narrative to criticise middle-class marriage in a specific way (Pike 351-52). Heathcliff's incarceration of Isabella within marriage and within an unhappy home mirrors Catherine's miserable imprisonment at Thrushcross Grange. These women effectively swap homes, and each comes to regret the decision. Through Isabella's descriptions of the horrors of married life, Emily Brontë violates romantic ideology that constructs marriage as a positive transformative force that changes a young lady into both woman and lady of the house (Pike 354). Like Isabella, Catherine Linton also moves from the cultured heaven of the Grange to the wild hell of the Heights in order to marry. Like Isabella, Catherine is forcibly incarcerated: Heathcliff locks her in the attic until she agrees to marry the sickly Linton (*WH* 272-76). Following Linton's death, Catherine remains at the Heights as a kind of servant to Heathcliff, having been forcibly inducted into the world of patriarchal violence and dominion (*WH* 12, 287, 299).

Through each of these unhappy marriages, Emily Brontë dismantles the sentimental conception of the middle-class home, offering a profound critique of domesticity. She illustrates that homes, along with their occupants, women and children, may become property to be acquired and controlled. Fundamentally, she demonstrates how nineteenth-century homes may become Gothic castles that serve to imprison young women (Pike 381). The natural Gothic paradise of Wuthering Heights is shown to be a space of freedom and power for Catherine Earnshaw. Even for Isabella Linton and Catherine Linton, who are forcibly confined at the Heights, the space leads to greater strength and a certain degree of monstrosity, as I discuss in the third chapter of this thesis. Thrushcross Grange and marriage, on the other hand, are condemned as the false goals

offered by domestic ideology and by traditional Gothic narratives, which will eventually kill Catherine herself.

This chapter has described the ways in which space is central to Emily and Charlotte Brontë's depictions of female subjectivity. Broadly speaking, architecture or physical space is key to the Gothic, particularly spaces that connect to history and mystery, and within which protagonists are threatened. Despite a tentative designation of these texts as Gothic, however, the relationship of the spaces written by Emily and Charlotte Brontë to those of traditional Gothic is not directly correlational. Both authors use architectural space to directly criticise Victorian ideology surrounding domesticity and romance. Charlotte Brontë uses the Gothic to warn of danger, even within seemingly realist settings: even outside the castle, heroines remain under threat. Perhaps most subversively, Emily Brontë reverses Gothic tropes in order to present marriage as the danger found in the centre of traditional Gothic texts. In a Victorian context, the Brontës can be seen to use physical space to both push the boundaries of traditional Gothic, and to expand the stories that are being told about women's lives.

Emily and Charlotte Brontë construct and utilise space to demonstrate intrusions upon female subjectivity and the female body. In analysing the significant spaces in which the protagonists exist and move, from the physical to the domestic and institutional, and from the Gothic to the non-Gothic, I have detailed some of the ways in which these spaces affect the women. Key themes include repression, isolation, confinement, limitation, and physical, intellectual and emotional deprivation. Charlotte Brontë uses physical spaces to illustrate the various forces working on her protagonists, particularly those that threaten, whereas Emily Brontë uses the space of Thrushcross Grange in particular to directly criticise domesticity as the central threat to female happiness and health.

Though both Emily and Charlotte Brontë share a sense of horror surrounding femininity and domesticity, they articulate this horror in different ways in relation to the Gothic. Charlotte Brontë uses Gothic tropes and Gothic

architecture, such as the spectral nun, Gothic villain and decaying house, to depict those dangers lurking in the domestic and ostensibly realist worlds of both *Jane Eyre* and *Lucy Snowe*. Conversely, Emily Brontë can be seen to reverse Gothic tropes in order to present the world of idyllic culture and the cults of femininity and domesticity as the most dangerous elements of Catherine's world. The harsh, violent and Gothic-seeming space of *Wuthering Heights* is the place where she is safest, in contrast to the deadly comforts of the non-Gothic Grange and domestic ideology. Similarly, as I discuss in chapter 3, the attic within which Catherine confines herself represents some small escape from the rest of the house, and thus an exertion of female power. Thus it can be seen that, for Emily Brontë at least, the Gothic itself is a space that allows both escape from and subversion of dominant modes of the day. The Gothic may form a kind of escape from bodily and social spaces, a turning inwards or fleeing from the world. As the final chapter of this thesis demonstrates, in addition to valourising the Gothic, Emily Brontë in fact constructs an omnipresent Gothic that pervades even the most domestic of spaces.

Chapter 2 – Patterns of Conformity: Patriarchal Conceptualisations of the Ideal Feminine

The figure of the delicate heroine passes repeatedly from fiction to reality and back again. (Michie 21)

[When we consider any 'female' pathology within a Foucauldian framework of power, we find] the body of the suffered deeply inscribed with an ideological construction of femininity emblematic of the period in question. (Bordo 168)

This chapter⁴ explores nineteenth-century constructions of normative femininity, and those ways in which Jane, Catherine, Lucy and other female characters conform to such structures. This exploration is conducted with a view to understanding how social ideology surrounding femininity plays out within the novels, particularly in relation to the suffering female body. In analysing how the protagonists conform to contemporary ideology surrounding femininity, I focus on the female body: how it manifests as a result of and embodies normative gender formations, and how it shrinks and suffers in response to conformity.

This exploration of nineteenth-century constructions of femininity particularly looks to 'crystallisations' of femininity: formations that capture multiple significant elements of normative femininity. As archetypal representations of idealised Victorian femininity, links may be observed between the traditional Gothic heroine, the 'angel in the house' and the tubercular woman. Each of these figures are passive and selfless, often sick(ly) or weak, and characterised by a virtue or purity that in turn renders them beautiful. This chapter therefore analyses the ways in which Emily and Charlotte Brontë engage with social, medical and literary tropes that collude in the patriarchal construction of ideal

⁴ Some material from Chapter 2 has appeared in 'Reading (not-)eating in the works of Emily and Charlotte Brontë', *Outskirts: feminisms along the edge*, vol. 36, 2017, pp. 1-21.

femininity. It becomes clear that the female body and the ways it is both disciplined and interpreted are central to notions of ideal femininity as explored by the authors.

2.1 The Gothic heroine and the 'angel in the house'

To continue the discussion from chapter 1, the Gothic mode, in its most traditional sense, may be described as a patriarchal space that replicates social ideology, thus creating and articulating femininity. The prototypical Gothic heroine embodies many aspects of normative Victorian femininity: she is beautiful, selfless, virtuous, suffering, often pale and slender, and, above all, passive (Russ 39-43; see also Conger 93-4). Significantly, the Gothic heroine is a subtype or evolution of that archetypal victim, the heroine of eighteenth-century sentimental fiction. The sentimental heroine is a virtuous (and chaste), suffering woman who is finally rewarded by marriage or elevated redemptively unto death (Todd 4). Where the sentimental heroine merely swoons, the Gothic heroine may display some curiosity in the face of danger. Fundamentally, however, each is a creature of sensibility, highly sensitive to her environment, who requires some form of rescue.

Radcliffe's Emily St Aubert forms an archetypal example of Gothic ideal femininity. She is traditionally beautiful, possessing "elegant symmetry of form...delicacy of features...[and] blue eyes, full of tender sweetness" (Radcliffe 5). Emily is schooled by her father and by the Gothic villain Montoni in the arts of self-control, repression and obedience (Radcliffe 5, 20, 77, 270). She is also deeply selfless, often "[forgetting] her own injuries in the misfortunes of her enemy" (Radcliffe 279). Emily may also be described as morally impeccable. She is animated by "duty" and "integrity" (Radcliffe 103), and almost sacrifices romantic happiness with Valancourt on two occasions, due to notions of impropriety (Radcliffe 155, 509, 512-18). Emily's virtue contrasts strongly with other women in the novel, who appear as slaves of vanity, avarice and "the corruptions of luxury" (Radcliffe 466; see also 11, 118, 140, 280-81, 376, 380).

The women who have been most acceptable to patriarchy throughout history have been passive, powerless, self-sacrificing and meek: this powerful conceptualisation is reflected in the traditional Gothic novel (Stein 124). Passivity is such a key characteristic of the Gothic heroine that “to act in the Female Gothic might be translated as not to act” (Fleenor 28). It is important to note that while women may be active in unravelling or transcending the Gothic mystery plot, they generally remain passive in relationships with men (Mussell 68). Heroines such as Emily St Aubert are often unable to rescue themselves, or to resist capture in the first place (Radcliffe 266, 447-52). In the face of violence and oppression, the Gothic heroine often becomes ill, loses appetite or faints (Radcliffe 87, 151, 154-55, 249, 262, 264, 286, 324, 507, 593).

In the words of Nina Auerbach, “Victorian womanhood is most delectable as a victim” (*Woman* 35). In the case of the Gothic heroine, victimhood refers to passivity, and also the heroine’s fragility and vulnerability to assault. As I demonstrate throughout this chapter, each of these characteristics links the Gothic heroine to the cults of domesticity and invalidism. The term ‘victim’ also refers to the ideal’s woman’s capacity to *suffer*. Suffering may be viewed as an intrinsic aspect of constructed femininity. Feminist critics have noted that patriarchal socialisation, and in particular eighteenth- and nineteenth-century romantic ideology, teaches women that, in a kind of sadomasochistic trade, they should suffer in order to attain some ideal, whether it be ‘feminine’ beauty, acceptance, salvation or love (Massé 3-4; Wooley 42). Girls therefore learn to forget or deny that they may have desired independence and agency and instead grow up to be suffering Gothic heroines (Massé 3-4). This association between suffering and ideal femininity is repeatedly reflected in Gothic literature (DeLamotte 157). In *Mysteries of Udolpho*, for example, Montoni explicitly verbalises this connection to Emily: “You speak like a heroine... we shall see if you can suffer like one” (Radcliffe 381). In traditional Gothic novels of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries, virtuous heroines are confronted with indifference, forced marriage and death, seeming destined to suffer as they are persecuted by patriarchal power (Botting 52). Moreover, female suffering is in fact valourised; in the case of Emily St Aubert, “a sacred pride was in her heart,

that taught it... almost to glory in the quiet sufferance of ills” (Radcliffe 381), and she is rendered “more interesting” by the melancholy that is etched upon her face (Radcliffe 502). Perhaps most importantly, the Gothic heroine suffers in silence: “Hers was a silent anguish, weeping, yet enduring” (Radcliffe 329).

Gothic authors such as Radcliffe depict virtuous women who suffer in order to affirm domesticity and female propriety: the close of the Gothic novel generally found the ‘good’ heroine in a state of secure domestic bliss (Botting 63-64, 70). Eleanor Tilney of *Northanger Abbey*, for example, is “entitled, by unpretending merit... [and] habitual suffering, to receive and enjoy felicity”, via her eventual marriage (Austen 260). The reward for the Gothic heroine is thus to become the ‘angel in the house’. In this way, the Gothic mode validates and perpetuates sociocultural ideology, by asserting that the performance of traditional or normative feminine roles has meaning and significance (Mussell 61, 64).

Some critics have pointed to the existence of collusion on the part of Gothic victims; the overwhelming power of the repressing force and consequent internalisation of repression is demonstrated by the way in which the heroine is immobilised, confined and silenced (Massé 18; see also Hoeveler 2-4). Options for escape or transcendence are limited by the protagonist’s environment and her own internalisation of its codes. Options for protest are likewise limited by what the protagonist’s self-knowledge allows to be voiced and the extent to which those around her are able or willing to hear and understand (Massé 20). Romanticised literary ideology, including within the Gothic, of suffering and masochism thus replicates cultural ideology surrounding femininity, relating to repression, silence, passivity and the valourisation of suffering.

Direct correlations may be observed between the Gothic heroine of literature and the ideal women in nineteenth-century society. The Gothic heroine both influenced and forms a manifestation of Victorian gender norms. Each of the characteristics outlined above links the Gothic heroine to her sister-types: the domestic angel and the consumptive beauty, as has been demonstrated by critics such as Susan Sontag (1977), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979), Juliann

Fleenor (1983),⁵ Elaine Showalter (1985), Michele Massé (1992), Fred Botting (1996) and Katherine Byrne (2011).

The figurehead for nineteenth-century conceptions of ideal femininity in the real world was the 'angel in the house', named after Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name (first pub. 1854). Patmore's angel is described as "simply, subtly sweet... fair... meek"; "so gentle and so good" (38-40). Moreover, this angel is also spiritualised: "round her happy footsteps blow/The authentic airs of Paradise" (Patmore 44). Deeply significant is Patmore's admission that "Man must be pleased; but him to please is woman's pleasure" (82). Broadly speaking, then, the 'angel in the house' was confined to the domestic sphere, and embodied idealised qualities such as purity, spirituality, submissiveness and selflessness. She was devoid of appetites and thus disembodied, desexualised and slender. In her quiet existence, this 'angel' also embodied silence and passivity. Significantly, invalidism became a normalised aspect of femininity in the nineteenth century: the ideal woman was fragile and weak, suffering and confined to the house or even the bed (see Appignanesi 110; Byrne 30-31; Gilbert and Gubar 53-55; Showalter *Female* 52-55; Sontag 33-34).

The appropriate sphere for the nineteenth-century woman was the domestic sphere, and this was the domain of the 'angel' (Auerbach *Woman* 69). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the bourgeois family was the leading model for appropriate social roles and behaviours (Mitchell 141). The husband lived in the active world and provided for the family, whereas the wife existed in the domestic setting and fulfilled the nurturing roles of wife and mother. Only the father was deemed morally strong enough to move freely through the outside world (Vandereycken and Deth 186). The home and family were viewed as refuge from a dangerous and amoral social world; the wife, women and girls were responsible for both maintaining this refuge and remaining within the domestic sphere in order to be protected (Brumberg 126; Ehrenreich and

⁵ See also Syndy Conger, Kay J. Mussell and Karen F. Stein in *The Female Gothic* (1983), edited by Juliann Fleenor.

English 21; Mitchell 141-43). The boundaries between the public and private worlds were sharply defined, and each gender inhabited the appropriate side of this divide (Auerbach *Woman* 69; Vandereycken and Deth 185).

One of the most salient features of this 'angel' is her purity (Auerbach *Woman* 69). As a partially secularised and domesticated manifestation of the Virgin Mary, the Victorian angel-woman is both pure and enshrined within the home; she becomes a living memento of divinity (Gilbert & Gubar 24). In keeping with Victorian codes of appropriate behaviour, purity implies a person who is above the earthly demands of the body, of the appetites. In terms of Victorian ideology, female sexuality is constructed as either secret, withheld and absent ("pure") or excessive, consuming and dangerous (Weisser 9), as in the case of *Jane Eyre's* Bertha Rochester, discussed at length in the following chapter. One mythic paradigm of women's sexuality in nineteenth-century British literature and society more generally is 'Moral Femininity'. The Morally Feminine heroine achieves self-definition and empowerment through restraining her own and her lover's desires (Weisser 12, 18). In this way, the Morally Feminine woman forms the moral guardian of both sexes.

Virtues such as submissiveness, modesty and selflessness were encouraged in Victorian women: the surrender of the self becomes the domestic angel's most significant action (Auerbach *Woman* 67; Gilbert & Gubar 23, 25; Glen 89). In both her selflessness and in her isolation from the ordinary fleshly life, this 'angel' is associated with death. The spiritualised Victorian woman effectively dies to her own desires, self and life, thus leading a kind of posthumous existence in her own lifetime (Gilbert & Gubar 24-25). The ideal nineteenth-century woman sacrificed the self and her own desires, particularly before the desires of men (Auerbach *Woman* 7). Through the denial of her desires and her own active subjectivity, the 'angel' is virtuous: denial is associated with moral certitude. The ideal nineteenth-century feminine life may be described as one of submission and 'contemplative purity': a life of silence with neither pen nor story (Gilbert & Gubar 35-36). Silence is therefore inextricably linked to purity and submission.

With each of these 'desirable' characteristics in mind, I now turn to a discussion of the ways in which Emily and Charlotte Brontë engage with key models of Victorian idealised femininity, from the Gothic heroine to the 'angel in the house' and the ailing invalid.

2.2 Ideal Femininity in Minor Characters

In terms of suffering and eventual reward, *Villette's* Paulina Home forms an exemplary manifestation of the will-less Virgin (Weisser 13), 'angel in the house' or traditional Gothic heroine. Her mother dies when she is young, and her father abandons her into the care of the Brettons. Though she represses her sorrows, it is clear that this lonely girl suffers immensely in her isolation (V 9, 26). Of course, Polly is eventually rewarded for her suffering through gaining Graham's love and the domestic affirmation of marriage. The very way in which they come back into each other's lives as adults, during the fire at the theatre, affirms the link between suffering and love. During the resulting chaos, "a young girl who has been very quietly and steadily clinging to a gentleman standing before us, was suddenly struck from her protector's arms by a big, butcherly intruder, and hurled under the feet of the crowd" (V 290). Here, Polly is painted as passive and deeply vulnerable to threat from without. Upon rescue, Polly forms Graham's "suffering burden"; she "*suppressed* a moan, and lay in his arms *quietly and patiently*" (V 291; my emphasis). Though she suffers, she remains a paragon of repression and passivity. Due to her obvious virtue and beauty, it is inevitable that this "faint and sinking girl" (V 292) will win Graham's heart and the Gothic reward of domestic bliss: marriage, children and a "blessed" life (V 483). In this way, Polly's narrative affirms the Gothic myth connecting love with suffering for the demure Gothic heroine.

In addition to being a traditional Gothic heroine, Polly is the clearest manifestation of ideal 'angelic' or moral femininity in *Villette* (see Hoeveler 232; Weisser 75). Through her repressed nature, passivity, selflessness, slenderness, ghostliness, purity and domesticity, Polly forms "a miniaturised compendium of

Victorian ideologies of femininity” (Boumelha 33). Lucy’s first impression of the young girl is as follows: she was “exceedingly tiny; but was a neat, completely-fashioned little figure, light, slight, and straight. Seated on my godmother’s ample lap, she looked a mere doll” (V 10). When Polly reappears as a young woman, she presents as an even clearer embodiment of Victorian feminine ideals. Upon meeting her again, Lucy “received a general impression of refinement, delicacy, and perfect personal cultivation” (V 292). During her initial stay with the Brettons, Polly, though only very young, is often depicted performing normative feminine domestic tasks such as table service and embroidery (V 18-19). Lucy’s description of Polly embroidering is particularly striking. She observes her:

pricking herself ever and anon, marking the cambric with a track of minute red dots; occasionally starting when the perverse weapon – swerving from her control – inflicted a deeper stab than usual; but still, silent, diligent, absorbed, womanly. (V 19)

Polly’s performance of this domestic task emphasises both her feminine nature and the connections between domesticity and femininity. Polly’s surname, ‘Home’, both describes her aptitude for domestic tasks and foreshadows her eventual role as wife in the home. The sewing scene also marks the hierarchy of ideal femininity over female health and wellbeing. In continuing to sew despite injuring herself repeatedly, Polly demonstrates her selflessness, which in turn reinforces her ideal femininity; she becomes “a miniaturised version of the domestic and self-abnegating woman, whose labours... are sprinkled with blood” (Boumelha 104). The description of the needle as a “weapon” capable of injury hints at the damaging nature of prevailing constructions of femininity: as this chapter explores, women may find themselves harmed by the domestic role prescribed by these constructions. Moreover, the sexual overtones of this passage hints at the dark side of heterosexual relations during this period. The “perverse weapon” renders Polly a woman, because her ultimate (and gendered) destiny is to be ‘pricked’ and thus made whole by man. This is the inevitable paradox that besets the angel in the house: though she must be pure and moral, she must also ‘fall’ in order to fulfil social expectations of wifhood and

motherhood. Reproduction, the female destiny, represents the death of unsullied purity. Moreover, as I discuss in relation to Catherine Earnshaw, motherhood represented a real physical threat to Victorian women.

Through Polly, Charlotte Brontë clearly engages with the trope of the Moral Feminine; the girl is an exemplar of purity and virtue, and is thus beautiful:

her seventeen years had brought a refined and tender charm which did not lie in complexion, though hers was fair and clear; nor in outline, though her features were sweet, and her limbs perfectly turned; but, I think, rather in a subdued glow from the soul outward. (V 306)

Lucy's suggestion that Polly's beauty emanates from the "soul" draws an explicit connection between angelic purity and attractiveness. In comparing Ginevra Fanshawe with Polly, Lucy highlights this particular virtue of Polly's: "the former, perhaps, boasted the advantage in material charms, but the latter shone pre-eminent for attractions more subtle and spiritual" (V 346). It seems that Ginevra's charms are *too* earthly or physical, whereas Polly is only angelic and pure. Unlike Ginevra, who seems to provoke base ardour in those who admire her, Polly garners only gentlemanly attraction.

Polly also exemplifies the trait of selflessness. In her domestic subservience to Graham, she often feeds him, while taking nothing for herself (V 27-28). Lucy elaborates further on Polly's seeming selflessness:

One would have thought that the child had no mind or life of her own, but must necessarily live, move, and have her being in another: now that her father was taken from her, she nestled to Graham, and seemed to feel by his feelings: to exist in his existence. (V 29)

Of course, it is unsurprising that Polly must “live, move, and have her being in” men, from her father to her eventual lover and husband: this is the goal of the Victorian ‘angel’. Polly will provide the novel’s marital ‘happy ending’, in part due to her status as a docile child-woman (Boumelha 104, 110).

As a paragon of domestic angelhood, Polly embodies those repressed and passive aspects of ideal femininity. Upon her father’s departure, Polly represses the “intolerable feeling... That day she would accept solace from none; nor the next day: she grew more passive afterwards” (V 26). Lucy contrasts Polly with other children, who “in grief or pain cry aloud, without shame or restraint; but this being wept: the tiniest occasional sniff testified to her emotion” (V 11). Even as a young child, she is a model of ladylike restraint: her emotions do not erupt or disrupt. The ‘much beloved’ deceased Justine Marie is another example of ideal, passive femininity. Lucy’s description of her portrait highlights her passivity: “its very amiability was the amiability of a weak frame, inactive passions, acquiescent habits” (V 434). Moreover, the reader discovers that Justine Marie was a nun, reinforcing links between acquiescence or repression and moral virtue.

Like Polly, Helen Burns of *Jane Eyre* is a morally pure and angelic young woman. A tribute to the Lowood system of moral management, Helen is intelligent, extremely pious, and seemingly indifferent to the material world. Moreover, she suffers emotional and physical abuse in silence, and is inevitably consumptive (Showalter *Literature* 113, 118). This ‘angel’ is fervently admired by Jane, who describes her beauty as “neither of fine colour nor long eyelash, nor pencilled brow, but of meaning, of movement, of radiance” (JE 85). Like Polly, Helen’s beauty seems to reflect a sense of inner or moral perfection. During a teacher’s shaming and punishment of her, Helen “looks as if she were thinking of something beyond her punishment – beyond her situation: of something not round her nor before her” (JE 62). In discussing the trials of this life with Jane, Helen confirms that her eyes are firmly fixed upon the afterlife:

We are, and must be, one and all, burdened with faults in this world: but the time will soon come when, I trust, we shall put them off in putting off our corruptible bodies; when debasement and sin will fall from us with this cumbrous frame of flesh, and only the spark of the spirit will remain, – the impalpable principle of life and thought, pure as when it left the Creator to inspire the creature. (*JE* 69)

Helen describes a dualist conception of the self: the body is figured as sinful and “corruptible” flesh, and the spirit as “pure”. Through her own identification with the soul, Helen represents a disembodied version of the feminine spirit (Showalter *Literature* 118). Moreover, she forms the diametrically opposed angel to Bertha Rochester’s monster. Helen’s goodness, her radiance and beauty, is figured as the result of her spiritual or moral perfection. Helen’s death, before any chance of marriage and motherhood, renders her eternally pure and her body *incorruptible*. Unlike Jane and Bertha, she will never have to navigate the worlds of patriarchy and domestic femininity as an adult woman.

Furthermore, Helen is characterised as a paragon of self-abnegation, submission, and therefore virtue (Boumelha 76; Henson 28; Kucich 927). When she is made to stand in the middle of a class-room in disgrace, Helen remains silent (*JE* 62). Repression is, of course, inextricably tied to silence. In addition to being without self, body and desires, the decorporealised ‘angel’ is also without voice. She is silent, passive and meek, offering only compliance. Helen Burns’ behaviour when standing on the chair in disgrace highlights this aspect of the angel: Jane “expected she would show signs of great distress and shame; but to my surprise she neither wept nor blushed: composed, though grave, she stood” (*JE* 62). Helen Burns is thus an exemplar of suffering and self-renunciation, remaining magnanimously silent in response to the teachers’ cruel and unjust treatment of her (*JE* 62, 65-6, 86). Through her silent “doctrine of endurance” (*JE* 66) and the way she is oriented toward the afterlife, the virtuous Helen links the rejection of self-defence with a kind of transcendence, beyond the grave (DeLamotte 197; Kucich 927).

Later, Helen remains magnanimous regarding the teachers' cruel treatment of her (*JE* 66), entreating Jane to "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you" (*JE* 69). During a period of punishment, Jane is overcome by Helen's smile at her. Significantly, she describes Helen as "a martyr, a hero" (*JE* 79). Her smile "was the effluence of fine intellect, of true courage; it lit up her marked lineaments, her thin face, her sunken grey eye, like a reflection from the aspect of an angel" (*JE* 79). Helen Burns, this angel or "perfect victim", exemplifies idealised femininity through the passive acceptance of suffering (Showalter *Literature* 118). Helen doubles Jane through manifesting this self-abnegating aspect of Jane's personality: the tendency toward masochism and self-defeating codes of conduct (Hoeveler 220; see also Showalter *Literature* 118). Helen's tendency toward masochism constructs her as a form of Gothic heroine, though one destined for death rather than marriage. In fact, Helen's death from tuberculosis marks her as triply pure: she is the suffering Gothic heroine, the Victorian angel, and the beautiful invalid.

Much like her young protégé, Helen Burns, Miss Temple is a manifestation of ladylike values such as beauty, gentility, magnanimity, cultivation, courtesy and above all, repression (Gilbert and Gubar 344-45; Henson 45). According to Helen, the teacher is "full of goodness" (*JE* 67). Jane describes her in more detail:

Miss Temple always had something of serenity in her air, of state in her mien, of refined propriety in her language, which precluded deviation into the ardent, the excited, the eager: something which chastened the pleasure of those who looked on her and listened to her, by a controlling sense of awe. (*JE* 85)

Miss Temple's "refined propriety", precluding ardent or excited expression, gives a clue to her capacity for repression. Repeatedly, then, Charlotte Brontë presents female characters who repress their true natures, thoughts and feelings and are thus virtuous. Like her young protégé, Miss Temple also embodies silence and passivity. During Mr Brocklehurst's outburst regarding the provision of additional food in case of spoiled breakfast, Miss Temple remains silent:

she now gazed straight before her, and her face, naturally pale as marble, appeared to be assuming also the coldness and fixity of that material; especially her mouth closed as if it would have required a sculptor's chisel to open it, and her brow settled gradually into petrified severity. (*JE* 75)

Despite her feelings on the subject, Miss Temple's closing of her mouth, in particular, indicates her capacity for self-suppression and passivity in the face of male oppression. The valourisation of female passivity and silence reflects the fact that patriarchal culture has viewed female presumption, particularly female speech that revolts against male dominion, as monstrous (Gilbert and Gubar 35). Conversely, Miss Temple's self-suppression marks her as morally virtuous.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë also engages directly and explicitly with the 'angel' trope. Compared to her mother, Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Linton represents a more straightforward manifestation of social codes surrounding ideal femininity. Nelly's descriptions of Catherine, the "angel" (*WH* 213), provide a point of reference for our understanding of normative femininity, articulating both Catherine's character and the reception of such a character by a patriarchal world (*WH* 123). Catherine is clearly described as a 'better' woman than her mother:

Her spirit was high, though not rough, and qualified by a heart, sensitive and lively to excess in its affections. The capacity for intense attachments reminded me of her mother; still she did not resemble her; for she could be soft and mild as a dove, and she had a gentle voice, and pensive expression: her anger was never furious; her love never fierce; it was deep and tender. (*WH* 189)

Catherine Linton's perceived superiority is due to the mixing of Catherine Earnshaw's blood with the gentler, more cultured Linton blood. As a child, Catherine Linton therefore seems to better embody the nineteenth-century feminine ideal than her mother ever did. At one point she is even referred to as a

“happy creature, and an angel” (*WH* 213). Compared to her mother, Catherine is a far more ideal manifestation of femininity; she is sensitive and mild where her mother is fierce, passionate and even rough. Like Helen Burns and Polly Home, the young Catherine is also selfless and self-sacrificing. She embodies this fundamental characteristic of ideal femininity in her relationship with her father:

I care for nothing in comparison with papa. And I’ll never – never – oh, never, while I have my senses, do an act, or say a word to vex him. I love him better than myself, Ellen... I would rather be miserable than that he should be – that proves I love him better than myself. (*WH* 231)

Catherine’s comment regarding loving her father better than herself echoes her mother’s assertion regarding Heathcliff: “Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff” (*WH* 82). This doubling mirrors the paradoxical doubling of the Angel/Monster dichotomy. Where the second Catherine embodies angelic selflessness, her mother demonstrates monstrously rebellious desires. Unlike her mother, who arguably refuses to enter the symbolic order, the second Catherine accepts the law of the father and a certain degree of angelhood (Homans *Bearing* 68). However, as I explore in the following chapter, the young Catherine gradually devolves into a less ‘angelic’ figure.

Thrushcross Grange seems to breed ‘ideal’ women. Like Catherine Linton, Isabella Linton begins the text as a relatively ideal female. As inhabitants of the Grange, the siblings Edgar and Isabella Linton are constructed in opposition to the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights. Unlike the wild and natural world of Wuthering Heights, the Grange is a manifestation of civilised culture. Echoing Lucy’s description of Polly as a “doll” (*V* 10), Heathcliff describes Edgar and Isabella disdainfully as “petted things” (*WH* 48). Catherine confirms this, commenting that “they are spoiled children, and fancy the world was made for their accommodation” (*WH* 98). Isabella is clearly a representation of the ideal bourgeois woman. Unlike the wild, roaming Catherine, she remains inside her domestic haven, and is frail and relatively passive throughout much of the text.

She is also beautiful, possessing bright yellow hair, white skin, and a “dainty elegance” (*WH* 98). Catherine’s descriptions of Isabella are revealing: of her eyes, she says “they are dove’s eyes – angel’s!” (*WH* 107). Like the young Catherine Linton, she is explicitly described as an ‘angel’, hinting at the ways in which she adheres to Victorian conceptions of ideal femininity.

After falling in love with Heathcliff and being warned away from him by Catherine and Edgar, Isabella demonstrates some typical Victorian female behaviour: she frets, pines, refuses food, and mopes silently (*WH* 101, 120). Particularly through her doomed relationship with Heathcliff, Isabella Linton may be viewed as another kind of prototypical Gothic heroine. Emily Brontë uses her experiences to engage with romantic and Gothic ideology concerning the connection between suffering and love or marriage. Isabella may be compared to Emily St Aubert, except that rather than being imprisoned by the Gothic villain, she actually marries him. As discussed in the preceding chapter, Emily Brontë subverts the Gothic by replacing the traditional period of fearful confinement with marriage. Isabella’s desire to marry Heathcliff, even in the face of his violence and derision (*WH* 106, 110, 129), suggests her belief in the Gothic fantasy that suffering will lead to recognition and love. Isabella reads like a heroine who is well versed in Radcliffean Gothic. In Heathcliff’s own words, Isabella “abandoned [the comforts of home and family] under a delusion... picturing in me a hero of romance” (*WH* 149).

Isabella’s description of *Wuthering Heights* as an “ancient castle” (*WH* 137) deliberately invokes Gothic convention (Pike 360), reflecting Brontë’s intention to engage with the myth of Gothic romance and with Gothic tropes such as confinement and bodily intrusion. Once ensconced at the Heights, Isabella is subject to imprisonment and ill-treatment by Heathcliff. Isabella is denied love and receives only cruel sadistic treatment: “I gave him my heart, and he took and pinched it to death; and flung it back to me” (*WH* 174). Heathcliff suggests that Isabella enjoys ill treatment and will crawl back to him regardless: “no brutality disgusted her – I suppose she has an innate admiration of it” (*WH* 150). Critics such as Joyce Carol Oates have pointed to Isabella’s perceived masochistic nature

(443). In this state, accepting ill treatment in exchange for marriage, and confusing this ill treatment for love, Isabella conforms to expectations of the masochistic heroine in Gothic literature. Moreover, Isabella is subject to domestic incarceration within both marriage and the traditional Gothic romantic fantasy.

It is in part because Isabella begins life as a cultured and naïve angel of the house that she is susceptible to violent brutality at the hands of Heathcliff. Through her character, Brontë demonstrates how 'genteel' women can become abuse victims, due to their naïve absorption of false notions of romance and marriage (Pike 272). Through Isabella's narrative, in addition to Catherine's, Emily Brontë criticises Victorian notions of romantic love and marriage, and thus the romantic myths perpetuated by the Gothic mode. Brontë modifies Gothic conventions due to dissatisfaction with Victorian literary definitions of femininity and feminine happiness (Conger 92). Fundamentally, Brontë seeks to break the associations between suffering and love or happiness; she does this by presenting marriage as a space of confinement, suffering and abuse, rather than the domestic idyll replicated throughout Gothic literature and Victorian society more broadly. Isabella's experiences with Heathcliff and with marriage mirror Catherine's own experience with marriage, as discussed in the preceding chapter; each relationship is used to condemn ideals of marriage and domesticity for Victorian women. Unlike Heathcliff, however, Edgar Linton is not painted as a traditional Gothic villain; he is blond, sweet, never violent and a child of culture. However, the effects of marriage to each of these men are the same for Catherine and Isabella. In much the same way that she destabilises the Gothic trope of marriage as a happy haven, Emily Brontë destabilises the trope of the dark, violent Gothic villain, demonstrating that any husband, by taking part in the dangerous institution of marriage, may become a villain.

This chapter so far has explored many of the attributes of the idealised Victorian woman, whether 'angel in the house' or Gothic heroine: purity, submissiveness, passivity, silence, disembodiment, desexualisation, the absence of appetites, and the ability to suffer. I now turn to a detailed discussion of the ways in which Jane

Eyre, Lucy Snowe and Catherine Earnshaw conform to Victorian expectations of the feminine. Key expressions of conformity include Jane's external appearance and physical wasting, Lucy's wasting, repression and mental deterioration, and Catherine's various illnesses and eventual death.

2.3 Jane Eyre

As highlighted in the preceding chapter, *Jane Eyre* draws heavily on Radcliffean Gothic in terms of plotting and female development. Charlotte Brontë also draws upon the traditional Gothic mode in her representation of Jane as a 'proper' woman. Jane overcomes various threats to her subjecthood, and suffers throughout the text. Like a true Gothic heroine, she remains pure (even in the face of Rochester's love). Like Emily St Aubert, whose moments of joy in her final reunion with Valancourt "repay me for all those of pain I have suffered" (Radcliffe 668), Jane is rewarded for both her continued virtue and her suffering by the final acquisition of true love and a husband. When compared with either Lucy Snowe or Catherine Earnshaw, Jane forms the fullest expression of the Gothic heroine trope. Brontë uses Jane's body in particular to express those ways in which she conforms to expectations of feminine virtue.

Charlotte Brontë uses Jane's outward appearance to demonstrate some of the ways in which she adheres to notions of ideal femininity. In addition to behaviour, purity and virtue may be demonstrated through clothing. Women have always been subject to more stringent bodily control than men. Fashion is a locus of patriarchal control over women's bodies and consists of powerful constraints regarding self-presentation, and the ways in which others interpret one's attitudes, behaviour and identity (Seid 9). In nineteenth-century terms, austere tastes may reflect a subject's self-control and discipline. Etiquette books of the time suggested that women should avoid attracting attention by dressing plainly (Mitchell 139). At Lowood School, Mr Brocklehurst's explicit "mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh; to teach them to clothe themselves

with shame-facedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel" (*JE* 76).

Much is made of Jane Eyre's sober and simple tastes, in addition to her plain appearance. For example, Jane demonstrates puritanical attitudes when Mrs Fairfax suggests they dress for her first meeting with Rochester; she will not put on her best dress, which "in my Lowood notions of the toilette, I thought too fine to be worn, except on first-rate occasions" (*JE* 136). Indeed, Jane generally dresses very plainly, in her "usual Quaker trim" (*JE* 147). Jane's sartorial puritanism is also evident in her attitudes toward others. For example, she clearly disapproves of Adele's frivolous nature and dedication to her toilette: "there was something ludicrous as well as painful in the little Parisienne's earnest and innate devotion to matters of dress" (*JE* 194). Jane's sartorial sobriety later in life may therefore be viewed as a form of acquiescence to contemporary codes of femininity, particularly in light of her evangelical education at Lowood.

Prior to meeting Blanche Ingram, based purely on descriptions by Mrs Fairfax, Jane creates portraits of herself and Blanche in order to remind herself of Rochester's intentions and her own failings. Tellingly, she titles them thus: "Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, plain" (*JE* 183) and "Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank" (*JE* 184). When she meets Blanche, along with the rest of the visiting party, it is clear that these women belong to a different world. Jane describes the dress of each woman, highlighting the bright colours, expensive accessories and even jewels worn by the women (*JE* 194-95). Elaborate clothing formed a declaration of higher social status in Victorian women (Mitchell 139). This series of descriptions serves to emphasise the differences between these rich, flamboyant women and Jane: poor, plain and wearing her 'best' grey dress. Blanche herself, of course, proves to be just as beautiful as Mrs Fairfax had described her (*JE* 195-96). Blanche stands in cultural opposition to the Moral Feminine, or 'angel', as an ambitious, assertive and self-interested expression of femininity (Weisser 13, 22). Though Jane obviously feels and is described as inferior to Blanche in significant ways, Rochester

demonstrates her superiority by eventually choosing her to be his wife, and condemning Blanche for her interest only in his fortune (*JE* 285-6). Thus, just as Jane's plain dress distinguishes her from these ladies as belonging to a lower stratum of society, as well as being poorer and less beautiful, it also marks her greater 'goodness' and morality.

Even after she discovers that Rochester prefers her to Blanche, and accepts his proposal, Jane's view of herself remains firm. She cautions Rochester, beseeching him as follows: "don't address me as if I were a beauty; I am your plain, Quakerish governess" (*JE* 291). She also cautions him against buying her jewels: "jewels for Jane Eyre sounds unnatural and strange: I would rather not have them" (*JE* 291). In the month preceding their wedding, Jane is uncomfortable with Rochester's determination to buy her fine dresses: "the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation" (*JE* 301). She is so stubborn in her puritanical attitudes that eventually, however, she manages to persuade him to heed her: "with infinite difficulty, for he was stubborn as a mule, I persuaded him to make an exchange in favour of a sober black satin and pearl-grey silk" (*JE* 301).

Given the strength of Jane's convictions regarding her own beauty and sober tastes, we may view Rochester's determination to buy her gifts and fancy dresses as some kind of warning that he does not understand her, or will not be able to fulfil her needs. Moreover, if her sartorial sobriety is a reflection of morality, Rochester's behaviour may reflect a disregard for her moral health. Upon their reunion at the close of the text, Rochester evidences a markedly changed attitude, saying to Jane: "the third day from today must be our wedding-day, Jane. Never mind fine clothes and jewels, now: all that is not worth a fillip" (*JE* 495). The reader may infer that Rochester has been 'moralised' and now shares the same values as Jane. On the other hand, the disempowered and maimed man may simply be grasping at anything to secure Jane's hand, so as not to lose her once again.

Beyond her adherence to expectations of the 'good' woman through her external clothing, Jane's very body epitomises acquiescence. The denial of desires and of self that is so central to normative Victorian femininity is closely tied to a disavowal of physical self or physicality. The fewer desires and appetites that a subject has, the less connected they are to their physical body and its processes. This ideal woman is idealised and beatified to the point that she becomes removed from the world of food, and her own bodily functions and desires (Cozzi 79). The ideal nineteenth-century woman may be described as a disembodied or de-corporealised figure; in the absence of sexual desires, she is also desexualised (Weisser 9, 12). The sexual life of individuals, particularly women, was strictly restrained by external and internal censorship (Vandereycken and Deth 203). Female sexual desire had no place in Victorian society. The ideal woman was thus removed from the physical world, in both her domestic confinement and in her distance from the earthly processes and desires of the flesh.

Charlotte Brontë engages with cultural ideology surrounding the ideal female body by painting Jane as a somewhat disembodied figure. Jane is framed by Rochester in supernatural terms. Upon meeting her, he describes her as a "fairy" who has "the look of another world" and asks whether she belongs to the "men in green" (*JE* 139). Following the fire in his bed, Rochester refers to Jane as "witch, sorceress" (*JE* 169), and following his gypsy stunt, "spirit" (*JE* 230). Rochester's conceptualisation of Jane's lack of physical presence, expressed in otherworldly terms, is troubling. When he repeatedly describes her as part of his own flesh, he uses romantic rhetoric to disguise "the sinister implication that she has no flesh of her own" (Michie 24). Moreover, due to her perceived lack of physical strength and even body, in Rochester's eyes Jane does not require physical sustenance. While he feasts with Blanche and the other guests, Jane is forced to forage for food (*JE* 191). To Rochester, Jane's ethereality directly contrasts with Blanche's fleshliness (Michie 24).

Like Jane Eyre, *Villette's* Polly is also introduced by Lucy as a "creature" and a "being" (*V* 10), hinting at her otherworldly or inhuman nature, her lack of humanity or corporeality. Lucy's later descriptions of the child Polly further

describe the decorporealised nature of this domestic ‘angel’: she refers to Polly as a “small ghost” (V 38), and finds rooms that she inhabits “haunted” (V 15). This reference to haunting is significant: here, within an ostensibly realist domestic space, Charlotte Brontë gestures once more to the Gothic. Spectrality in female-authored Gothic is often a metaphor for disempowerment and repression; in her limited life, the haunting ‘angel’ is a marginal and repressed figure (Torgerson 95; Wallace 26). As a young adult, Lucy reiterates Polly’s decorporealised and inhuman nature: “an airy, fairy thing – small, slight, white – a winter spirit” (V 304). These descriptions of Polly’s ghostliness allude to both disempowerment and the disembodiment associated with idealised femininity. Polly’s bodily, reproductive fate is obfuscated, to some extent, by physical and social denials of what this body is *for*—it’s for reproduction, the inevitable death of unsullied purity, and potential death in childbirth.

Beyond a certain disempowered ‘ghostliness’, the ideal woman was rendered doubly incorporeal by prevailing attitudes toward female appetite. The ways in which the ideal woman ate, and the resulting nature of her corporeal form, are thus especially significant for this discussion of patriarchal conceptualisations of the feminine. At various points throughout history, the control of female appetite is encouraged or promoted by certain social and cultural systems, but for different reasons and purposes (Brumberg 42, 46). On both a symbolic and literal level, prevailing constructions of femininity have required women to feed others, not the self, and to construe any desire for self-nurturance or self-feeding as excessive. This control of female appetite is simply the most concrete expression of a general rule governing the construction of femininity: “that female hunger—for public power, for independence, for sexual gratification—be contained, and the public space that women be allowed to take up be circumscribed, limited” (Bordo 171; see also Michie 16). For example, as discussed in the following chapter, the hungry Bertha Rochester must be contained lest her sexuality overwhelm Mr Rochester.

Historically, and persisting to today, there exists a representational tradition in which depictions of women eating (particularly enjoying food in a sensual

fashion) are taboo. The Genesis narrative of the fall is a powerful expression of cultural perceptions and ideologies regarding women's appetites: "sin and death enter the world when a woman eats" (Heller and Moran 1). The representation of unrestrained female appetite as transgressive formulates restriction and denial as central components of the construction of femininity. Further, the thin body or 'nonbody' comes to represent purity, the triumph of will over the unruly (female) body, and transcendence of the flesh (Bordo 147-48).

Evidence of such attitudes toward female appetite and worldliness may be found in *Jane Eyre*. Mr Brocklehurst, the supervisor and emblem of Lowood School, is a direct manifestation of social doctrines regarding the governance of ideal femininity, as well as religious doctrine. During a visit to the school, he criticises Miss Temple for allowing the students to have extra food on days when the porridge is ruined:

You are aware that my plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying. Should any little accidental disappointment of the appetite occur, such as the spoiling of a meal, the under or the over dressing of a dish, the incident ought not to be neutralised by replacing with something more delicate the comfort lost, thus pampering the body and obviating the aim of this institution; it ought to be improved to the spiritual edification of the pupils, by encouraging them to evince fortitude under the temporary privation. (*JE* 74)

Here Brocklehurst valorises deprivation and denial, in the service of fostering self-denial and spiritual purity in the orphan girls. On the very next page, he explicitly connects the denial of food with spiritual purity: "Oh, madam, when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge into these children's mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls!" (*JE* 75). In this way, Brocklehurst connects female appetite and satiation with spiritual corruption and impurity. This confluence of

gender and religious ideals is utilised in the deprivation and wasting of female bodies.

Lowood doctrine is an extreme representation of the ways in which food deprivation may be used to tame the appetite in physical, social and intellectual ways. The school diet, in both alimentary and intellectual terms, aims to render the girls “hardy, patient, self-denying” (Scholl 121-22). Food and taste are used to control social positioning within this school context. The young girls are in a state of perpetual hunger due to the insufficient provisions, and they are expected to be grateful for any morsel at all; this reduces any human differentiation of taste to a base need to fill their bellies, thus reducing their social prospects (Scholl 122). The outcome of the Lowood diet, broadly speaking, on Jane is observed by Rochester:

The Lowood constraint still clings to you somewhat; controlling your features, muffling your voice, and restricting your limbs; and you fear in the presence of a man and a brother – or father, or master, or what you will – to smile too gaily, speak too freely, or move too quickly. (*JE* 158)

In Jane’s capacity for self-control, her sartorial sobriety, her tiny form and her quiet, passive demeanour, she retains these Lowood sensibilities for much of the text.

Glen highlights Brontë’s use of Jane’s experiences at Lowood to engage specifically with discourses of evangelicalism surrounding childhood and womanhood. The evangelical child, unlike the Romantic child, is already destined for hell, and was “subjected also to a rigorous discipline, aimed at subduing the desires of the flesh, instilling humility and obedience, and fitting them for eternity” (Glen 72). The successfully-reared child, such as Helen Burns or even Jane herself, internalises self-suppression. Children also learn to associate suffering with love, believing that parents beat them because they loved them and desired to ‘save’ them (Glen 74-75). In this way, connections emerge

between different strands of social ideology: religious discourse may be observed and reflected in literature, particularly narratives of (Gothic) romance.

Beyond a private nightmare vision, Jane's experiences as a child therefore offer a realistic and damning portrayal of evangelicalism (Glen 78). *Jane Eyre* draws attention to not just physical privation and punishment, but also the insidious ideologies of self-subjugating discipline and death, as espoused by evangelicalism (Glen 81). These ideologies of death and discipline are reflected in the characters of both Helen Burns and St John Rivers (Gilbert and Gubar 346; Glen 78-9). As discussed above, Helen is an exemplar of self-abnegation and unsurprisingly destined for death. Similarly, St John's religious fervour and his desire to mortify the flesh and serve God carry him toward death at the end of the text. The experience of childhood was unlikely to be transcended in adulthood by middle-class girls; the model of appropriate womanhood presented by moralists and inscribed in the popular rhetoric of romantic love entailed subordination and dependence, rather than self-assertion. In this way, women remained just as powerless as evangelical children—instead of being disciplined and humiliated, women were subjected to more invisible forms of control: they were expected to be modest, submissive and restrained (Glen 82, 87). Religious and moral ideology is thus reflected in the rhetoric and literature of romantic love. Beyond control and submission, the model of appropriate womanhood held other dangers for women. It was common knowledge in the Victorian era that motherhood posed a literal threat to female life; women often died during or following childbirth. In this way, the annihilation implied by romantic love becomes more than metaphoric (Glen 89, 91).

Beyond evangelical discourses of childhood and womanhood, the control of female appetite during the nineteenth century was related to broader issues of morality. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a 'civilised' appetite and tastes developed, and controlled eating became a marker of virtue (Vandereycken and Deth 210, 240). Much like sexuality, food formed a central preoccupation for Victorian Britain. Broadly speaking, society was plagued by "anxieties of ingestion" (Cozzi 4-5). Ingested substances, from chocolate cake to

foreign literature, were seen to reveal something about the subject's capacity for self-governance (see Gilbert 65-66). M. Paul's censorship of Lucy's education and reading material, as discussed in the preceding chapter, reflects male fears surrounding female ingestion and excessive 'appetite' for knowledge (*V* 385, 390).

Alimentary self-control is, much like other forms of restriction or discipline, of particular significance for women, as "custodians and embodiments of virtue for the culture" (Seid 11). The eating process itself, necessitating digestion and defecation, was unfeminine, and female discomfort with food and eating formed a pervasive subtext of Victorian popular culture. The Victorian woman was dehumanised to such an extent that constipation was incorporated into ideal femininity (Brumberg 178; see also Seid 11). Links were imagined between literal and sexual appetite and women were encouraged to restrict their appetite and avoid 'stimulating' foods such as meat and spices (Brumberg 176-78; see also Michie 15; Schlossberg 94). Such restrictions indicate that although women were expected to be spiritual and pure, society believed that constant vigilance was required to repress women's appetites and sensual nature. The ideally pure woman therefore eats delicately and little; she is sickened by meat, in much the same way she is sickened by sexual desire (Michie 17).

During the nineteenth century, gluttony and corpulence were linked to both physical ugliness and moral reprehensibility (Brumberg 179). As the slender female body became more idealised, correspondingly denigrating attitudes toward women who did not fit this ideal emerged: "voracious, uncontrollable, irrational, bestial, and craven, the hungry woman is second only to the fat woman in her projection and representation of male fear and disgust" (Cozzi 79). In lacking appetites, whether for food or sex, the ideal middle-class Victorian woman contrasted with both the hungry poor and indulgent aristocracy.

In both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, narrators' descriptions of the eating habits of others are illuminating. Charlotte Brontë uses Jane Eyre's cousins to engage directly with discourses of consumption. In describing John Reed, Jane explains:

“He gorged himself habitually at table, which made him bilious, and gave him a dim and bleared eye and flabby cheeks” (*JE* 16). Here, Jane is derisive and critical of John’s excessive consumption. Moreover, she links his ill-temper to his ‘gorging’, suggesting perhaps that over-consumption makes him immoral. In John, Brontë paints a picture of “alimentary excess”, which spills over into violent excess toward his family and toward Jane (Scholl 122). Furthermore, John’s indulgence undermines his school education, disrupts his intellectual and social development and results in his eventual self-destruction (Scholl 122-23). His sister Georgiana may be viewed as a manifestation of self-indulgent, consuming and therefore inappropriate femininity (Weisser 64). In criticising her sister Georgiana, Eliza calls her “such a fat, weak, puffy, useless thing” (*JE* 264). Here, Eliza draws connections between corpulence and physical weakness or lack of usefulness, in addition to immorality.

In contrast to the frivolous Georgiana, Eliza herself is a model of asceticism, denial and renunciation. She is:

very thin... There was something ascetic in her look, which was augmented by the extreme plainness of a straight-skirted, black, stuff dress... hair combed away from the temples, and the nun-like ornament of a string of ebony beads and a crucifix. (*JE* 256)

Eliza is incredibly disciplined, and eventually gives herself to God through becoming a nun (*JE* 264, 272). In her asceticism and severe morality, Eliza represents an extreme version of Victorian ideals of moral femininity (Weisser 64). In comparison to the “full-blown, very plump” (*JE* 257) Georgiana, Eliza is clearly presented as a ‘better’ woman. As a small-figured and somewhat puritanical figure herself, Jane appears to have more in common with Eliza than Georgiana: to an extent, they respect and understand one another, each admitting that the other has “some sense” (*JE* 272).

Negative attitudes toward female appetite and the denigration of fat bodies inevitably give rise to the slender body as manifestation of beauty and virtue.

Slenderness became associated with the upper and classes; “the thin body not only implied asexuality and an elevated social address, it was also an expression of intelligence, sensitivity, and morality” (Brumberg 187; see also Vandereycken and Deth 210-12, 240). Earlier beauty ideals such as the reproductive figure (pre-seventeenth century) and the hour-glass figure (eighteenth century) were displaced by the new tubular, slender body (Vandereycken and Deth 212-15). From the early nineteenth century onwards, the feminine beauty ideal centred on the slender or ‘wasp’ waist (Michie 21; Silver 30). Discipline of the body, such as tight-lacing, became important in achieving this physical ideal and conforming to codes of self-control and the denial of body, appetites and self. A slender waist indicated the lack of appetites, including carnality, which was so important to the Victorian construction of ideal femininity. Moreover, in addition to an angelic or spiritual nature, slenderness also represented female weakness and vulnerability (Silver 27-29). The aesthetic cult of fragility and delicate beauty was linked to the moral cult of angelhood: women were required to become “slim, pale, passive beings” and in doing so became beautiful (Gilbert and Gubar 25; see also Michie 20; Silver 95-6).

Various female characters in these texts exhibit slender bodies. Some are naturally small or slender and others become ever thinner in response to external circumstances. Fundamentally, these characters exhibit slenderness and waste away in accordance with or as a consequence of patriarchal conceptualisations of the feminine. Manifestations of slenderness may be viewed as conformity to aesthetic ideals, or expression of moral character. *Villette*'s Polly conforms to nineteenth-century beauty standards via slenderness. In addition to her “impression of refinement, delicacy, and perfect personal cultivation”, Lucy notes, “this girl herself was a small, delicate creature, but made like a model” (*V* 292-3). Polly's diminutive and delicate form is linked with both beauty and morality, in the form of ‘personal cultivation’.

Beyond reflecting the ideal feminine, slenderness may also manifest in response to the negative consequences of acquiescence to gender codes. As I explore throughout this chapter, both Emily and Charlotte Brontë use wasting and

starving to figure deprivation and malnourishment, from the literal to the emotional, spiritual and social. Due to the limited social construction of femininity and of female lives, women exist in states of confinement and limitation: the wasted, suffering bodies of the women in these texts form the inevitable consequence of normative gender formations.

Jane's vulnerability to patriarchal power and oppression, as well as expectations of femininity, is illustrated via her body. Jane is repeatedly, as both a young girl and as a grown woman, described as tiny and child-like. As discussed above, her time at Lowood School presents a shocking example of male control over female appetite, due to patriarchal expectations of femininity. When Bessie visits before Jane leaves for Thornfield, she notes that in all the intervening years, Jane has not grown "so very tall... nor very stout" (*JE* 105). Rochester describes his first impression of Jane as a "childish and slender creature" (*JE* 351). Though we know that Jane suffered malnourishment during her education at Lowood, it seems clear that her lack of growth also reflects her lack of affection and love: food is not the only thing Jane has been deprived of.

In arguing with Rochester over his supposed marriage to Blanche Ingram, Jane connects her diminutive size to the other respects in which she may be perceived as lacking: "do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? – You think wrong! – I have as much soul as you, – and full as much heart!" (*JE* 284). Though she repudiates the idea that she has lesser feelings, through connecting smallness with plainness and poverty, her remark suggests that her diminutive size represents her relative importance within society. Thus it can be seen that Jane is tiny because she has been denied love and affection, but also because her position in society renders her 'small' or unimportant. As discussed earlier, Rochester's perception of Jane as 'otherworldly' demonstrates that he sees her without a real physical presence, or flesh of her own (Michie 24). Jane's small body thus represents her marginalisation and disempowerment within society, and within her relationships.

Significantly, when Jane and Rochester begin to grow closer and she experiences some semblance of happiness, perhaps for the first time in her life, she begins to put on weight:

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; my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength. (*JE* 166)

Jane no longer hungers for companionship, and therefore grows in size. Several pages later, Jane reiterates the connection between health, particularly robust physical health, and happiness or hope: “now I looked much better than I did when Bessie saw me; more life, more vivacity; because I had brighter hopes and keener enjoyments” (*JE* 179). Charlotte Brontë uses Jane’s gathering of flesh to reinforce the connections between health and love, deprivation and shrinking.

Jane’s weight, and indeed health, waxes and wanes in accordance with her relationship with Rochester. Though she initially gains flesh when they become closer, the threat of Blanche to Jane’s happiness heralds a return to her earlier physical state. Like prototypical Gothic heroines such as Emily St Aubert (see Radcliffe 286, 593), Jane is unable to eat and thus sickens in the face of distress. Rochester notes that, since he last saw her, she is “getting a good deal paler than you were... What is the matter?” (*JE* 204). In these novels, paleness is often connected with physical wasting. While Blanche, the fleshly beauty, attracts Rochester’s time and attention, it follows that Jane would begin to waste away. This is reinforced during the dinner party, when Jane is forced to forage for food (*JE* 121; Michie 24).

Upon leaving Rochester and Thornfield, Jane spends several days destitute, starved and alone. St John and his sisters take her in, and the reader views her condition through their eyes. Jane is “worn to nothing. How very thin, and how very bloodless! ... ‘A mere spectre!’” (*JE* 377). This “poor, emaciated, pallid

wanderer” (*JE* 379) is clearly physically unwell and “much wasted” (*JE* 381). Even after days of care and bedrest, according to Diana: “You still look very pale – and so thin! Poor child! – poor girl!” (*JE* 384). In light of Jane’s previous waning in the absence of Rochester’s affection, this development may be read as the physical expression of her loss of Rochester: the manifestation of her deep suffering. Jane’s flight from Rochester following his indecent proposal may also be interpreted as an expression of unwavering morality. Perhaps in adhering to gender codes she invites a fuller expression of the idealised female form: a thin and sick body.

This section has demonstrated the ways in which Jane Eyre acquiesces to patriarchal conceptualisations of ideal femininity. In particular, it is Jane’s body, whether her outward presentation, the ways others conceive of her body, or the way in which she repeatedly shrinks, that expresses her acquiescence to prevailing gender codes and the consequences of this. In shrinking and suffering, Jane’s body continually gestures to Gothic notions of femininity. In *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë again explores the consequences of ideal femininity for the female subject, paying particular attention to the consequences of repression, from wasting to madness.

2.4 Lucy Snowe

Much like Polly Home and Helen Burns, Lucy exhibits a certain degree of selflessness or self-abnegation throughout the text. During the concert, Lucy leaves her seat according to Graham’s wishes: “willingly would I have kept mine also, but Graham’s desire must take precedence of my own; I accompanied him” (*V* 246). Similarly, during the fire at Vashti’s performance, when Graham instructs Lucy to stay still, “at the price of my very life, I would not have moved to give him trouble, thwart his will, or make demands on his attention” (*V* 290). Indeed, in her broader relationship with Graham, Lucy appears overwhelmingly selfless and passive. In her repeated musings on their relationship, Lucy shoulders the blame for any sadness she might feel, suggesting that his

happiness is of far greater importance than her own. In her own words, Lucy's is "a soon-depressed, an easily-deranged temperament – it fell if a cloud crossed the sun" (*V* 349).

In behavioural and emotional terms, repression forms another key feature of idealised Victorian femininity. Deborah Tolman and Elizabeth Debold suggest that women throughout history participate in a trade of conformity to aesthetic and social ideals for safety, believing that "by sacrificing knowledge of our bodily appetites and passionate feelings, we will be kept safe from rape, poverty, and loneliness" (302). Of course, the other side of this agreement is not necessarily upheld. This 'bargain' is struck within a socio-political context that prescribes norms for feminine behaviour and appearance, and in so doing, denies women active desire (Tolman and Debold 303). In order to become safe and loved, girls remove their authentic selves, or suppress them, during the process of creating relationships (Steiner-Adair 382). This is particularly evident in Lucy's relationship with Graham, as well as her participation in the world of Villette.

Lucy is highly skilled in the arts of repression. Repeatedly, she suppresses her true feelings and tells no one: "This longing, and all of a similar kind, it was necessary to knock on the head" (*V* 121). She appears realistic, even pessimistic, regarding her options: "About the present, it was better to be stoical; about the future – such a future as mine – to be dead" (*V* 120). Lucy seems to view her repression and pessimism as a form of self-protection: "Loverless and inexpectant of love, I was as safe from spies in my heart-poverty, as the beggar from thieves in his destitution of purse" (*V* 131).

Charlotte Brontë uses the Gothic mode to further explore Lucy's repressive tendencies. As a prototypical Gothic figure, the ghostly nun represents the return of the repressed—in this case, Lucy's repressed desires (DeLamotte 276; Gilbert and Gubar 425-26; Hoeveler 227; Shuttleworth 226; Torgerson 69). The nun symbolises displacement; through her, desire is endlessly deferred and disembodied (Vrettos 68; Wein 735). Repression is here connected with a lack of voice: Lucy is unable or unwilling to voice her desires to Graham, so the nun

manifests as those desires. Like those Gothic metaphors of confinement and spectrality, the unspeakable, inability to voice or the experience of being silenced points to the repression inherent in the nineteenth-century female subjective experience (Massé 21; see also DeLamotte 24).

The nun, a figure lacking both self and will, may be read as a symbol for both moralised femininity, and the more specific repression required by the Catholic church in order to be a 'proper' woman (see Torgerson 60; Weisser 84). The nun therefore represents the confinement caused by patriarchal expectations of single women, namely self-abnegation, chastity, and service (Gilbert and Gubar 426). Moreover, the nun forms a symbol of female life nullified via religious control (Stoneman *Charlotte* 70). More specifically, the nun may also represent the oppression Lucy faces from the Catholic forces around her. The Gothic metaphor of spectrality hints at disembodiment and disempowerment, in addition to repression (Wallace 26). Connections may be drawn between spectrality, the denial of female desires and physicality, and the decorporealisation of the ideal nineteenth-century woman. A woman denied desires, physicality, activity and autonomy may well become a spectre, haunting her own life or the lives of others. Repressed desires themselves may also haunt women—in the Gothic, the uncanny is formed by the ghostly return of repressed events and feelings. The nun thus forms the uncanny spectral embodiment of both Lucy's desires and their repression. Furthermore, the nun may represent a kind of voluntary confinement or concealment. We may read the nun as a manifestation of Lucy's anxiety regarding passion and imagination, and her very right to life: a projection of Lucy's desire to be hidden, confined and desexualised. Indeed, for much of the novel, the severely repressed Lucy "strives for a literal form of live burial, recapitulating the experience of the nun" (Shuttleworth 233).

Like Jane Eyre, Lucy also exhibits puritanical attitudes toward dress, demonstrating further her tendency toward repression and severity. In dressing for the concert, she is concerned that even the plainest of dresses is somehow extravagant: "the dress was made with extreme simplicity, *guiltless* of flounce or

furbelow; it was but the light fabric and bright tint which scared me" (V 232; my emphasis). The word 'guiltless' implies an association between sin and decoration or luxury, demonstrating Lucy's extreme ascetic attitudes. It is only when "Graham found in it nothing absurd" that Lucy's "own eye consented soon to become reconciled" (V 232). Graham seems to view Lucy's sobriety as a failing on her part, explaining that "Lucy's disadvantages spring from over-gravity in tastes and manner – want of colour in character and costume" (V 371). By contrast, M. Paul shares Lucy's tastes. He even criticises her for perceived indulgences, questioning "what fatal influence had impelled me lately to introduce flowers under the brim of my bonnet... and even to appear on one occasion in a *scarlet gown*" (V 369). In this way, he both supports and undermines Lucy. Later in the text, Lucy is concerned that her pink dress will outrage M. Paul (V 420-21), demonstrating her continued awareness of his strict judgement regarding dress and her desire to please him.

Much like Jane, Lucy's sober tastes may be seen to reflect her puritanism and adherence to gender codes. Moreover, these tastes are a specific manifestation of her High Protestantism. Her severe dress code reflects her ever-present desire to demarcate herself from the "swinish multitude" (V 91) of Catholics in Villette, who are "robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning" (V 141; see Boumelha 118). Throughout the text, Lucy remains convinced of the superiority of both Protestantism and the English lady (Boumelha 118). Protestant England condemned the indulgence of Catholicism and abstinence was thus glorified. Lucy repeatedly aligns indulgence with Catholicism, defining herself against such slavery and indulgence (Cozzi 81, 96). In this way, Lucy's clothing represents her own extreme self-repression as well as her religious and cultural beliefs.

As in *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë uses Lucy Snowe's body to engage with Victorian ideology surrounding female embodiment. Lucy, like Jane, demonstrates critical attitudes toward 'consuming' women. In the art gallery, Lucy becomes critical of various portraits depicting robust femininity: "Several very well executed and complacent-looking fat women struck me as by no means

the goddesses they appeared to consider themselves" (V 222). Lucy goes on to opine at length regarding the obese 'Cleopatra' portrait:

She was, indeed, extremely well fed: very much butcher's meat – to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids – must she have consumed to attain that breadth and height, that wealth of muscle, that affluence of flesh. She lay half-reclined on a couch: why, it would be difficult to say; broad daylight blazed round her; she appeared in hearty health, strong enough to do the work of two plain cooks; she could not plead a weak spine; she ought to have been standing, or at least sitting bolt upright. (V 223)

The 'Cleopatra' is based on *Une Almée* by the Belgian artist Edouard de Biefve (see V 574n9). The painting depicts a dark-skinned 'dancing girl' reclining against cushions. This Cleopatra is an image of passive sensuality on display (Boumelha 109). As she examines the painting, Lucy becomes increasingly critical of the woman depicted: "She had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa. She ought likewise to have worn decent garments; a gown covering her properly, which was not the case: out of abundance of material... she managed to make inefficient raiment" (V 223). Lucy appears to focus her criticism on the woman's apparent (in Lucy's eyes, unacceptable) indolence and her impropriety or lack of virtue. However, in her vitriolic description of the piece, Lucy clearly connects the woman's size to both her indolence and immorality, equating fleshliness with promiscuity. Charlotte Brontë uses female plumpness as a sign of 'fallen nature' (Michie 22, 27). Ginevra Fanshawe is plump, and grows ever plumper until her final elopement with de Hamal. She often consumes much of Lucy's food and wine, while Lucy repeatedly refuses food, remaining "silent, sanctimonious, and puritanical" throughout the novel (Michie 22). Lucy's condemnation of the woman in the portrait, in addition to her 'sanctimonious' attitude toward Ginevra, may constitute evidence that she has incorporated and thus regurgitates ideologies of normative femininity.

Like Jane, Lucy also draws a connection between greed or appetite and stupidity. Lucy points out two students in the audience at the concert:

who, during their last year at school, ought to have been in the first class, but whose brains had never got them beyond the second division... Also during three months I had one of them for my vis-à-vis at table, and the quantity of household bread, butter, and stewed fruit, she would habitually consume at 'second dejeuner' was a real world's wonder – to be exceeded only by the fact of her actually pocketing slices she could not eat. (V 239-40)

These words echo Lucy's earlier criticism of Catholics as "robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale" (V 141). In addition to her continued criticism of the excesses of Catholicism and the Continent, Lucy here seems to echo nineteenth-century discourse that denigrates both female appetite and plump, presumably healthy female bodies. Charlotte Brontë's characters thus exhibit evidence of social ideology that connects female appetite with stupidity, laziness, uselessness, immorality and ill-temper.

Beyond criticism of fat or consuming women, Lucy's own body conforms to the ideal feminine form. Like Jane and Catherine, Lucy is often described as a 'wasted' woman. Following the death of Miss Marchmont and the withdrawal of her "morsel" (V 42) of human contact, Lucy becomes "thin, haggard, and hollow-eyed; like a sitter-up at night, like an over-wrought servant, or a placeless person in debt" (V 48). Here, she connects wasting with lack—of love, sleep, energy, place or money. Lucy's nine days of starvation during the school holidays similarly represent deprivation: she is utterly alone and utterly miserable. Rather than the denial of literal food that young Jane is subject to, Lucy is denied human company and thus, in her isolation, 'starves'. We may read her inability to eat as both a direct physical manifestation of extreme distress, and as a metaphor for the lack of human contact and love in her life.

When Lucy is abandoned by the Brettons, particularly Graham, she compares herself to “a poor, pallid, wasting wretch” (V 296). Much like Catherine, when faced with the potential loss of her beloved, she starves in anticipation of impending deprivation. Similarities may also be observed between depictions of Lucy and those of Jane following her wandering destitution and the withdrawal of Rochester’s affection. In both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë repeatedly links the withdrawal of love and affection to wasting of the physical figure. Inevitably, the more these women are deprived and the more they miserably waste away, the more they conform to codes of femininity. In this way, the relationship of these characters to food represents their place in and interaction with a given community (Scholl 119).

The absence of food or eating is linked to aspects of idealised femininity such as self-control and repression. As I discuss in greater detail in the following chapter, consumption is intimately connected to voice. Because eating and speaking are linked via the mouth, if the mouth is stifled—if women are unable to express their desires—then they may also find themselves unable to eat. Charlotte Brontë uses malnourishment and self-imposed starvation to figure emotional repression. Lucy’s inability or unwillingness to voice her desires for much of the text is a manifestation of her broader repression and self-regulation, as discussed above. The ways in which she conceives of and treats hope forms an interesting exemplar. She metaphorises “Hope” as food: “my hunger has this good angel appeased with food, sweet and strange, gathered amongst gleaning angels, garnering their dew-white harvest in the first fresh hour of a heavenly day” (V 256). However, at various other points in the text, her inner monologue reveals the triumph of reason over hope: “That evening more firmly than ever fastened into my soul the conviction that Fate was of stone, and Hope a false idol – blind, bloodless, and of granite core” (V 177). Lucy’s “vindictive” reason (V 256) is the repressing force inside her, which drowns out her imagination and feelings and stays her tongue (V 177). In conceiving of hope as food, and repeatedly repressing hope, Brontë demonstrates that Lucy starves herself as she silences herself.

At the end of the text, when Lucy sees M. Paul after believing him to have already left, she represses her outburst: "I clasped my hands very hard, and I drew my breath very deep; I held in the cry, I *devoured* the ejaculation, I forbade the start, I spoke and I stirred no more than a stone" (V 513; my emphasis). This scene reinforces the linkage between voice and consumption: here, Lucy consumes her own thoughts and needs, rather than voice them aloud. Moreover, as discussed earlier, in denying her own feelings regarding Graham and refusing to voice them, she starves in his absence, becoming the "poor, pallid, wasting wretch" (V 296).

Beyond the physical manifestation of repression, Lucy Snowe suffers psychological consequences of adhering to normative conceptions of femininity. Lucy endures several bouts of physical and psychological disturbance. Unlike her Gothic predecessors, Lucy's confrontation with the supernatural, in the form of the nun, is assigned neurological causation as 'hysteria' (Vrettos 60). One peak episode of psychological illness occurs during the school holidays. Lucy is left alone as sole carer for the 'cretin' and experiences a period of intense depression, mental illness, and wasting. In her own words, "attendance on the crétin deprived me often of the power and inclination to swallow a meal, and sent me faint to the fresh air" (V 174). During this vacation, Lucy is utterly isolated and becomes increasingly miserable and distressed: "My heart almost died in me; miserable longings strained its chords. How long were the September days! How silent, how lifeless! How vast and void seemed the desolate premises! How gloomy the forsaken garden..." (V 172). Lucy's feelings of isolation are as compelling as her sense of imprisonment within this "vast" and "desolate" space. Jon Hodge suggests that Lucy's psychological illness during this time may be characterised as the result of her monomaniacal obsession with being abandoned and forgotten (905-7).

After some time, her charge is removed and then Lucy is truly alone (V 174). Her condition worsens:

...at last a day and night of peculiarly agonizing depression were succeeded by physical illness, I took perforce to my bed... for nine dark and wet days, of which the Hours rushed on all turbulent, deaf, disheveled – bewildered with sounding hurricane – I lay in a strange fever of the nerves and blood. Sleep went quite away. (*V* 176)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Lucy begins to, seemingly, hallucinate as the beds turn into “spectres” and “death’s heads” (*V* 177). The anthropomorphisation of space suggests that Lucy is threatened by her own mind. As she explains later, Lucy’s mental condition deteriorates until finally, for nine days, she is unable to eat or sleep (*V* 192). Clearly, Lucy suffers due to her isolation, the pressures of caring for the girl, and her increasing misery and psychological disturbance.

Lucy’s psychological illness may be the consequence of division or fragmentation due to different desires and contrasting expectations placed upon her (Gilbert and Gubar 412). Repression plays a key role in her psychological deterioration, creating a tension between her authentic and performed selves (see Vrettos 67). Lucy stands in the middle of a religious conflict regarding womanhood—the Protestant script (as represented by Graham Bretton) expects a woman to be a shadow, resigned to her lot, whereas the Catholic script (as represented by Péré Silas) expects a single woman to become a nun. Though she remains devoutly Protestant, neither ideology allows for Lucy’s desire to live actively and fully in the world. Lucy’s psychological disturbance may partly result from this conflict between the religious expectations of patriarchal culture and Lucy’s inner life (Torgerson 60).

In their discussion of eating disorders in contemporary society, Tolman and Debold highlight the damaging effects on young women of repression and attempts to conform to societal expectations. These issues pertain to women of the Victorian era also. Women who endeavour to embody the ideal have no recognised sexual feelings, and live without desire or connection to their bodies.

This state of being, living as flattened images with no acknowledged appetites, puts women at psychological risk (Tolman and Debold 309, 312). It may be conceived of as a psychological division, between the presentation of a self that best approximates what will be favourably received, and the 'real' self who may not fit these criteria: girls expend much effort both establishing the 'right' way to be and hiding the parts of themselves which do not conform (Steiner-Adair 382). As I discuss further in chapter 3, Lucy does not conform to normative gender formations in various ways; namely, her intense desires and imagination, and desire to connect with other people. The tension between her true self and the expectations placed upon her contribute to her mental breakdown. *Villette* thus depicts Lucy's individual experience of suffering, but also the way this experience is determined by and representative of the culture in which she exists (Vrettos 80).

According to Graham Bretton, Lucy's sighting(s) of the nun are an indicator of mental instability on her part. Graham is the only person that Lucy tells for a time, and his reaction to her confession sheds light on another yet another patriarchal institution operating upon and controlling Lucy: the medical establishment. The medical establishment, both during and prior to the nineteenth century, has traditionally controlled and confined women, denying them voice and autonomy. Though he is considerate toward Lucy and seems to genuinely desire her health, Graham does not take her complaints seriously. Regarding the nun, he tells her "it is a case of spectral illusion: I fear, following on and resulting from long-continued mental conflict" (V 278). Like so many others treating female patients before him, the doctor decides "this is all a matter of the nerves" (V 277). He makes no room for the possibility that she saw something real and cautions her to remain silent on the matter (V 278). In showing how Lucy's voice is taken from her, Charlotte Brontë criticises the medical establishment: "Not one bit did I believe him; but I dared not contradict: doctors are so self-opinionated, so immovable in their dry, materialist views" (V 285). Graham's interpretation of Lucy's vision offers little consolation or support, leaving her feeling isolated and misunderstood.

This section has demonstrated how, in *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë again interrogates notions of bodily conformity, through Lucy's sartorial sobriety and repression. However, she also extends the analysis begun in *Jane Eyre* of the suffering caused by existing in a patriarchal world. *Villette* explores further the nature of female illness(es) and those crucial relationships between repression and physical and psychological deterioration. In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë provides an even starker portrayal of the bodily cost of conformity to gendered expectations. She also demonstrates the ways in which women have been perceived as 'angelic' and virtuous due to illness.

2.5 Catherine Earnshaw

Like Jane, Lucy and Gothic predecessors, Catherine becomes ill as a result of starving, though she deliberately chooses not to eat. Following three days in the attic during which she eats nothing at all, Nelly describes her "ghastly countenance" and "wasted face" (*WH* 121). Though Nelly for some time underestimates Catherine's condition, it is immediately apparent to Edgar when he comes to the chamber: "the haggardness of Mrs Linton's appearance smote him speechless" (*WH* 127). Though Catherine's starvation may be read as a form of protest or attempt to exert control over her circumstances, as I explore in the following chapter, it can also be read as a straightforward metaphorical expression of her confined life and broader malnourishment. In this way, as in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, conformity to patriarchal ideology regarding femininity is shown to result in a wasting body.

Catherine adheres to expectations placed upon her by patriarchal society, and consequently suffers various kinds of deprivation, including physical wasting. Catherine's decision to marry Edgar confines her within the role of middle class wife and expectant mother, and within the space of Thrushcross Grange, which in turn enforces restrictions upon her behaviour and social relations. Catherine's wasted body may therefore be interpreted as a manifestation of deprivation. Enshrined within Thrushcross Grange, she is removed from her childhood, the

moors, and her true love Heathcliff. Though not much detail is given regarding Catherine's daily life at the Grange prior to Heathcliff's return, the reader may infer that her life is circumscribed and quite isolated. As discussed in the previous chapter, shortly before her death, Catherine states that she is "tired of being enclosed" in her "shattered prison" and "yearning" for the world outside (*WH* 161-62). Catherine describes herself as an "exile" and "outcast" and wants nothing more than to return to the wild freedom of her childhood (*WH* 125). Heathcliff's return is both the return of her true love and a reminder of all that she has sacrificed in order to become Edgar's wife. In response to Edgar's demand that she choose between them, Catherine begins to starve: the mere mention of losing Heathcliff for good, after having him returned to her, enacts a terrible consequence upon her body. Her self-starvation and wasting may therefore be viewed as a manifestation of deprivation: of childhood, of the outside world, of her home, and of the connection with Heathcliff that she craves. Much like Lucy in *Villette*, Catherine's experience links starvation with silence. When faced with Edgar's ultimatum regarding her and Heathcliff and his refusal to hear or understand her desires, Catherine loses her voice and retreats into silence and starvation (Stoneman *Catherine* 531). Indeed, "she had no breath for speaking" (*WH* 118).

Toward the end of the text, Heathcliff passes three days with no food and no sleep, much as Catherine did in the attic. His experience clearly echoes Catherine's, reinforcing the doubled nature of their relationship. Shortly before Heathcliff's death, Nelly describes him thus: "your cheeks are hollow, and your eyes blood-shot, like a person starving with hunger, and going blind with loss of sleep" (*WH* 333). These words echo those earlier descriptions of the insomniac and wasting Catherine, reinforcing a sense of doubling between the two. Nelly is also "persuaded that he did not abstain on purpose; it was the consequence of his strange illness, not the cause" (*WH* 336). We may infer from this statement that the physical starvation experienced by both Catherine and Heathcliff is a consequence of being denied one another. In this way, denial of each character's needs is figured as literal starvation and wasting. Thus it emerges that

Catherine's starvation is a manifestation of the deprived state of her existence, as the result of her incarceration within the domestic space.

The proliferation of wasting protagonists in these Brontë texts may recall a modern disorder to the mind of the twenty-first-century reader. Though anorexia nervosa was not named until 1873 and is generally thought to be a twentieth- and twenty-first-century disorder, women in the nineteenth century and indeed throughout Western history have demonstrated an inability or refusal to eat. We may therefore look to theories surrounding anorexia for further insight into broader discourses of slenderness and self-denial. Critics such as Susan Bordo have argued that the slender body represents much more than an unrealistic aesthetic ideal, or a manifestation of purity (170). Naomi Wolf argues that anorexia is the representation of patriarchal desire for absolute control over women. The starving woman is the perfect woman, because she is "weak, sexless, and voiceless, and can only with difficulty focus on a world beyond her plate" (100). Wolf suggests that economic and political retaliation against female appetite and female power holds far greater explanatory weight than most other causal theories of anorexia (100). This theory can easily be applied to the nineteenth-century conceptions of idealised femininity, or indeed a broader tradition of female fasting and illness: patriarchy has repeatedly fostered behaviours and ways of inhabiting the world that leave women weak, silent and powerless.

By the nineteenth century, slenderness had come to embody and represent various aspects of ideal femininity, from self-control and self-sacrifice to purity and decorporealisation, fragility and passivity. In this way, the prevailing aesthetic ideal reflected moral and social ideology regarding female behaviour. The popularity of dangerous practices such as tight-lacing and vinegar-drinking indicates societal condoning and even encouragement of damage to female bodies, female illness and death, all in the service of delicate beauty. This particular nineteenth-century ideology surrounding female illness has been referred to as the 'cult of invalidism' (Ehrenreich and English 93; Gilbert & Gubar

25, 54; Michie 20-21). Catherine's lengthy period of invalidism in fact represents the closest she adheres to normative expectations of femininity.

In the nineteenth century in particular, illness came to form a defining characteristic of femininity. The "socially conditioned epidemic of female illness" (Gilbert & Gubar 55) during this time may be seen as an extreme manifestation of certain aspects of ideal nineteenth-century femininity. Feminist critics have argued that the apparent epidemic of female invalidism in the nineteenth century (or even as a broader historical phenomenon) is a result of patriarchal oppression: to be trained in denial and renunciation is almost necessarily to be trained in ill health. Moreover, we may conceive of various 'female' afflictions as hyperbolic or stereotypical expressions of ideal femininity. Pathologies such as hysteria and anorexia nervosa function as inherent or inevitable parodies of social proscriptions. In this way, the 'female' illnesses of nineteenth-century women may have been the goals, rather than merely by-products, of their training in femininity (see Appignanesi 143; Gilbert & Gubar 54).

Female illness emerges as a central concern of *Wuthering Heights*, and is one of the themes used by Emily Brontë to connect Catherine's experiences to those of other women. Following her violent episode of illness in the attic, Catherine suffers a long invalid decline. Through her decline and death, Emily Brontë explicates a variety of issues surrounding Victorian constructions of female invalidism. Of particular note is the connection between patriarchal conceptualisations of the ideal feminine and female illness and suffering. Crucially, civilisation or culture may be viewed as the source of all illness in *Wuthering Heights*: each representation of illness in the text is merely a symptom of a diseased cultural system (Torgerson 90-91). Upon Catherine's initial entrance into the Grange—following her dog bite—the Lintons treat the girl as an invalid. The Lintons also feed her cakes, which may be interpreted as the food of culture, and thus poisonous (Gilbert and Gubar 303; see also 273). By the time Catherine closes her mouth on food, it is too late; she has been domesticated and is doomed to invalidism and death. Catherine experiences peak episodes and a long decline of illness while entombed within the Grange. For Catherine, and

indeed for other women in the text, becoming a lady alienates her from her self and makes her sick. Ideal femininity, that restrictive product of culture, is inextricably linked with female illness and suffering.

The nineteenth-century cult of female invalidism valorised illness. Invalidism embodied those female characteristics deemed most desirable by Victorian society: purity, passivity, and self-sacrifice. As manifestations of cultural ideology surrounding femininity and female roles, a direct link emerges between the cult of invalidism and the aforementioned 'angel in the house'. In an era characterised by moral repression, the resigned, incapacitated and suffering woman, often confined to her sickroom, formed the antithesis to sin, worldliness and problematic corporeality (Byrne 95). Moreover, both the invalid woman and the domestic angel are weak, passive and subservient to patriarchal figures such as the husband or physician.

Within a society that valorises ill health as a signifier of ideal femininity, the physical manifestation of illness inevitably becomes linked to feminine beauty (Byrne 99-100). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the tubercular or consumptive aesthetic—"dramatically pale and ethereally thin with the red cheeks and bright eyes of fever"—was associated with vulnerability, virtue and sensitivity, and consequently with desirable fragility and sexual attractiveness (Byrne 92-93; see also Ehrenreich and English 98; Sontag 34; Vandereycken and Deth 215). This association of the tubercular appearance with beauty represents the complete antithesis of traditional beauty standards, which had always been associated with health and vitality. The association of tuberculosis with beauty was supported by misunderstandings surrounded transmission. Tuberculosis was believed to 'choose' those that it afflicted, revealing something singular about the afflicted person, and to affect the beautiful and talented more often than common humanity (Byrne 20, 93; Sontag 43).

Beyond the physical attributes of tuberculosis and their association with ideal femininity, it is necessary to consider key cultural perceptions of the illness. A link was perceived between tuberculosis and excess emotions. However, like

other aspects of the illness, this link was also characterised by paradox. Popular conceptions held that tuberculosis was a disease of both passion and repression (Sontag 26). The associated fever was a sign of “inward burning”: the tubercular is ‘consumed’ by ardour, which in turn leads to the dissolution of the body (Sontag 25). It is for this reason that tuberculosis was originally named ‘consumption’; the body is ‘consumed’ by the illness. Common mythology held that an intense passionate feeling or event could provoke a bout of tuberculosis. Building on the apparent association between tuberculosis and excess emotions, ‘to die of a broken heart’ is given physical meaning by the use of tuberculosis in Victorian literature: the disease of female consumptives often functions as an expression of inner or emotional suffering (Byrne 29). Tuberculosis was also interpreted as a pining for death, reflecting an understanding of the disease as ‘resignation’. Tuberculosis represented a prototypically passive death and was sometimes viewed as a form of suicide, albeit an acceptable one within a Christian socio-religious framework. In a way, the illness absolved the sufferer, providing a way of retreating or retiring from the world without claiming agency in such a decision (Sontag 28-9, 38). Such passivity or resignation may result from the repression of passions and desire—a conscious suppression of desires that can’t be fulfilled.

Respiratory issues, exemplified by the distinctive bloody cough, is one of the most characteristic tubercular symptoms, along with loss of appetite. The disease has been thought to cause consumption of the body from within: wasting, “disintegration, febrilisation, dematerialisation” (Sontag 18). Because tuberculosis is associated with the lungs, it takes on qualities associated with the upper, spiritualised regions of the body. This disease of the lungs is thus, metaphorically, a disease of the soul, or the ‘spiritualisation’ of consciousness: “in TB, you are eating yourself up, being refined, getting down to the core, the real you” (Sontag 71, 22). Like the slender or fasting body, the consumptive body reflects bodily purification and the denial or diminishment of the ‘dirty’ physical body. The Romantics used tuberculosis to moralise and aestheticise death in a new way: the illness was seen to dissolve the gross body, etherealise the personality and expand consciousness (Sontag 24). Lord Byron himself

expressed a desire to “die of a consumption” because ladies would find it “interesting” (Motion 499). Perhaps most famously, John Keats suffered from and eventually died of tuberculosis; public perception held that he had been ‘spiritualised’ by the process, which in turn added to Romantic perceptions of the illness (Motion 495-501, 565-66). Tuberculosis thereby provided a decorative, even lyrical death (Sontag 24).

Through the character of Catherine Earnshaw, Emily Brontë explores female illness, particularly tuberculosis, as a marker of ideal femininity. Inevitably, it is through her illness and slow decline into death that Catherine best conforms to nineteenth-century codes of femininity. Catherine’s lengthy period of invalidism, characterised in part by tubercular symptoms, renders her, finally, ‘ladylike’. Following her physical and mental breakdown in the attic, Catherine spends two months convalescing: “Mrs Linton encountered and conquered the worst shock of what was denominated a brain fever” (*WH* 134). Though she recovers somewhat, Catherine is never the same following her breakdown in the attic: she is “a mere ruin of humanity” (*WH* 134; see also 147). She is described thereafter as “the invalid” and demonstrates greater understanding of her condition than either Nelly or Edgar: Catherine believes that she shall die within the year (*WH* 135), and is proved correct. According to Nelly, the “paleness of her face... and the peculiar expression arising from her mental state... refuted more tangible proofs of convalescence and stamped her as one doomed to decay” (*WH* 158). I suggest that Catherine’s invalidism is in part characterised by tuberculosis. This theory is supported by the deaths of Frances Earnshaw, Edgar Linton and Isabella Linton from illnesses characterised by tubercular symptoms such as coughing, sparkling eyes, consuming fever etc. (*WH* 45-46, 191).

It is of particular significance that Catherine’s lengthy period of invalidism follows her violent breakdown in the attic, which was provoked by Edgar’s insistence that she choose between himself and Heathcliff. Catherine’s prolonged period of illness prior to death may thus be attributed to: a broken heart; the repression of her desires for Heathcliff and to return to childhood; or to the intensity of the events and emotions experienced in the attic. In fact, Catherine

makes several explicit references to a broken heart, reinforcing the tubercular connection. In her dream regarding heaven and hell, discussed at length in the previous chapter, Catherine “broke [her] heart with weeping” because she did not belong in heaven (*WH* 81). Following her quarrel with Edgar, just prior to the episode in the attic, Catherine declares, “Well, if I cannot keep Heathcliff for my friend – if Edgar will be mean and jealous, I’ll try to break their hearts by breaking my own. That will be a prompt way of finishing all, when I am pushed to extremity! (*WH* 116). Catherine’s heartbreak is, of course, the inevitable consequence of her decision to marry Edgar, thus forsaking Heathcliff. Shortly before her death, she cries, “You and Edgar have broken my heart, Heathcliff!” (*WH* 160). These references both add another dimension to her breakdown and foreshadow her tubercular decline. In light of Catherine’s repeatedly broken heart, it seems inevitable that she would suffer from tuberculosis.

Despite Edgar’s best efforts during her illness, Catherine remains exhausted and sad: “she let the tears collect on her lashes and stream down her cheeks unheeding” (*WH* 135). Compared to her violent outbursts in the attic, Catherine now seems calm and decorous, even in misery. Significantly, then, illness renders Catherine quiet and passive. Catherine’s tubercular illness is, at least in part, defined by resignation: she becomes quiet, docile, and “she never endeavoured to divert herself with reading, or occupation of any kind” (*WH* 158). Nelly’s descriptions of Catherine at this time are illuminating. She sits in a white dress and shawl, with her hair simply combed, suggesting purity or even virginity (*WH* 157-8). Catherine’s “appearance was altered... there seemed unearthly beauty in the change” (*WH* 158); this description demonstrates the glorification of female invalidism, and of the tubercular aesthetic in particular. Nelly continues to describe Catherine’s ‘change’:

The flash of her eyes had been succeeded by a dreamy and melancholy softness: they no longer gave the impression of looking at the objects around her; they appeared always to gaze beyond, and far beyond – you would have said out of the world – Then, the paleness of her face... (158)

The unladylike 'flash' of Catherine's eyes, associated with her earlier unfeminine anger and harshness, has given way to 'softness', indicating quietness, and perhaps passivity. The positive tones of Nelly's description indicate that Catherine has become somehow 'better' via her illness. She is pale, passive and quiet: the perfect domestic angel or Moral Feminine (Weisser 105).

Victorian literature is pervaded by tubercular deaths, almost symptomless and beatific, particularly of young people (Sontag 20). Tubercular victims include Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Smike in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838) and Paul in *Dombey and Son* (1848) by Charles Dickens. Such representations both elided the suffering of tubercular patients, and reinforced conceptions of the illness as associated with virtue and beauty. As exemplified by Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre*, tuberculosis was used in literature to identify innocent or spiritual characters, especially women and girls (Byrne 16). Helen provides an almost archetypal example of this kind of virtuous suffering and death. She is marked with death from her first meeting with Jane, as her presence is introduced by "the sound of a cough close behind me" (*JE* 59). When other students fall ill with typhoid, they are all kept together in the hospital, whereas Helen is kept apart (*JE* 91). This separation invokes a sense of singularity, suggesting that there is something special about Helen.

This suggestion is reinforced by Brontë's construction of Helen as a paragon of suffering and spirituality, a magnanimously silent angel in Jane's eyes. During Helen's last night alive, Jane sneaks in to see her and finds her, in a little crib with white curtains, "pale, wasted, but quite composed" (*JE* 94). Helen is here an exemplar of wasting, angelic beauty. Even in sickness, Helen remains selfless, insisting that Jane use her quilt to keep warm (*JE* 94). When Jane questions her state, Helen bravely replies that "the illness which is removing me is not painful; it is gentle and gradual: my mind is at rest" (*JE* 94). In terms of ideal femininity, Helen's decline into tuberculosis, culminating in her beatific young death, reinforces the connections between her purity, saintliness and suffering: she remains, to the end, grateful and happy for her suffering and anticipated death

(*JE* 94-6). Like Helen Burns, Catherine's illness seems to bestow a certain spirituality or virtue upon her. The way in which she gazes "beyond, and far beyond – you would have said out of the world" (*WH* 158) suggests that, like Helen, she has her eyes fixed on the afterlife. In this way, tuberculosis is shown to spiritualise or purify both women.

Catherine's ghostly invalidism also gestures to the disembodiment inherent to the 'angel in the house'. Catherine has acquired a sense of disembodiment or the supernatural, reflecting the spectrality that so often figured repression and disempowerment in literature of the time. Her desires, her voice, and her unladylike behaviours have been repressed or replaced by illness: she has been domesticated. I suggest that, in choosing to marry Edgar, forsake Heathcliff and become an 'angel in the house', Catherine leaves herself vulnerable to this 'angel's sickness'. The damaging consequences of privileging domestic ideology over female wellbeing are reflected and reduplicated through other female characters, namely Hindley's wife, Frances, and Isabella Linton.

Frances represents a close cleaving to contemporary notions of ideal femininity. She is an early Victorian model of the 'angel in the house' (Gilbert and Gubar 267-68), described as "half silly" and "hysterical", who expresses girlish delight in domesticity (*WH* 46). Nelly describes her delicate constitution, and it therefore seems almost unsurprising for her to die of tuberculosis soon after childbirth (*WH* 45, 64-66). This is a pattern that the reader recognises: the girlish, slender and delicate woman who inevitably passes, beautifully and quietly, from consumption. Moreover, her death due to the combined forces of pregnancy, childbirth and tuberculosis directly foreshadows Catherine's own death. Through the brief presence and young death of Frances, Emily Brontë reiterates the connections she makes between ideal femininity, sickliness, tuberculosis and motherhood in Catherine's demise (see Gilbert and Gubar 267-69). The space of the feminine, as conceived and approved of by patriarchy, is shown to be mortally dangerous.

Like Catherine and Hindley's wife, Isabella Linton also dies of tuberculosis:

what her last illness was, I am not certain; I conjecture, they [Edgar and Isabella] died of the same thing, a kind of fever, slow at its commencement, but incurable, and rapidly consuming life towards the close. (*WH* 191)

Isabella and Edgar are children of culture and, as discussed above, Isabella represents a certain manifestation of ideal femininity through her frailty and beauty. Emily Brontë thus reinforces the connections between bourgeois codes of femininity, sickness and tuberculosis. As discussed in the following chapter, Isabella eventually loses much of her dainty cultured nature and gains instead a measure of coarseness. However, this coarseness and independence are seemingly insufficient to inoculate her against the disease of domestic femininity. The deaths of both Isabella and Catherine from tuberculosis, among other things, reinforce these connections between domestic femininity, disease and death. For each of the women in *Wuthering Heights*, becoming a proper lady is self-alienating and consequently disease-producing (Torgerson 108). Tuberculosis literally ‘consumes’ these female characters from within, as patriarchal spaces metaphorically consume them from without. Tuberculosis, then, is a physical representation, a wasting, of what has been taken from these women by patriarchal spaces, and of what they have lost through their interactions and incarcerations within such spaces.

Female illness in *Wuthering Heights* therefore represents a recapitulation to nineteenth-century social values and expectations regarding women. In terms of female Gothic, perhaps the real horror for Emily Brontë, like other female authors, was “not the monster, the goblin, or the freak, but the living corpse” (Moers 110). If the ideal female body is weak, vulnerable, passive and silent, it is no wonder that fear of entrapment within the female body was a central gothic concern (Hoeveler 241). Catherine’s stunted existence as a broken-hearted invalid wife is little better than that of a corpse. The invalid is a liminal figure, one situated neither in life nor in death, but somewhere in between: the spiritualised Victorian invalid, defined by the death of desire and self, “leads a posthumous existence in her own lifetime” (Gilbert & Gubar 24-25; see also

Ehrenreich and English 99). The pale, wasted consumptive woman is therefore spectral; as Diana Wallace explains, spectrality is often used to figure repression (35, 38). The liminality and spectrality of the invalid woman render her inescapably Gothic. Catherine is denied physical, social and emotional freedom; this limitation slowly pulls her away from a full living existence and toward a pale, shadowy and limited existence. Catherine's liminal existence in this state draws attention to the destructive effects of imprisonment within male-prescribed roles and within patriarchal-governed spaces.

For Catherine, indoctrination into the world of idealised femininity condemns her to extended suffering, followed by an early death. It is significant that Catherine dies in childbirth—motherhood, in fact, kills her. Poignantly, considering Catherine's limited existence at the Grange, the final stages of pregnancy are known as 'confinement'. Pregnancy may thus be interpreted as imprisonment or even invasion by male forces. Pregnancy is not only a state of imprisonment; it represents another manifestation of Catherine's liminal subjectivity. On the most base level, the unborn baby distends the space of the mother's body; the mother's body-space is subjected to a violent pressure from within, a pressure that both stretches and suggests rupture. The boundary between woman and unborn child is both physically and psychically permeable (Homans *Dreaming* 262).

Pregnancy is a liminal state in which the mother is not only herself, but is occupied by a second being: she is no longer solely and wholly a woman and neither is she yet a mother—in Catherine's case, she is rendered doubly liminal, through both invalidism and pregnancy. Owing to these invasive and disruptive qualities, the unborn baby constitutes a threat to the self of the mother. For Catherine, motherhood renders her powerless and causes a total loss of identity: death. Catherine's baby represents the literalised and fatal form of the childhood that Catherine longs for (Homans *Dreaming* 262, 276; *Bearing* 80). The liminality and suffering experienced by Catherine in the final stages of her life draw attention to the female body as a space, inescapably Gothic, which confines the female self, and may be intruded upon from without.

Catherine's eventual death is therefore rich with meaning. It seems clear that the compounded effects of pregnancy; impending motherhood; physical and social confinement; emotional suffering; tuberculosis and intermittent starvation end her life. In light of this confluence of circumstances, her death is ultimately a demonstration of the damage caused by the feminine role prescribed by patriarchy (Gilbert and Gubar 286). If, as Torgerson suggests, culture is the source of illness in *Wuthering Heights*, the only escape from culture is the escape into nature through death (95). In this way, Catherine's illness and death become manifestations of a "terrible dis-ease with patriarchy that causes women... to try to escape their imprisonment in roles and houses by running, by starving themselves, and finally by dying" (Gilbert and Gubar 280). The symbolic significance of Catherine's death, in relation to rebellion, is explored more fully in the following chapter.

Crucially, by starving, sickening both physically and psychologically and finally dying, Catherine adheres to the expectations placed upon her by nineteenth-century society. It seems that Catherine is redeemed by her death; tuberculosis in fact provides a redemptive death for those fallen ones (Sontag 45). According to Nelly, Catherine's expression is now:

of perfect peace. Her brow smooth, her lids closed, her lips wearing the expression of a smile. No angel in heaven could be more beautiful than she appeared; and I partook of the infinite calm in which she lay. My mind was never in a holier frame, than while I gazed on that untroubled image of Divine rest. (*WH* 166)

This is by far the most positive description of Catherine in the text; it borders on apotheosis. Through the spiritualising process of tuberculosis and invalidism, and through death itself, Catherine has finally become angelic, spiritual, good and thereby beautiful (Weisser 108).

Perhaps most troublingly, this kind of valourisation of female illness, whether in the service of aesthetic or moral perfection, indicates a pervasive disregard for

the health of women. To men, but also to women themselves, conformity to culturally entrenched codes of behaviour was of greater significance than physical wellbeing. Suffering was accepted and even encouraged; the suffering woman was a virtuous woman, and a suffering death was a virtuous one. Valourisation of suffering and illness reflects a broader disregard for the desires, health and happiness of women. If ideal femininity is the goal offered by the 'false quest' of Gothic literature (Fleenor 11) and of Victorian society more broadly, then this false quest for the ideal feminine role and resulting imprisonment within patriarchal spaces can only limit the subjectivity and experiences of these women. The roles prescribed by patriarchy, and those domestic spaces associated with such roles, may be conceived of as desolate spaces, bereft of nourishment and offering only denial, repression, starvation and illness.

Much like her physical wasting and invalid decline, Catherine's mental deterioration may be viewed as the direct consequence of her adherence to feminine ideology and marriage to Edgar. Catherine Earnshaw's peak episode of illness following Heathcliff's return, which both mystifies and is therefore underestimated by Nelly and Edgar, is recognisable as somewhat 'typical' for a nineteenth-century woman, according to social expectations. The episode is eventually diagnosed as a "brain fever" (*WH* 134), and may be read as a period of hysteria: her symptoms include insomnia, food refusal, fits or seizures, sobbing, confusion, fainting and paralysis. Upon Heathcliff's return, Catherine is "breathless and wild" (*WH* 95), "laughed like one beside herself", and "could neither eat, nor drink" (*WH* 97). Following an argument with Edgar over her continued relationship with Heathcliff, her symptoms increase. In her own words, "A thousand smiths' hammers are beating in my head!" (*WH* 116) and her veins are "boiling" (*WH* 117). According to Nelly:

There she lay dashing her head against the arm of the sofa, and grinding her teeth, so that you might fancy she would crash them to splinters... She had no breath for speaking... In a few seconds she stretched herself out stiff, and turned up her eyes,

while her cheeks, at once blanched and livid, assumed the aspect of death. (*WH* 118)

Horrified, Edgar observes “she has blood on her lips!”. Within moments, “she started up – her hair flying over her shoulders, her eyes flashing, the muscles of her neck and arms standing out preternaturally” (*WH* 118). Catherine retreats into the attic, succumbing to insomnia and refusing to eat for three days (*WH* 120-122), before exhibiting further signs of psychological disturbance.

Hysteria was the most common psychiatric diagnosis applied to women in the nineteenth century. By this time, ‘hysterical’ had come to be somewhat synonymous with ‘feminine’ and hysteria had become the “quintessential female malady” (Scull 30).⁶ The vast, unstable and unpredictable array of symptoms [fits, seizures, fainting, vomiting, choking, sobbing, laughing, screaming, paralysis, muteness, deafness, loss of appetite, tearing garments/hair etc.] was linked to the supposed instability of feminine nature. The hysterical diagnosis described a contradictory and somewhat sexualised madness, the symptoms of which had no real, detectable base in the body. This ‘chameleon-like’ illness could in fact mimic the symptoms of any other (Appignanesi 143; Ehrenreich and English 124; Scull 6; Showalter *Female* 129-30).

As I discuss in the following chapter, Catherine’s illness during this episode may be interpreted as an expression of distress resulting from oppression and confinement, or even direct rebellion. However, illness also represents a degree of acquiescence to the expectations placed upon Victorian women. Women were expected to be hysterical, and Catherine’s illness represents a classic example of hysteria. Moreover, her illness is a direct consequence of cleaving to social expectations. Though her heart lies with Heathcliff, and on the moors, she marries Edgar and enters Thrushcross Grange—these actions prove to have dire consequences.

⁶ It is worth pointing out here that this remains the case—in contemporary society, women are far more likely than men to be described as ‘hysterical’ (see Scull 176). This reflects the prevailing association of madness, particularly emotional irrationality, with women.

Emily Brontë uses the attic scene and Catherine's 'mad' musings to give a clear articulation of Catherine's experiences of disempowerment and deprivation at the Grange. The specific details of Catherine's mental breakdown are deeply significant. In the attic, in addition to her starving, frenzy and insomnia, Catherine seems to experience a kind of mental fragmentation or dissolution. Nelly describes Catherine's confusion as she looks into a mirror:

'Don't you see that face?' she enquired, gazing earnestly at the mirror.

And say what I could, I was incapable of making her comprehend it to be her own...

'It's behind there still!' she pursued, anxiously. 'And it stirred.

Who is it? I hope it will not come out when you are gone! Oh!

Nelly, the room is haunted! I'm afraid of being alone!' (*WH* 123)

Catherine's apparent failure to recognise herself, and subsequent confusion between the past and the present (*WH* 124-25), is arguably due to the stark contrast between her miserable life at Thrushcross Grange and her happy childhood at the Heights. Catherine's decision to marry Edgar confines her within the role of middle-class wife and expectant mother, which in turn enacts restrictions upon her behaviour, such as Edgar's prohibition regarding her relationship with Heathcliff (*WH* 117). Catherine's declarations during this scene, as elaborated in the preceding chapter, illustrate this contrast between adulthood and childhood and her resulting misery. Here, Emily Brontë demonstrates that Catherine's marriage to Edgar, despite her love for Heathcliff, effectively split her into two people: the adult wife and the still-lingering ghost-child. Moreover, Catherine fails to recognise herself because she does not self-identify as Edgar's wife. Rather, she identifies as the other half of Heathcliff, and is thus unable to see her true self in the mirror's reflection (Jafari 50-51; see also Levy 165-66).

In this house, Catherine is effectively living apart from the world. Through this marriage and her domestic incarceration within Thrushcross Grange, she is alienated from the moors and home of her childhood. In a deeply symbolic moment, Nelly refuses to open the window for Catherine (*WH* 122). This refusal to gratify Catherine's desire recalls all of the other ways in which her desires are marginalised throughout the text. Moreover, Catherine's desire to open the window reflects her desire for what lies outside: the moors. For Catherine, the moors represent Heathcliff, her home at Wuthering Heights, her own wild childhood and, fundamentally, freedom (Levy 165). Catherine's 'madness' here is a direct result of her inability to reconcile herself with her circumstances, particularly the dissonance between her wild, happy childhood and her miserable, sickly adulthood. Those around her repeatedly ignore her desires, for Heathcliff, for the moors outside, for her childhood, and thus for her true self.

Catherine's references to 'haunting' are significant. She herself is haunted and so is the room (*WH* 122-23). As Botting points out, "the disturbing return of pasts upon presents" is a core Gothic theme (1). Nineteenth-century Gothic fiction concerned itself with uncanny experiences and deranged states, and how to represent these both objectively and subjectively. Both angles are explored in depictions of the uncanny, internally presented in doubles and mirrors, and externally objectified in criminal or psychological degeneration (Botting 112). Haunting refers to the *unheimlich* nature of Thrushcross Grange—for Catherine, it can never truly be home. Moreover, her failure to recognise herself in the mirror reflects the fact that her very body, her very *self* cannot be home. Catherine's uncanny experiences here are the consequence of repressing her true self and desires for childhood, the moors and Heathcliff. Catherine's mental dissolution is undoubtedly the consequence of her misery and marginalisation, following her decision to forsake Heathcliff and the Heights. As Jane Ussher suggests, "madness may be a reasonable response to an untenable situation; the result of living in an insane world" (6). Nineteenth-century 'mad' women may have experienced distress and physical symptoms as a result of oppressive and restrictive social and relational contexts (Ussher 11). Catherine's situation

clearly illustrates the ways in which 'hysterical' or 'mad' diagnoses may have obscured the true horror of women's lives.

In terms of idealised femininity, Catherine, like both Jane and Lucy, ultimately suffers greatly, as a consequence of her adherence to expectations of the feminine. She wastes away, suffers mental deterioration and eventually declines into invalidism and death. Catherine's angelic invalidism, demonstrated most fully by reifying descriptions of her corpse, emerges as an ultimately lethal acquiescence to expectations of femininity: the frail and passive invalid. Patriarchal conceptualisations of the feminine are shown, once again, to entail threat and suffering for the female subject.

Though Catherine's lengthy invalid decline transforms her into an angelic woman, her more acute breakdowns are presented somewhat differently. Nelly Dean's treatment of Catherine during these periods is particularly revealing. Nelly's attitude toward both Catherine and Isabella Linton, during periods of sickness or psychological distress, reflects the unsympathetic way the medical profession and society viewed many 'sick' women, particularly those who exhibited behaviours that defied normative constructions of femininity. Hysterical women were generally viewed as repulsive, morally degenerate, manipulative and deceitful by their doctors, and treated with anger, frustration and repugnance (Scull 69, 93; see also Appignanesi 110-11; Ehrenreich and English 125-6). Patriarchal conceptualisations of the feminine again evince a deep contradiction: women were expected to be sickly, due to their inferior physiology, but they were also denigrated and in some cases even punished for exhibiting illness, particularly psychological illness (Ehrenreich and English 124).

At times, Nelly is shockingly unsympathetic toward Catherine. During Catherine's most startling breakdown, upon Heathcliff's return, Nelly repeatedly and insistently underestimates and fails to sympathise with Catherine's condition. Nelly is critical of Catherine's reaction: "it was enough to try the temper of a saint, such senseless, wicked rages!" (*WH* 118). She clearly has little

sympathy for Catherine's situation and health, viewing her as a malingerer, as Victorian psychiatrists would have done. Despite Catherine's physical appearance and behaviour, Nelly assures Edgar that "there is nothing in the world the matter" (*WH* 118), indicating an absolute lack of both sympathy and understanding. Nelly's incomprehension is further indicated by her descriptions of Catherine's condition to the doctor. She dismisses Catherine's extreme misery, loneliness and regret as "strange ideas and illusions" (*WH* 130).

When Catherine refuses food, Nelly again lacks sympathy, suggesting that Catherine "fasted pertinaciously, under the idea, probably, that at every meal, Edgar was ready to choke for her absence" (*WH* 120). According to Nelly, Catherine is solely manipulative and undeserving of sympathy; there is no possibility that she may be suffering greatly. As Catherine's condition worsens, Nelly continues to greet her with suspicion and hostility, admitting with hindsight, "I should not have spoken so, if had known her true condition, but I could not rid myself of the notion that she acted a part of her disorder" (*WH* 121). It is for this reason that Nelly suggests Edgar does not take her seriously either. Crucially, Nelly ascribes a great degree of agency to Catherine, believing that she is causing or acting her madness and symptoms, rather than suffering as a victim of them. When Nelly finally informs Edgar of Catherine's true condition he echoes this attitude, asking, as though she had manufactured her condition: "Catherine, what have you done?" (*WH* 128).

Nelly is similarly unsympathetic toward Isabella during periods of distress. During her initial infatuation with Heathcliff, clues to her emotional state are evident in her behaviour. Nelly and Catherine observe that "Miss Linton fretted and pined over something"; moreover, Isabella is "dwindling and fading before our eyes" as a result of "rejecting her breakfast" (*WH* 101). Nelly's unsympathetic attitude casts female suffering and the resulting refusal of food as "peculiarly wayward" rather than legitimate (*WH* 101). As one of Catherine's doubles within the text, Isabella's behaviour, and those reactions it elicits from other characters, echoes Catherine's experiences. This misunderstanding or underestimation of female suffering forms a strong theme in the text.

Beyond simple misunderstanding or devaluing of female health and experience, these examples of criticism point to a crucial element of Victorian ideology regarding illness and femininity—not all symptoms are created equal. It seems that while certain symptoms are valorised and even become signifiers of beauty, such as tubercular wasting and fevered eyes, others are treated with downright hostility. Nelly's suspicion that Catherine "acted" her "senseless, wicked" illness gives a clue to how certain 'sick' women were received by society and by the medical profession. I suggest that the kind of suspicion and hostility reflected in Nelly's comments gives a clue to the subversive underside of female illness and suffering—the ways in which various symptoms and behaviours may have formed an expression of nonconformity or rebellion.

The analysis of female maladies in the latter part of this chapter has revealed some ways in which cultural and medical discourse surrounding illness reveals prevailing social and cultural ideologies regarding gender. Illness, like the female body, reveals itself as a site of gender and power conflict. Links may be observed between socialisation and pathology in female behaviour: in the Victorian era, both hysteria and tuberculosis may be seen as a performance or embodiment of hyperbolic femininity (Vandereycken and Deth 200). The tubercular woman is a model of the more idealised hyper-femininity, particularly the vulnerable wasting beauty that the Victorians found compelling. As I explore in the following chapter, however, the more volatile hysterical woman may be seen as a hyperbolic model of those aspects of femininity feared and reviled by patriarchal culture: irrationality, instability, deceptiveness and sexuality (Showalter *Female* 140). The various and mutable symptomatology of nineteenth-century female disorders can be interpreted as the concretisation of the period's feminine mystique, produced according to the prevailing ideological construction of femininity.⁷

⁷ Similar patterns may be observed in other epochs. Both agoraphobia, which escalated among women in the 1950s and early 1960s, and anorexia through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been interpreted as capitulation to prevailing ideals of domesticity and femininity (Bordo 169-70).

This chapter has explored prevailing patriarchal conceptualisations of femininity, with references to tropes such as the 'angel in the house' and the Gothic heroine; the interlinked 'cults' of domesticity and invalidism; and those female behaviours and attributes most prized by Victorian society. Key ways in which Charlotte and Emily Brontë demonstrate feminine acquiescence are through the discipline of the external appearance and body, spectrality, wasting, repression, psychological deterioration, invalidism and even death. By careful examination of normative constructions of femininity, it is possible to see how the Brontës engage with these tropes in order to present and criticise conceptualisations of the feminine, through both minor and central characters. Moreover, we see how each protagonist conforms to contemporary expectations relating to gender: Jane through her incorporeal, wasting body and outward presentation; Lucy through her repression, wasting and mental deterioration; and Catherine through her myriad ailments, pregnancy and death. Crucially, both Emily and Charlotte Brontë demonstrate the ways in which prevailing constructions of femininity are harmful or even fatal for these characters: ideal femininity is inextricably linked to wasting, illness and death, particularly in the case of Catherine. It can therefore be seen that Jane, Lucy and Catherine each suffer in conforming to and as a consequence of Victorian notions of ideal femininity.

Chapter 3 – Corporeal Protest: Bodily Eruption and Rebellion

in a society that not only perceived women as childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable, but also rendered them legally powerless and economically marginal, it is not surprising that they should have formed the greater part of the residual *categories of deviance* from which doctors drew a lucrative practice and the asylums much of their population. (Showalter 73; my emphasis)

Victorian discourse surrounding the female body, from appetite to illness to female emotion and bodily communication, reveals deep anxieties about women's sexuality and power. These anxieties emphasise contradictions in social ideology, such as the simultaneous expectation for woman to be both pure and inherently impure, both angel *and* monster, or the simultaneous naturalisation and pathologisation of female emotions within the medical tradition (Vrettos 27). Consequently, and perhaps most significantly for this thesis, both the embodied and the disembodied woman may be reassuring or threatening in different ways (Heller and Moran 24-25). Crucially, the very same depictions of female wasting, illness and death in Victorian literature, which can represent acquiescence or conformity to the restrictions placed upon female power by domestic ideology, may also represent resistance to domesticity. Female corporeal expression may therefore be a source of power and disruption, even within the confines of domestic Victorian femininity.

This chapter⁸ explores the ways in which pathological behaviours and suffering bodies exhibited by fictional characters may be viewed as forms of nonconformity or rebellion: the monstrous feminine. Much as they engage with the trope of the Gothic heroine, Emily and Charlotte Brontë also engage with

⁸ Some material from Chapter 3 has appeared in 'Reading (not-)eating in the works of Emily and Charlotte Brontë', *Outskirts: feminisms along the edge*, vol. 36, 2017, pp. 1-21.

Gothic discourse surrounding monstrous femininity. Once again, suffering emerges as a core theme: the Gothic anti-heroine suffers through her monstrosity and is usually punished for her crimes. As one would expect, connections emerge between the anti-heroine in Gothic literature and the monster/whore of Victorian gender ideology. Through the defiance of patriarchal expectations, each figure forms the antithesis to the angelic and pure heroine of the home. In detailing Emily and Charlotte Brontë's disruptions of Victorian ideal femininity, I re-examine some examples of bodily suffering and acquiescence discussed in the preceding chapter, thus demonstrating the ways in which the suffering female body may gesture simultaneously to acquiescence and rebellion. Jane, Catherine and Lucy are each engaged in forms of bodily communication, as they voice that which goes unheard and struggle against the strictures of Victorian femininity. The female body is shown to be a disruptive and eruptive force, capable of deviant communication and outright rebellion.

3.1 The Gothic Anti-Heroine and the Victorian Monstrous Feminine

The virtuous, passive and thus desirable Gothic heroine stands in stark opposition to her horrifying counterpart: the anti-heroine. Much like Victorian literature in a more general sense, the Gothic is predicated along a line of division: women were either virtuous or monstrous. Throughout history, the non-conforming woman has been demonised through supernatural constructions such as the succubus, harpy, witch and vampire (Mulvey-Roberts 106). The wicked and witch-like women of Gothic fiction threaten a kind of symbolic castration, through rejecting those traditional roles as dutiful and self-sacrificing daughters, wives and mothers. In order to create this anti-heroine, the Gothic draws upon the patriarchal perception of woman as an unstable, irrational and material being, associated with the body, sexuality, darkness and evil. Crucially, the wicked woman uses her body to seduce, horrify and destroy (Williams *Wicked* 91, 94-95). Like Victorian conceptions of femininity, the female Gothic body has thus developed through the virgin/whore duality (Mulvey-Roberts 108).

Classic examples of Gothic anti-heroines include Signora Laurentini in Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Beatrice de las Cisternas, who doubly manifests as the grotesque 'Bleeding Nun', in Lewis' *The Monk* (1796). Signora Laurentini is possessed of strong passions and weak principles, which prove to be her downfall. She is ruled by her emotions, which drive her to become "disordered" and vengeful, and finally urge her married lover to murder his wife (Radcliffe 655-58). In contrast to the overwhelmingly pure Emily St Aubert, Signora Laurentini is utterly lacking in the virtue, self-control and submission that characterise the ideal Gothic heroine. As the consequence of her terrible deed, she is haunted by her guilt, inevitably becomes mad and finally dies. Emily's final encounter with the "dying nun" is described as a scene of "horror" (Radcliffe 648). Laurentini gazes "wildly", shrieks, speaks of horrific and bloody imagery, and suffers from "delirium", "convulsions" and fainting fits (Radcliffe 644-48). She remains, to the end, a figure of monstrosity.

Beatrice de las Cisternas is perhaps an even more abhorrent figure. Even as a woman, before she becomes a spectre, Beatrice is monstrous. Despite becoming a nun, she "abandoned herself freely to the impulse of her passions". She is both a concubine and an atheist, and scandalises all with her "unbridled debauchery" (Lewis 173). The rebellious or immoral nun is a common early incarnation of the Gothic wicked woman (Williams *Wicked* 93). Beatrice becomes involved with her lover's brother, and is finally moved to murder him while he sleeps (Lewis 174). Beatrice thus forms a concretisation of fears surrounding insatiable female sexuality and appetite (Mulvey-Roberts 109). Moreover, her passions are linked to both duplicity and violence. Following her murder by her lover, as punishment for her crime (Lewis 174-75), Beatrice manifests as the Bleeding Nun: "a Female of more than human stature", who wears a veil and bloodstained dress, carries a knife and howls "the most horrible blasphemies" (Lewis 138, 140). This figure is abjectly horrifying; she possesses "rotting fingers" and kisses poor Raymond with her dead lips (Lewis 163). In both life and death, then, Beatrice is monstrous. The nun's 'bleeding' references an almost superstitious male dread of female biology; in this way, Lewis bases his Gothic horror upon the female body (Williams *Wicked* 95). Both Laurentini and Beatrice exemplify the demonisation

of female passion and desire within the Gothic. Woman is represented as slave to her passions and an exemplification of the worst kinds of excess. Moreover, each of these women presents a foil to the heroine of their respective tales. Where Laurentini and Beatrice (prior to her death) represent the trope of the wicked Gothic villainess, the Bleeding Nun represents the terrifying supernatural aspect of femininity.

The Gothic anti-heroine obviously shares attributes with the monstrous woman or whore, as defined by Victorian literary and social ideology. In Victorian ideology, the dark counterpart to the pure and virtuous 'angel' is the monster/witch/bitch/fiend. As the embodiment of uncompromising female autonomy, this monster threatens to displace and replace her angelic sister. The traditionally male characteristic of assertiveness is viewed as monstrous in women, because it is both unfeminine and uncondusive to the angel's life of passive purity. The literary tradition of the monstrous woman therefore illustrates a fear of women's hidden power (Gilbert and Gubar 26, 28-29, 33-34).

By the Victorian era, the monstrous, wicked woman, or Gothic villainess, the antithesis to the angel, begins to re-emerge as a pathological specimen, as medical ideology begins to pathologise woman herself. It is in part the telling of Gothic tales from a woman's point of view that facilitated this transformation (Williams *Wicked* 99). Throughout the nineteenth century, then, the wicked woman's story is repeatedly transformed into a medical case history. In the Victorian era in particular, madness and 'faulty' biology became inextricably linked with female monstrosity. Nineteenth-century medical discourse was heavily influenced by prevailing socio-cultural attitudes and theories surrounding women (Showalter *Female* 5; see also Appignanesi 78). As Showalter has demonstrated, madness has long been considered a 'female malady': compared to men, women were believed to be more vulnerable to insanity, to experience it in specifically feminine ways, and to be differently affected by it in terms of their lives (*Female* 7, 3). Drawing upon a long tradition of assumptions regarding the greater propensity of women to be 'mad', Victorian medicine linked insanity with the perceived instability of the female

reproductive system, suggesting that this instability interfered with the female capacity for sexual, emotional and rational control.

The proliferation of madwomen in Victorian fiction reflects these assumptions regarding female insanity. Bertha Rochester of *Jane Eyre* is, of course, the classic madwoman in the attic. As I discuss in the following section, Bertha represents various aspects of femininity reviled by patriarchal authority. Victorian 'moral insanity' redefined madness as deviance from social norms rather than the loss of reason. This 'moral' diagnosis was broad enough to include any behaviour viewed as abnormal or disruptive, which in turn had significant implications for any woman acting outside the bounds of socially prescribed normative femininity. The rise of the Victorian madwoman may thus be linked to the simultaneous rise of the male-dominated and misogynistic psychiatric profession (Appignanesi 69, 73; Showalter *Female* 28-29, 55).

Narrow Victorian ideas of femininity and feminine roles, particularly the maternal yet frail and tender Victorian woman, were supported by Darwinian theories of female psychology and sexual difference (Appignanesi 110). According to the medical profession, defiance of normative gender codes resulted in pathological 'unsexing' and mental breakdown (Showalter *Female* 121-23). Moreover, through the medical interventions of 'moral management', male doctors imposed and enforced doctrines of ideal femininity upon patients (Appignanesi 78; Scull 62; Showalter *Female* 75-84). Literary representations of non-conforming and thus monstrous women, often represented as 'mad' or 'fallen', thus give insights into conceptions of femininity itself, in addition to those ways in which women may rebel.

3.2 Monstrous Femininity in Minor Characters

Prevailing Victorian conceptions of ideal femininity cast women as the moral guardians of society and the home. The angel or Moral Feminine should have no worldly appetites, or at the very least repress any hint of such. Various

characters in *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Villette* provide examples of ideal femininity, including Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe themselves. The repressed and confined bodies of these characters gesture toward normative expectations of the space of the feminine. However, each of these texts paints a more complex portrait than that of mere social acquiescence. In the novels of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, female protagonists suffer visibly and extremely, and this very suffering draws attention to the ways in which they are repressed and deprived. To repress female (sexual) desire, it seems, “is to forfeit some essential measure of female selfhood and autonomy” (Weisser 12). Moreover, the female protagonists do not adhere easily and completely to normative femininity; they are seen to ‘fail’ in various ways. In addition to these complicated female protagonists who have difficult relationships with ideal femininity, Charlotte and Emily Brontë have created explicit counter-models: monstrous defiant women.

Any discussion of nonconformity to ideals of femininity in the literature of Charlotte Brontë may rightly begin with the depiction of Rochester’s first wife in *Jane Eyre*. Bertha Rochester is an almost archetypal image of female monstrosity—the madwoman in the attic and complete antithesis to the ‘angel in the house’. She encapsulates many of patriarchy’s fears surrounding women. Bertha functions as a Gothic element within the narrative due to her racial Otherness, her sexual promiscuity and her insanity (Smith 80). Bertha’s treatment also exemplifies the way in which Victorian psychiatry colluded against women who didn’t conform to narrow constructions of femininity.

From the beginning, Bertha Rochester is described in supernatural terms, and thus constructed as an inhuman or sub-human figure. Before she and Jane meet, Bertha’s laugh is described in terms such as “demoniac” and “goblin” (*JE* 168). Following her attack on Mason, also before Jane sees her in the flesh, she is described as a “a mocking demon” (*JE* 237). Moreover, before she learns her true identity, Jane connects Bertha to “the foul German spectre – the Vampyre” (*JE* 317). Much later in the text, upon Jane’s return to the blackened ruin of Thornfield, a man at the inn tells Jane that Bertha is “cunning as a witch” (*JE* 475). In describing her as vampire and witch, in addition to demon, Charlotte

Brontë gestures to traditional figures of female deviance within folklore. Bertha thus fits into both folkloric and Gothic traditions of female deviance.

Beyond the supernatural, Bertha is repeatedly portrayed as animalistic and linked to the animal world. Jane describes her as a “carrion-seeking bird of prey” (*JE* 237), and following her attack on him, her own brother calls her a “tigress” (*JE* 239). Each of these descriptors carries the suggestion of danger and violence. Animalistic and supernatural references repeatedly construct Bertha as something other than human, reinforcing the boundaries between herself and Rochester or Jane. Rochester’s description of his wife as “a bad, mad, and embruted partner” (*JE* 327), following the revelation of her existence, foreshadows Jane’s final viewing of Bertha:

What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face... the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind feet... The maniac bellowed: she parted her shaggy locks from her visage, and gazed wildly at her visitors. (*JE* 327-28)

This description dehumanises Bertha yet further. Jane’s repeated use of the pronoun “it” marks Bertha as non-gendered, or inhuman. To begin, Jane is unable to tell whether she is human or beast; she is baffled by the contrast between the clothing “it” wears and the way “it” moves on all fours.

This description of Bertha also invokes the grotesque, in the senses of strange, terrible, tragic, bizarre, monstrous, supernatural and uncanny (Clayborough 11, 15-17; Novak 50; Russo 7). Where the classical body is closed, static, symmetrical and contained, the grotesque body is open, changing, irregular and erupting (Russo 8). Accordingly, Jane’s tiny, privatised and repressed form is confronted by the hyperbolic, excessive and carnivalesque body of Bertha

(Hoeveler 216). Like the grotesque itself, Bertha is hard to pin down: she moves between the registers of woman, animal and demon, threatening to collapse the distinctions between such categories. Spatially, as well as linguistically, it is impossible to contain Bertha; she continually escapes her confinement on the third floor, seemingly wandering and attacking where she will. Drawing upon Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, Mary Russo points out that the grotesque is formed by those hidden elements of culture that have been rejected in order to consolidate the cultural identity of the bourgeoisie. The grotesque is thus an uncanny form; formed by the repressed of the political unconscious, it inevitably *returns* (Russo 8-9). The grotesque woman is of course particularly unsettling due to the association, since the Romantic period, of the female with the spiritual and ideal aspects of humanity (Milbank *Bleeding* 88). The grotesque has long been associated with deviance, and thus forms an appropriate vehicle for the expression of fears regarding woman's 'true' nature (Russo 14).

Bertha is also marked as a Gothic figure through descriptions of her behaviour, in addition to her terrifying, violent and supernatural appearance. Following her attack on Mason, she is referred to as "murderess" (*JE* 236). This term "murderess" invokes a Gothic heritage of anti-heroines, including predecessors such as Beatrice de las Cisternas and Signora Laurentini. Bertha may be viewed as a classic Gothic anti-heroine, who threatens the heroine of the text. In terms of the mode, Bertha embodies certain central Gothic fears, regarding the eruption of the body and of the past, the boundaries of the female body, and the domestic incarceration of women. This scene in which the terrifying Bertha intrudes upon Jane in her bed is typically Gothic; intrusion upon the female body is a central concern for female Gothic writers. The secrecy surrounding this figure, before Jane discovers the true identity and lays eyes upon the caged woman in the attic, further cements Bertha's Gothic nature: she personifies hidden mystery and history.

Bertha is a living manifestation of the past that erupts into the present, specifically Rochester's past into Jane's present. She is a skeleton in the closet, representing Rochester's impurity and 'fall into sin'. The scene therefore

contains warnings about both secrets and threats to the safety of the female body. As Jane herself questions earlier in the text, “What crime was this, that lived incarnate in this sequestered mansion, and could neither be expelled nor subdued by the owner? – What mystery, that broke out, now in fire and now in blood, at the deadest hours of night?” (*JE* 237). Bertha’s repeated breaking out of her room on the third floor encodes fears surrounding those things that cannot be contained, and the inevitable return of the repressed. Bertha’s very body, erupting repeatedly from the attic into the space of the household, is uncanny. In this way, Bertha’s body renders Thornfield itself *unheimlich* and represents the bodily intrusion of the past upon the present.

Brontë’s use of inhuman descriptors, the grotesque, and the Gothic each work to present Bertha Rochester in opposition to all others in the text. Jane describes the person who enters her bedroom as “a woman, tall and large ... Fearful and ghastly to me... It was a discoloured face – it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments” (*JE* 317). Though this description identifies her as “woman”, the “ghastly” and “savage” figure forms an abjectly horrifying image to Jane. Her “red eyes” and “blackened” face suggest a connection to the demonic, and present her in stark contrast to the pale and small Jane. In many salient ways, Bertha is both monstrous and Other. She is part-Creole, ostensibly mad, a drunkard, distinctly animalistic and ugly, and in possession of a “violent and unreasonable temper” (*JE* 325-28, 344). According to Rochester, she has many vices, and is both “intemperate and unchaste” (*JE* 345). In his eyes (and Jane’s, to a lesser degree), Bertha is devoid of any of ideal feminine features: virtue, beauty, submission and self-control. On a fundamental level, Bertha forms the embodiment of female deviance. Bertha stands as the crystallisation of those negative images of womanhood available in Victorian social and scientific discourse, and thus the antithesis to normative codes of femininity (Moore 79-80; Showalter *Literature* 119; Shuttleworth 167).

Victorian doctors used medical and psychiatric theory to reinforce patriarchal conceptions of ideal femininity. Bertha Rochester provides a prototypical

example of pathological ‘unsexing’ and mental breakdown as the consequence of defying codes of femininity (Moore 80); she has ceased to be a woman. As demonstrated by Rochester’s disgust and disdain for Bertha, the madness resulting from ‘excessive’ expenditure of nervous energy, including sexual energy, was seen as both physically depleting and morally reprehensible. In this way, the moralising nature of Victorian medicine was utilised to disempower female patients. As evidenced by Rochester’s incarceration of his wife, Victorian psychiatry allowed controlling or abusive husbands and fathers to collude with corrupt doctors in ‘dealing’ with troublesome women. In this context, the powers of definition and control rested with the male observer and women were repeatedly silenced. Doctors were in fact able to diagnose any independent act by a woman as ‘hysterical’ (Appignanesi 96, 117-18; Ehrenreich and English 125; Showalter *Female* 97-98).

Darwinian psychiatry associated madness with faulty heredity (Showalter *Female* 130), as reflected in Rochester’s explanation that “Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; – idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard” (*JE* 326; see Boumelha 71). Beyond faulty heredity, Rochester characterises Bertha’s madness as stemming from intemperance: “her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity” (*JE* 345). This “intemperate and unchaste” woman is in possession of rank vices, obnoxious tastes, “violent and unreasonable temper” and “a nature the most gross, impure, depraved I ever saw” (*JE* 344-45). In the Victorian era, female sexuality, feared by men, was suppressed by medical theory; uncontrolled sexuality became an almost definitive symptom of female insanity (Showalter *Female* 74).⁹

Feminist scholarship has highlighted the ways in which Bertha embodies all those Victorian patriarchal fears regarding female desire. As “the incarnation of the flesh, of female sexuality in its most irredeemably bestial and terrifying form”

⁹ This fear is reflected in the brief popularity in Victorian England of barbaric treatments such as the clitoridectomy and ovariectomy, which were intended to put an end to female masturbation and indeed sexual pleasure of any kind (see Scull 77-9, 88).

(Showalter *Literature* 118), Bertha represents the figuration of female desire without object or limits (Milbank *Daughters* 144). She is an Eve figure, responsible for the fall of man—in this case, Rochester. Charlotte Brontë utilises the convention of the sexually excessive aristocratic female body in order to feed a bourgeois audience's worst fears about both the aristocracy and women in general (Hoeveler 216). As the opposition to angelic sexual innocence, Bertha's sexuality manifests as bestial, violent and eventually self-destructive. The way in which Bertha repeatedly breaks out of containment, of her locked room on the third floor, marks her as beast-like and encodes Victorian fears about female desire and female power. Her attack on her brother, in which she "bit [and]... worried [him] like a tigress" (*JE* 239), symbolises her violent lack of self-control and hints at the dangers of unrestrained female appetite. Bertha's attack on Rochester in the attic further suggests her unwholesome appetites: "the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek" (*JE* 328). These appetitive attacks figure female desire as terrifying, bestial and dangerous to man.

For all of these reasons, Bertha Rochester forms a classic exemplar of the negative side of the angel/monster dichotomy. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë divides the Victorian female psyche into angel and monster, or its extreme components of mind and body, externalised as Helen Burns and Bertha, respectively. Charlotte Brontë locates the central female conflict between passion and repression within Jane herself, and presents it through these dichotomous portrayals of Helen and Bertha. Compared to the angelic and passive Helen, Bertha is large, dark and violent. Where Helen represents the purity of intellect, illness and masochistic self-abnegation, Bertha represents the impure female body, in all its transgressive appetitive glory (Showalter *Literature* 113, 126). Beyond the Helen/Bertha dichotomy, Bertha may also be viewed as Jane's opposite, one who has rejected reason and repression in favour of passion. Unlike both Helen and Jane, who exemplify passivity to varying degrees, Bertha is a 'true' active agent (Glen 94; Moore 80).

Beyond a manifestation of intemperance, unruly appetite, monstrosity and racial Othering¹⁰, Bertha has been cast as Jane's double. A common interpretation holds Bertha to be the emergent manifestation of Jane's rage: a terrifying and adult version of the angry orphan child that Jane has been struggling to repress since leaving Gateshead (Gilbert and Gubar 360). At times, Bertha acts *for* Jane; her rending of Jane's wedding veil, for example, may indicate Jane's own unwillingness to marry Rochester or her anger regarding his controlling tendencies. Bertha represents the plight of the Victorian wife who has become a ghost of herself: silenced, imprisoned with the home and forced to live somewhere between life and death. Bertha may therefore function as a warning against what marriage will entail, and signal Jane's potential escape from the dangerous marital scenario (Milbank *Daughters* 144; Moore 81). Bertha may in this way represent Jane's own feminist tendencies.

As Jane's alter ego, Bertha has also been said to represent her passionate and sexual side, that she has been commanded to incarcerate by her upbringing, religion and society (Showalter *Literature* 28). Much like the nun in *Villette*, the hungry and disorderly Bertha may form the embodied manifestation of Jane's repressed nature. Both the nun and Bertha are bodily eruptions that disrupt the narrative of their texts, and challenge the protagonist in various ways. It is of course significant that Bertha is destroyed and the nun is debunked by the close of their respective texts, allowing the protagonists to live in semi-repressed happiness. As a real source of Gothic 'horror', Bertha must be destroyed, whereas the nun, source of imaginative 'terror', may be rationalised or explained away.

Beyond rage and passion, Jane and Bertha share experiences as women living in a patriarchal world. First and foremost, they share parallel images of confinement (Stoneman *Charlotte* 38). Like Bertha on the third floor, Jane is

¹⁰ Though much has been said regarding race in *Jane Eyre*, I have chosen not to focus on the issue in this thesis. This is because my analysis focuses primarily on the suffering bodies of Jane Eyre, Catherine Earnshaw and Lucy Snowe, and consequently on the Victorian middle-class white female body. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider race and the female body in any depth.

confined in the Red Room, in addition to feeling confined by social expectations and patriarchal institutions and figures repeatedly throughout the text. Both Jane and Bertha are women “whose energy and vitality are deemed evil” (Moore 81). Further, both Jane and Bertha are connected to the uncanny. Bertha’s various manifestations and visitations form a series of uncanny returns within the household of Thornfield. Jane’s anger, repressed as it is due to social conformity, also becomes uncanny, particularly during those instances when Jane’s outbursts find a mirror in Bertha’s inarticulate violence (Stoneman *Charlotte* 40). These kinds of similarities between the two women work to undermine Bertha’s positioning as Other. In this way, Brontë uses doubling to disrupt expectations of the ways in which we construct the Other.

Despite similarities in experience, however, the interpretation of Bertha as Jane’s double has been criticised by more recent scholarship. Perhaps most significantly for this thesis, the positioning of Bertha solely as Jane’s psychological manifestation fails to acknowledge the expression and persistence of Jane’s own rebellious, even feminist, spirit (Stoneman *Charlotte* 39). The doubling theory reduces Bertha to a mere facet of Jane’s mind, which is also problematic given the colonial implications of Bertha’s place within the text and the way in which pale Jane’s success comes at the expense of the darker Bertha (Fraiman 31). Jane’s self-imposed isolation on the third floor is invigorating and temporary, whereas, for Bertha, solitude is neither chosen nor temporary; it is the result of domination by her more powerful husband. However, though Jane’s privilege makes the third floor a contested space, symbolically, “their feminine stories intersect” (Russell 130).

Finally, Bertha has been considered as a proto-feminist protester engaged in the rejection of patriarchy: a “paradigm of incendiary womanhood who sprang out of the revolutionary forties” (Auerbach *Woman* 43; see also Moore 81). Bertha’s behaviour while incarcerated at Thornfield, and her suicide in particular, may be viewed as a carnivalesque display of intensely destructive emotions aimed against authoritarian power structures, such as the patriarchally marked estate and marriage itself (Hoeveler 221). In considering Brontë’s depictions of

marriage, it is of particular significance that Bertha is really the only one who refuses to conform to Rochester's master-slave formation of marriage (Killeen 99). Her attacks on both her brother Mason and her husband Rochester represent attacks on patriarchy, particularly the markets of marriage and inheritance which decreed her ensnarement by these men.

Despite the temptation to paint Bertha as a prototypical feminist protester, however, it must be noted that, through her confinement, Bertha remains the spirit of Thornfield, the *home*, rather than outdoors (Auerbach *Woman* 43). Even the most openly rebellious and non-conformist female character in these Brontë novels remains confined to the Victorian home. Moreover, and crucially, the figuration of woman as a mad, sexualised creature explicitly inscribes Victorian ideology, rather than moving beyond it. Shuttleworth, for example, highlights a need for critics to set aside the romanticised view of female madness as a natural form of rebellion for the oppressed or repressed. Instead, she suggests, we should consider the ways in which Victorian discourse pre-defines the forms of both rebellion and conformity. Through characters such as Bertha, Charlotte Brontë breaks open the binary divide categorising female behaviour, suggesting that those forces of conformity and rebellion are in fact the same (Shuttleworth 164).

In comparison to *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* presents a more nuanced version of nonconforming femininity, particularly in terms of Lucy Snowe and minor characters such as the actress Vashti. Where Bertha Rochester fulfils all of patriarchy's most negative dreams regarding deviant femininity, Vashti provides a more complex depiction of femininity. She is, however, the most nonconforming or monstrous woman in the text. The following description of Vashti highlights some of the ways in which she does not conform to Victorian conceptions of docile femininity:

Behold! I found upon her something neither of woman nor of man: in each of her eyes sat a devil. These evil forces bore her through the tragedy, kept up her feeble strength – for she was

but a frail creature; and as the action rose and the stir deepened, how wildly they shook her with their passions of the pit! They wrote HELL on her straight, haughty brow. They tuned her voice to the note of torment. They writhed her regal face to a demoniac mask. (V 286)

Like Bertha, Vashti is linked to the supernatural or evil, through references to a “devil”, “HELL” and her “demoniac mask” of a face. Moreover, Lucy finds something “upon” her that is “something neither of woman nor of man”. Like Bertha, she is both monstrous and grotesque: a bizarre and compelling creature that threatens to collapse gender distinctions. Vashti moves beyond a straightforward depiction of ‘woman’. Specifically, Vashti transcends socially-prescribed gender roles, by representing the true union of mind and body (Shuttleworth 237). In *Jane Eyre*, as I have mentioned, representations of woman are dichotomously split into the angelic Helen, representing mind or soul, and the monstrous Bertha, who represents the body. Vashti, as a spectacle of female embodiment, in addition to mind or soul, is a woman unlike any other.

The Vashti figure forms an embodiment of visceral female rebellion. Her agency is key—where the Cleopatra portrait forms a representation of passive sensuality, Vashti’s is an active and performed passion. Much like Bertha, Vashti’s passion is incendiary—it sets the theatre alight (Boumelha 109-10; V 289). Labelling her “a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation” (V 286), Lucy is clearly drawn to Vashti, indicating her attraction to this picture of integrated, transcendent and monstrous femininity. This attraction suggests some degree of kinship; Lucy seems to understand Vashti, perhaps because they are alike or Lucy aspires to be like her. Much like Bertha for Jane, the tormented and impassioned Vashti forms a double for Lucy (Boumelha 109).

Perhaps most significantly, Vashti forms an exemplar of female suffering: “Suffering had struck that stage empress; and she stood before her audience neither yielding to, nor enduring, nor in finite measure, resenting it: she stood locked in struggle, rigid in resistance” (V 286). However, unlike the Gothic

heroine, Vashti does not suffer in sweet, passive silence; rather, she actively struggles against and performs her suffering. Intriguingly, Lucy seems to suggest that, through Vashti, there might be an end to suffering: "To her, what hurts becomes immediately embodied: she looks on it as a thing that can be attacked, worried down, torn in shreds" (V 287). Perhaps it is through embodiment that woman may find the solution to suffering?

Fundamentally, Vashti contrasts strongly with the Victorian concept of angelic femininity, as exemplified by Polly Home's beautifully enacted suffering and repression. "Pain," for Vashti, "has no result in good; tears water no harvest of wisdom: on sickness, on death itself, she looks with the eye of a rebel" (V 287). This description forms an explicit rejection of those feminine ideals espoused by Victorian society. The passionate performing woman forms the antithesis to notions of innocent and passive femininity. Moreover, even as Lucy concedes that Vashti is "Wicked", she explains, "also she is strong; and her strength has conquered Beauty, has overcome Grace, and bound both at her side" (V 287). Vashti finds the strength that Lucy admires through conquering patriarchal ideals such as beauty and grace. Through her links to the demonic and grotesque, her rejection of docile angelic notions of femininity, and her dismantling of gender constructions, Vashti is both monstrous and moves beyond a simple dichotomous representation of femininity.

In contrast to the angelic and monstrous characters in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, who by and large seem to remain as they are, *Wuthering Heights* presents a series of female transformations. Where Catherine Earnshaw gradually becomes more angelic through the processes of illness and enculturation, other female characters conversely travel toward a more monstrous femininity. Aspects of femininity expressed in Catherine's character are emphasised, reflected and subverted as they appear in other characters, such as Isabella Linton and Catherine Linton, her daughter. Despite her initial striking conformity to idealised femininity, Catherine Linton undergoes a significant transformation during the course of the novel. Much like Isabella, Catherine's transformation occurs upon her move to the Heights, as she is introduced to a world of

patriarchal violence and disregard for female happiness and health. Lockwood explicitly describes Catherine Linton's life at the Heights in terms of a Gothic metaphor, hinting at her incarceration within both marriage and a hellish household; "here is the consequence of being buried alive" (*WH* 13).

Lockwood's descriptions of Catherine in the first chapter introduce the changes that have occurred as a result of her 'live burial'. He is unsettled by the way in which "she kept her eyes on me, in a cool, regardless manner, exceedingly embarrassing and disagreeable" (*WH* 10). This comment illustrates a profoundly uncomfortable reaction on the part of Lockwood to Catherine's evident lack of passivity, and her refusal to be subservient or even respectful to him. Here, Lockwood forms the first character-embodiment of nineteenth-century values and ideologies in the text. Catherine's refusal to make Lockwood tea (*WH* 11) symbolises her rejection of the domestic feminine role and Lockwood himself as purveyor of expectations regarding femininity. Eventually, he refers to Catherine as a "little witch" (*WH* 15), evincing his dependence on the Victorian angel/monster dichotomy for classification. It seems that Catherine and her daughter perform opposing journeys in *Wuthering Heights*. If Catherine Earnshaw's journey is taken as one from monstrosity to angelhood, then her daughter's journey may be characterised as the fall from angelhood into monstrosity (Weisser 109).

To some degree, Isabella Linton's transformation mirrors that of the younger Catherine Linton. Each marries and moves to Wuthering Heights and is therein introduced to a world of male prerogative and violence. Each sheds her angelic innocence and ceases to conform to ideal femininity in significant ways. Much like Catherine Linton, Isabella begins life as a 'petted' darling (*WH* 48), borne of culture and privilege at Thrushcross Grange. She is beautiful, dainty and fragile, as evidenced by her weeping during the young Edgar's altercation with Heathcliff (*WH* 59). Isabella's behaviour and countenance fall squarely within the bounds of normative femininity: she is an angelic child of culture. However, through Isabella's failed and miserable marriage to Heathcliff and her move to Wuthering Heights, she begins to lose her angelic, passive innocence and gain

both self-awareness and a growing irony regarding her previous naïveté (Pike 352, 358, 360).

Despite her initial adherence to the promise of a Gothic romance with Heathcliff, Isabella manages to escape both her literal imprisonment at the Heights and her marriage to Heathcliff. She transcends the myths of Gothic romance and Gothic femininity in order to find her voice, her subject-hood and ultimately her escape. Isabella effectively finds her freedom through gaining clear comprehension of her situation and of her husband's character: "people feel with their hearts, Ellen, and since he has destroyed mine, I have not power to feel for him". She explains that, "he has extinguished my love effectually, and so I'm at my ease" (*WH* 174). Through unshackling herself from her previous expectations, Isabella is able to rise from the position of silent, abused object-hood she had assumed in her relationship (Massé 84, 86-7). Her ill treatment by Heathcliff provokes a shift to a coarser and less ladylike way of being as she gradually devolves into a more monstrous figure. The following explanation clearly demonstrates this transformation:

...[Heathcliff] was worked up to forget the fiendish prudence he boasted of, and proceeding to murderous violence: I experienced pleasure in being able to exasperate him: the sense of pleasure woke my instinct of self-preservation; so, I fairly broke free, and if ever I come into his hands again he is welcome to a signal revenge. (*WH* 174)

Through this 'pleasure', Isabella is able to awaken from her state of subsumed object-hood within marriage and become an active subject. She even comes to desire revenge; when Heathcliff throws a knife at her, she returns the blow, clearly breaking free from her role as suffering wife (*WH* 183). This is a radical and subversive move for a nineteenth-century female character. Eventually, in order to escape Heathcliff's grasp, and the perils of Gothic romance and domesticity, she must physically remove herself from the Heights—pregnant and injured by her husband, she runs away. This act of bodily rebellion links Isabella

Linton to Bertha Rochester and Jane Eyre. The acts of speaking out, responding with violence toward oppressors and the ultimate refusal to bear intolerable situations mark each of these female characters as monstrous. Moreover, each of these women rejects marriage on terms they do not agree with.

Isabella Linton's letter to Nelly, detailing her ill treatment and resulting transformation from 'petted' darling to independent and coarse woman, is an example of a monstrous pen that tells a terrible story (see Gilbert and Gubar 36). In this letter and her conversation with Nelly after fleeing Heathcliff, Isabella speaks freely and assertively (*WH* 136, 172). In this interaction, Nelly again performs the role of patriarchy's housekeeper, critiquing Isabella's attire, and stating that laughter is out of place (*WH* 172-73; Pike 364, 370). Isabella, however, defies Nelly's admonitions to cease laughing and to clean herself up (Pike 376), indicating once more that she has moved from a passive silent-object role to an active speaking-subject role. By dismissing Nelly's orders, Isabella defies normative proscriptions for feminine behaviour. Of course, her physical retaliation against Heathcliff and subsequent flight from him represents the greatest defiance of all. The emergence of Isabella's ironic and angry narrative voice in her letter and her discussion with Nelly is clear evidence of a transformation from idealised 'angel' to coarse and independent woman. Isabella's violent desire for revenge, and to possess Hindley's weapon, stand in clear contrast to her earlier cowering self in the vicinity of Edgar and Heathcliff (Pike 357, 371). Her vocal tone and the desires she expresses are clear indications that she has lost much of her silly girlhood and developed into a woman who "has grasped intimate knowledge of men and their motives... come to envy masculine power and wilfully transgresses both class and gender boundaries" (Pike 358).

Brontë's treatment of Isabella highlights the existence of a certain tension between cultural constructions of normative femininity and the 'true' nature of women who did not fit into these moulds. This tension emerges repeatedly in nineteenth-century female Gothic narratives: "women [authors] reveal deep-seated conflicts between a socially acceptable, passive, congenial, "feminine" self

and a suppressed, monstrous hidden self" (Stein 123). The female Gothic may therefore be interpreted as a form created by female authors to explore formerly unspoken 'monstrous' aspects of women's lives and selves (Stein 126).

The transformations of both Catherine and Isabella Linton are presented in a positive light. In fact, Emily Brontë uses these monstrous transformations, in conjunction with Catherine's ultimately deadly angelic transformation, to critique prevailing constructions of femininity. Through Catherine Earnshaw's illness and inevitable death; the incarceration and abuse suffered by Catherine and Isabella Linton as conforming women; and the freedom found by each as rebellious women, Emily Brontë demonstrates that normative Victorian femininity is harmful to women.

These examples of nonconforming or monstrous femininity in the core texts begin to provide a framework within which to analyse the ways in which the protagonists rebel or fail to conform. Although neither Jane, nor Lucy nor Catherine can really surpass Bertha Rochester in terms of monstrosity, each can be seen to disrupt expectations of the ideal feminine in various ways.

3.3 Jane Eyre

Jane Eyre is perhaps the least monstrous of the three protagonists examined in this thesis. However, in some ways she does fall short of normative expectations of the ideal woman. Jane Eyre occupies a doubly problematic status, within the social and economic spheres and in the psychological domain, wherein she is aligned with two figures of excess: the passionate child and the madwoman (Shuttleworth 153). In both resembling Bertha to some degree, and in comparison with those angels of *Jane Eyre*, Miss Temple and Helen Burns, Jane clearly fails to embody the 'angel in the house'. As an ugly orphan, who is neither silently submissive nor pure nor selfless, Jane is a far cry from the idealised female. Her way of confronting the world may be described as "fiery rebellion", rather than "contemplative purity" (Gilbert and Gubar 347). As a young girl at

Gateshead, we are introduced to Jane as an “inferior” child who is chastised for being too outspoken (*JE* 34, 13). Jane is neither silent nor submissive: when attacked by her cousin John, the angry young girl responds in kind (*JE* 17).

Jane’s tendency toward rebellion and outspoken self-defence is further demonstrated in her verbal attack on her aunt following her traumatic incarceration in the Red Room (*JE* 47). Jane feels that “*Speak* I must: I had been trodden on severely, and *must* turn”, and berates Mrs Reed for imprisoning her in the red room, informing her that she is “bad and “hard-hearted”, that she does not love her and is glad they are not related by blood (*JE* 45-6). According to Jane, this voicing of her true feelings “was the hardest battle I had fought, and the first victory I had gained” (*JE* 46). Following this exchange, Jane describes a kind of transcendence:

Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I have ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhoped-for liberty. (*JE* 46)

Though she suffers just as they do, it is Jane’s rage that differentiates her from Gothic and sentimental heroines such as Emily St Aubert. The following description of Emily is particularly illuminating: “Hers was a silent anguish, weeping, yet enduring; not the wild energy of passion, inflaming imagination, bearing down the barriers of reason and living in a world of its own” (Radcliffe 329). This second part of this description practically describes Jane’s first experience of rage, though it is compared negatively to Emily’s “silent anguish”. In this way, Jane breaks out of the bounds of acceptable femininity as espoused by traditional Gothic texts. Moreover, Jane’s attack on her aunt is ultimately the reason she is sent away to school; her rebellious words enact some power over her aunt and cause an improvement in circumstance. Here, Charlotte Brontë gestures to the power of female anger and voice.

At Lowood School, Jane continues to demonstrate rebellious tendencies. When Helen is labelled 'slattern', she remains "patient, unresentful", whereas "the fury of which she was incapable had been burning in my soul all day", leading Jane to tear the sign from Helen's head and cast it into the fire (*JE* 86). These incidents of anger and rebellion mark her in opposition to Helen, and also link her to Bertha Rochester. After many years at Lowood, under the guidance of Miss Temple, Jane's character seems altered: the angry and explosive child has been tamed into "harmonious" submission (*JE* 98). However, as soon as Miss Temple leaves Lowood, this restraint begins to fall from Jane and she "[feels] the stirring of old emotions" (*JE* 99). Following the road from Lowood with her eyes, Jane longs for freedom: "how I longed to follow it further!... I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer" (*JE* 99). In desiring "a new servitude", Jane describes herself as "half desperate" (*JE* 99). This desperation is a display of naked desire, and demonstrates Jane's inability to continue repressing that which she longs for. The resurfacing of Jane's rebellious and desirous tendencies suggests that her character never really altered under Miss Temple's guidance. These desires and longings continue to resurface at various times throughout the text, particularly when Jane feels that she has been treated unjustly.

Charlotte Brontë also uses Jane to engage directly with Victorian social and literary tropes such as the angel and the monster. In Jane's own words to Rochester, shortly before he proposes to her:

I am not an *angel*... and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself.
My Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything
celestial of me – for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it
of you: which I do not at all anticipate. (*JE* 292; my emphasis)

Jane dismisses the "celestial" expectations of the angel in the house, enjoining Rochester to see her for who she is. Thus, though Bertha is painted as a monster, Jane refuses to become the angel. As I discuss in the following chapter, however, the ending of *Jane Eyre* seems to reflect a disappointingly 'angelic' final positioning of Jane herself.

If we take Bertha to be the representation of Jane's own inner rage and passion, we might say that Charlotte Brontë outsources the bodily rebellion in *Jane Eyre*. The adult Jane, as opposed to the angry child, is generally able to remain demure, while Bertha acts out her rage-filled fantasies. However, Jane's flight from Thornfield cannot be dismissed. This is one of the strongest instances of Jane's own bodily rebellion. Faced with Rochester's controlling, slavish and bigamous vision of marriage, Jane forcibly wrests herself, against her own desires, away from Rochester and his home. She defies the wishes of the patriarch, in a most bodily way. However, Jane's actions here may also be read as unwavering acquiescence to moral femininity—in leaving, she protects her immortal soul and her pure virginal body. In this way, Jane's flight gestures simultaneously toward both rebellion and conformity.

Confinement, both within the female body or female domestic role and by overarching patriarchal forces, is a key concern of female Gothic texts. The suffering female body may manifest in response to confinement, and may constitute an attempt to rebel against such limitation. As she is dragged toward the Red Room, Jane "resisted all the way: a new thing to me, and a circumstance which greatly strengthened the bad opinion Bessie and Miss Abbot were disposed to entertain of me" (*JE* 19). From the first moment, then, Jane adopts an attitude of rebellion. Once incarcerated within the room, Jane muses upon her miserable lot: "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" (*JE* 22). It is indeed worthy of note that Jane's first instinct to achieve escape from oppression, even as a young girl, is to bodily remove herself by running, or by starving and self-destructing. Jane's instinct reflects a terrible disease, or perhaps "dis-ease", borne of patriarchy, which causes imprisoned women to attempt escape via running, starving, or dying (Gilbert and Gubar 280).

More time passes and Jane begins to muse upon the possibility of a visitation from her uncle's ghost. She grows more and more frightened and seems to exhibit physical symptoms of distress: "My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a

sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings: something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down – I uttered a wild, involuntary cry” (*JE* 24). This cry attracts the attention of Bessie and Abbot, who determine that Jane has “screamed out on purpose” and are disgusted by her “naughty tricks” (*JE* 25). Mrs Reed also comes to the scene and, despite Jane’s pleading to be liberated and determination that “I cannot endure it... I shall be killed”, locks her in the room once more. Very soon, Jane suffers “a species of fit: unconsciousness closed the scene” (*JE* 25). It seems that in the absence of any avenue of escape, through common humanity, compassion or begging, Jane resorts to a kind of bodily escape. Her ‘fit’ or unconsciousness provides her with the only possible escape from her intolerably confining situation. Moreover, Jane’s fainting fit and ensuing illness brings her into contact with Doctor Lloyd, who eventually engineers her admission to Lowood and thus her escape from Gateshead (*JE* 33, 42-44). Escape emerges as a central theme of the text, and Jane discovers three possibilities: escape through flight, starvation or madness. These possibilities recur throughout nineteenth- and twentieth-century women’s literature (Gilbert and Gubar 341), and it is noteworthy that two of these three alternatives are deeply embodied experiences.

Though she is never quite as ill as Catherine Earnshaw, the paragon for Victorian invalid femininity, illness does gain Jane the help she needs in another situation of extreme desperation. Following her days and nights starving in the wilderness, Jane comes upon the Rivers household. Though she is initially turned away by Hannah, St John Rivers suggests that Jane should not be “condemned to meet a lingering and premature doom, such as yours would be if you perished here of want” (*JE* 376). It seems clear that Jane, “trembling, sickening; conscious of an aspect in the last degree ghastly, wild, and weather-beaten”, is treated with sympathy and kindness by these strangers, on account of the state that she is in (*JE* 377). John, at least, does not want her to die. Upon fleeing Thornfield, Jane is in an extremely disempowered and vulnerable position, as physicalised by her starving and sickening. However, it is her very illness that gains her the help she needs, and thus a certain measure of power. Sympathy and concern are perhaps forms of power given by or drawn from others.

During Jane's time on the moors, and her entrance into the Rivers household, she is engaged in a kind of bodily communication. Beyond broad gestures of resistance or striving for power, the suffering female body may form a vehicle for more nuanced communication. There existed a widespread belief in Victorian culture in the expressive or communicative potential of the human, particularly female, body (Vrettos 21). In Victorian literature, illnesses formed "strategies of communication that effectively renounce or circumvent spoken language in favour of the more immediate, material reality of the heroine's ailing body" (Vrettos 15). Jane's experience in the wilderness, leading to her eventual salvation in the form of the Rivers' family, may be interpreted in just this way. Her body forms a cry for help, because she is unable to explain her situation to anyone: Jane "[lacks] either a speakable past or an imaginable future" (Homans *Bearing* 94). She is unable even to voice her own name, choosing "Jane Elliott" instead (*JE* 377). Like Bertha in the attic, Jane has become unintelligible: in the absence of an understanding ear, any woman's speech may become unintelligible (Moore 79). Jane and Bertha's stories of patriarchal oppression and culpability cannot be told. Perhaps the most overt message communicated by Jane's suffering body is that of her loss: her loss of love, warmth and hope. Food figures love for Jane, as for Lucy Snowe, and thus she must fast when love is withdrawn. From this brief consideration of Jane's experience in the wilderness, the connections between suffering, silence and starvation begin to emerge.

There exist important literal and metaphorical similarities and connections between eating and speaking. Because both are located in the mouth, and both operate somewhere between nature and culture, "it is no wonder that eating and speaking should continually cross over in metaphorical exchange" (Eagleton 207; see also Heller and Moran 2). The mouth symbolises consumption, control, need, voice and language, and is a metonym for 'articulation', or the way(s) in which an individual relates themselves to social contexts and histories (Lupton 18; Probyn 16). Appetite (and, by extension, consumption) is an important voice in female identity (Brumberg 265). Throughout history, female expression has been limited through cultural oppression; appetite, food behaviours and the body have therefore provided a socially acceptable and meaningful voice for

women (Peters and Fallon 352). Women are socialised to repress their own needs, which in turn creates a widespread structural resistance to taking in nurturance of various kinds (Orbach 162). The denial of voice thus becomes linked to the denial of nourishment.

During Rochester's supposed engagement to Blanche Ingram, Jane begins to waste away. She dines with Mrs Fairfax, and upon being told of Blanche's unparalleled beauty, is unable to eat her tea (*JE* 182). Jane is, of course, unable to voice her misery regarding the engagement to Mrs Fairfax. Even Rochester notices that Jane is "getting a good deal paler than you were... What is the matter?" (*JE* 204). Jane denies that anything is wrong, even when pressed, indicating her absolute inability to voice her misery. In this instance, among others, Jane's body speaks what she cannot. During her stay with the Rivers family, despite St John's controlling influence, Jane becomes increasingly anxious to know what is become of Rochester. Diana observes that she looks ill, but Jane does not divulge what is troubling her (*JE* 445). Yet again, Jane's body communicates what she cannot. For both Jane and Lucy, illness and starvation may form the expression of a deprived life, loneliness and emotional malnourishment; psychological states are written on the wasting bodies of Charlotte Brontë's protagonists, as a desperate act of communication.

Various pathologies or physical symptoms, which would probably have been designated 'hysterical' by Victorian doctors, may result from emotional distress and inexpressible distress. 'Hysterical' symptomatology also operates on a textual level in *Jane Eyre*. Various critics suggest that each one of Jane's dreams of children signifies trouble, preceding some kind of disaster. In the case of disaster in which someone related to Jane is injured or killed, the disaster may form a displaced expression of anger against kin that Jane herself denies (Poovey 141; see also Boumelha 68; Homans *Bearing* 88, 92-93;). Mary Poovey suggests that at these moments, *Jane Eyre* becomes "a hysterical text, in which the body of the text symptomatically acts out what cannot make its way into the psychologically realist narrative" (141). Children represent women's dependence within a world defined by bourgeois ideology; these dreams and

ensuing disasters therefore represent Jane's anger at women's dependence. Because there is no permissible Victorian plot for female anger, whenever Charlotte Brontë investigates this kind of self-assertion, the text itself splinters in a hysterical way. Such splintering is provoked by experiences of frustration and dependence, and also reproduces them. The disjunction of these narrative episodes demonstrates that hysteria occurs when impermissible female emotions are expressed (Poovey 141). Bertha's 'madness' may be viewed in a similar way. Denied freedom of speech (and movement), she speaks only through violence and maniacal laughter: bodily eruption (Russell 130). The expression of female rage, such as her attacks on Mason and Rochester, is once again linked with hysteria.

Thus it can be seen that despite those ways in which she conforms to Victorian gender ideology, Jane Eyre also rebels through various bodily means. Jane's anger, as both a child and a young woman, mark her as a non-ideal female. Moreover, she repeatedly refuses to conform to patriarchal wishes, most often through attempting to escape from situations of confinement. Jane's bodily suffering and illness afford some sense of power, via gaining her the help she needs in a situation of extreme disempowerment and danger. Finally, bodily suffering is shown to be a means of communication: of distress, deprivation and anger. As the next section demonstrates, Lucy Snowe also fails to conform to Victorian ideals of femininity; much like Jane, her body is presented as un-ideal and even rebels against social strictures confining women.

3.4 Lucy Snowe

Like Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe conforms in some ways to normative conceptions of ideal femininity. However, like both Jane and Catherine Earnshaw, she also disrupts and steps outside the bounds of normative gender constructions. Lucy struggles to fit easily into a Victorian tradition of ideal femininity; she is not only an orphan, but also unattractive, highly intelligent and thus likely to remain a spinster and social non-entity (*V* 234; see also Nichols 194). According to M.

Paul, Lucy's eventual lover, an intelligent woman is an unfortunate accident, "wanted neither as wife nor worker" (V 393). An intelligent woman can find no acceptable role within patriarchal society. In the world of *Villette*, women should be beautiful, minimally-educated, subservient to men and desirable as wives, much like Polly Home. Lucy's nonconformity to nineteenth-century codes of femininity is expressed through both her exile from England and the fact that she never reproduces. The spinster and orphan Lucy is superfluous or redundant: the unmarried woman disturbs middle-class expectations and stability, and must therefore seek new environs abroad (Cozzi 91). Both Lucy and Jane lie outside the bounds of accepted womanhood due to their work as governesses and their small, slight, nervous natures: their very physiques place them on the margins of womanhood (Shuttleworth 82-83).

M. Paul points to some of the ways in which Lucy fails to conform to codes of normative femininity. Regarding Lucy's illness during the vacation in which she cared for the 'cretin', he suggests, "women who are worthy the name ought infinitely to surpass our coarse, fallible, self-indulgent sex, in the power to perform such duties" (V 228). In becoming ill, Lucy has clearly failed the criteria of self-sacrifice and selflessness demanded of every Victorian angel. Lucy's passionate desires offer further evidence of her failure to be selfless. Much like Jane, Lucy's intense desires and imagination mark her as a figure outside normative Victorian constructions of femininity. Lucy's passionate and dangerous fantasies and desires belie those repressive ideological discourses governing Victorian society. Her appetites are "so immoderate, so extreme, so un-English, that [she is] at risk of going mad from them" (Cozzi 84). Though Lucy is adept in repressing her desires for the most part, the reader gains a clear sense that she wishes for more than her life seems to promise. These very wishes are enough to mark her as an un-ideal female. Crucially, Lucy's (limited) success by the close of the text stems from her outburst of passion regarding M. Paul, as she finally defies Madame Beck (V 530-31). In this way, unlike *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* does not fully endorse self-control and self-sacrifice. By calling (self-)control into question in this way, Charlotte Brontë implicitly challenges Victorian theories of

social, psychological and physiological functioning, and the model of healthy self-regulation which underpinned them (Shuttleworth 232).

Though, in *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë addresses the trope of the 'angel' explicitly through Jane's own language, *Villette* presents a more detailed and nuanced explication of multiple constructions of femininity. Over the course of the text, Lucy gains an understanding of the problems with artistic, medical and religious representations of women. Her three main insights relate to the dangers of extreme Protestant self-control; the primacy of phrenology (as espoused by M. Paul) over medicine (as espoused by Graham Bretton); and the problematic materiality of male artistic and medical representations of women. Upon re-examination of religion, science and art as cultural institutions, Lucy begins to reclaim her identity in new ways and release her need for repression (Torgerson 74-83).

As discussed in previous chapters, Lucy is critical of various representations of women. She denigrates the four 'angel' portraits pointed out by M. Paul in the gallery, suggesting that the opportunities provided by normative and 'angelic' femininity are "grim and gray... bloodless, brainless" (V 226). She also rejects the Cleopatra portrait, condemning the woman's indolence, size and perceived immorality (V 223). This condemnation seems to reflect Lucy's own ingestion of social mores surrounding femininity and the denigration of female appetite. However, when considered alongside her rejection of the angel portraits, it is possible that Lucy rejects all of these artworks due to their limited portrayals of femininity. The Cleopatra and 'angel' portraits assume iconic significance in the narrative, as depictions of the two alternate models created by men for women. Furthermore, constructions of the feminine in male-executed art are allied to medical constructions of women: under both medical and artistic gazes, woman is reduced to flesh *or* nerves. Through Lucy's rejection of the portraits presented to her, Charlotte Brontë repudiates materialist constructions of women. Lucy rejects artistic and medical materialism because they are too rigid to adequately conceive of women (Shuttleworth 237-9).

Doctor Graham Bretton represents a particularly authoritative form of surveillance and 'reading' of Lucy and other women. Through his relationship with Lucy, Charlotte Brontë describes "a discourse of gendered social power... [in which] male science unveils female nature" (Shuttleworth 220). Moreover, Graham's diagnoses form an imposition of male 'reason' onto a predominately Gothic text (Shuttleworth 221). Victorian medicine generally refused to listen to women and held a range of deeply problematic (and untrue) beliefs regarding female physiology and pathology. As *Villette's* avatar for Victorian medicine, Graham evinces a thorough misunderstanding of Lucy, her nature and her malady: Dr. John never learns to accurately *read* Lucy (Torgerson 82).

Beyond denying the validity of Lucy's fears and physical fright, through designating the nun as 'hallucination', Graham also leaves the responsibility for recovery in Lucy's hands, suggesting that "happiness is the cure – a cheerful mind the preventative" and instructing her to "cultivate both" (*V* 278). He seems to suggest that any psychological or physical difficulty she is experiencing is her own fault, and that she shouldn't allow her 'nerves' to get the best of her in this way. Lucy is understandably distressed by this suggestion:

...no mockery in this world ever sounds to me so hollow as that of being told to cultivate happiness. What does such advice mean? Happiness is not a potato, to be planted in mould, and tilled with manure. Happiness is a glory shining far down upon us out of Heaven. (*V* 278)

Most tellingly, Graham's advice has a deleterious effect on Lucy's wellbeing. Rather than finding support and, indeed, medical care, she is left to her own devices. In her words: "I was left secretly and sadly to wonder, in my own mind, whether that strange thing was of this world, or of a realm beyond the grave; or whether indeed it was only the child of malady, and I of that malady the prey" (*V* 280). The lack of a willing ear to validate her story leaves Lucy questioning her own sanity. At the end of the text, she discovers that the nun was indeed a real figure (*V* 524). Through this revelation, Charlotte Brontë reinforces the ways in

which Graham denies Lucy's experience and voice, in turn causing her greater degrees of distress. Moreover, Brontë condemns Victorian medicine and psychiatry for its almost wilful misunderstanding of women.

The final institution whose inadequate representations of women Lucy comes to understand is Christianity. Religious conflict is one central aspect of Lucy's experience in *Villette*; she must navigate and finally reject the scripts presented for her as a single woman by continental Catholicism and British Protestantism. The Protestant script (as represented by Graham Bretton) expects a woman to be a shadow, resigned to her lot. The Catholic script (as represented by Père Silas) expects a single woman to become a nun (Torgerson 60). Moreover, the Catholic Church portrayed in *Villette* is an example of 'moral management', as championed by Victorian psychiatry (Shuttleworth 224). As Lucy discovers throughout the course of the text, however, neither ideology will permit her to live actively in the world. The discrepancy between Lucy's outer and inner realities manifests in hysteria (and consequently further physical illness): hysteria charts the conflict between Lucy's own self-image and representations of both Protestant and Catholic concepts of womanhood (Torgerson 60). In this way, Lucy's suffering body may be seen to critique the limited conceptions of femininity presented by both Protestantism and Catholicism. Through Lucy's growing understanding and rejection of artistic, medical and religious constructions of femininity, Charlotte Brontë is able to criticise normative femininity. Lucy's gaze and thoughts become a disruptive force, as she dismantles those paragons of femininity presented by these institutions.

Like Jane, Lucy also finds some escape from an intolerably confining situation through illness and unconsciousness. Lucy is left alone during the school vacation to care for a 'cretin' and subsequently suffers an episode of seemingly hysterical psychological and physical disintegration, including insomnia and food refusal. Prior to the vacation, Lucy's life has been characterised by isolation and attendant suffering. The vacation represents a further intensification of this isolation and, because Lucy is unable to leave the school as the other students do, Charlotte Brontë is able to demonstrate the way in which Lucy is in a sense

'locked in' by her own isolation. Following nine days of intense suffering, she ventures out into the streets of Villette and eventually suffers a complete breakdown:

...I suddenly felt colder where before I was cold, and more powerless where before I was weak. I tried to reach the porch of a great building near, but the mass of frontage and the giant-spire turned black and vanished from my eyes. Instead of sinking on the steps as I intended, I seemed to pitch headlong down an abyss. I remember no more. (*V* 181)

Lucy's breakdown appears to be a direct consequence of her experiences as a repressed and deprived outsider, imprisoned within herself. Lucy's repression and deprivation may be characterised as 'live burial', to make use once again of a core female Gothic metaphor (Gilbert and Gubar 401). Crucially, we must look beyond Lucy's illness and fall into unconsciousness as mere symptoms of distress in order to see the rebellious or agentive quality of her physical and psychological suffering. As becomes evident in the following chapter of *Villette*, it is Lucy's public and extreme breakdown that eventually gains her the help she needs, in the form of Graham and Madame Bretton, who form a surrogate family for Lucy. Thus we see that that a loss of consciousness, which is situated as a sign of weakness or infirmity, perhaps even hysteria, by Victorian medicine, actually becomes a form of release and escape in Lucy's narrative. Like Jane Eyre, Lucy's fall into unconsciousness removes her from an insufferable reality and eventually leads to her escape from this situation more permanently.

It is essential to note that the issue of autonomy, in relation to female bodies, consumption and illness, is inherently paradoxical. As we have seen, female fasting and illness may represent the assimilation of social expectations and attitudes, or the direct influence of external structures. However, fasting and illness may also represent the attempt to gain control, or to exert power. Though women are certainly subject to various strictures surrounding bodily control, and live within a regime of patriarchal control, we must look beyond this

structure in order to explore notions of control and autonomy more thoroughly. Women may use control over food and the body as a means to construct subjectivity, and may find pleasure and self-assurance within this practice (Lupton 14), in addition to autonomy and power. The search or desire for control or autonomy thus emerges as a central and significant issue for women existing within traditions of female fasting and invalidism. Female illness is of particular relevance in the nineteenth century, due to the cult of invalidism outlined in the previous chapter. As this chapter demonstrates, for Victorian women, illness also formed a desperate and final grasp for power, “an effort to maintain control over their single, shrinking resource: their bodies” (Michie 25). This is the case for Lucy, and especially for Catherine Earnshaw.

Jane’s experiences on the moors are mirrored in Lucy’s breakdown and rescue in the streets of Villette. For Lucy also, illness affords some power over circumstance; it is this eventual breakdown in the streets that leads to a change in her circumstances. Lucy is rescued by Graham and taken to his house to convalesce, surrounded by people she holds dear. However, this only occurs when her illness reaches a certain degree of severity and publicity (*V* 199). It seems to be Lucy’s very illness, exacerbated in part by inanition, in the face of isolation that gains her the help she needs. (Not-)eating and illness may therefore represent an attempt, conscious or otherwise, to gain control in a situation of extreme disempowerment: the suffering female body may be engaged in an explicit struggle for power or autonomy.

Paradoxically, in Lucy’s case, the loss of self-control entailed by illness may be seen as a necessary step toward greater self-authority. During illness, her physical body supersedes any other awareness of her body, in turn freeing her from social constraints. Her body is no longer under her control; however, it also momentarily evades social control (Torgerson 73-4). During and following her period of illness, Lucy is able to analyse her own cultural body and the way in which society operates on her, gaining an understanding of the dangers of extreme Protestantism and the failings of both medical and artistic constructions of Victorian femininity. In the process of rendering Lucy herself as culturally

invalid, illness also renders her culture in-valid. Lucy comes to understand that the cultural institutions of religion, science and art, that have created her cultural identity, are unable to help her during the immediate experience of illness. Via a return to the physical body, illness enables Lucy to analyse her own cultural body and the limitations of the value systems operating upon her (Torgerson 74).

It has been suggested that Lucy gains some kind of power or control through her tendencies toward reservation and the direction of observation (Kucich 935). At various times Lucy controls her observed body, through her extreme reluctance to express her own feelings, her constant narrative deflections and her bodily obfuscations, such as refusing to fully cross dress while playing a male part in the school play, despite M. Paul's protestations (V 153-54; see Kim 410-11, 418). Lucy's refusal to cross dress entirely, meaning that she wears men's clothing on her torso, but a dress underneath, renders her grotesque: she cultivates gender dissonance and thus a kind of cultural disturbance (Milbank *Bleeding* 91-92). This scene links her to Vashti, who also disrupts gender conventions, as well as marking her as inescapably monstrous. The female body is shown, yet again, to be a disruptive force.

Lucy's narrative reticence, which is in turn a way of controlling her observed body, has been interpreted as both self-preservation, and the assertion of control over knowledge itself (Stoneman *Charlotte* 70-71). Lucy attempts to control how male characters and the reader view her, both physically and figuratively. These attempts may be interpreted as symptoms of emotional and psychological barricades that have been constructed to protect Lucy's very self from the male gaze and from the pain of heartbreak or lost love she has already experienced in her lifetime (Kim 407). Moreover, Lucy's reserve may form a kind of co-opting of oppressive strategy, within a culture that tries to impose reserve on women from without (Kucich 935).

It is for this reason that Lucy's reserve or repression might be viewed as a contested aspect of her personality. Though her isolation, due in part to her

extreme self-repression, inarguably contributes to her suffering and illness throughout the text, the practice of withholding may offer some measure of power. Much like the withholding of food, withholding of the self may be seen as a complicated gesture that is deeply associated with power and autonomy. Similarly, Catherine Earnshaw withholds both herself and food during the episode in the attic: she “fasted pertinaciously, under the idea, probably, that at every meal, Edgar was ready to choke for her absence” (*WH* 120). As with Lucy, this withholding seems to offer the promise of power.

Lucy’s ‘hysteria’ may be related to her narrative authority, another source of power. Charlotte Brontë expanded the realist genre through a departure from previous depictions of the nerves; she linked nervous sensibility or sensitivity to an emerging psychological realism. Moreover, Brontë transformed illness from an expression of sentimental distress to a condition of narrative authority. Lucy’s nervousness both enhances her own narrative authority, and necessitates acts of narrative containment (Vrettos 59, 67). In the case of the King, Lucy alone is able to apprehend his psychological nature and the cause of his suffering: “There sat a silent sufferer – a nervous, melancholy man. Those eyes had looked on the visits of a certain ghost – had long waited the comings and goings of that strangest spectre, Hypochondria” (*V* 238). Brontë suggests that Lucy is able to read these subtle symptoms of human emotion because her nerves are similarly sensitised, because she too suffers silently (Vrettos 66). Illness is thus related to narrative, or, in a broader sense, communication.

Nineteenth-century psychiatric illnesses such as hysteria may be viewed as manifestations of psychic distress. In the absence of another avenue for expression, such illnesses become “an unspoken idiom of protest, a symbolic voice for the silenced sex, who were forbidden to verbalise their discontents, and so created a language of the body” (Scull 7; see also Showalter *Female* 147). In this way, repressed women found a way to use their bodies to express inner turmoil silently. Sickness or sickliness may have offered women a chance to express dissatisfaction with various aspects of their lives: an implicit criticism of the domestic role that they were apparently unable to fulfil, and the ways in

which they lived deprived lives. Following early twentieth-century psychoanalysis, twentieth-century feminist critics have highlighted the significance of voice or language in analysing illness and eating behaviours in women. Women physicalise their experiences, and particularly their discomforts, via developing corporeal (symptomatic) languages of distress. These languages are necessary because the state of female existence within a phallogocentric symbolic is a derelict one, in which it is extremely difficult for woman to represent herself or to communicate (Heller and Moran 19).

Charlotte Brontë's protagonists repeatedly speak with their bodies. In these texts, lack of appetite (or the inability to eat) is not a sign of innate female 'nature'. Rather, it represents a criticism of the social role prescribed for women, and particularly the inability of women, due to repressive constructions of femininity, to speak their desires (Silver 81). When love is withdrawn, both Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe begin to waste away. This wasting figures emotional malnourishment, but it also communicates the desires and absences experienced by these characters, which they are not able to voice to others. For example, these issues find expression in Lucy Snowe's inability to speak her desires and resulting inability to eat and intense illness. For much of the text, Lucy is desperately lonely, isolated and repressed. During the vacation in particular, when she is left all alone, Lucy is unable to express to anyone the suffering she endures. During her confessional experience with Père Silas, just prior to collapsing in the street, Lucy explains her difficulty in finding language to describe her state; she is only able to give him "the mere outline of my experience" (V 178; see Shuttleworth 234). Lucy's starvation and illness during the vacation may be seen as a way of voicing her distress, a desperate cry for help. Lucy is effectively silenced by her isolation and her physical illness may be viewed as a corporeal language of distress (Heller and Moran 19). Lucy's 'hysteria' is linked to both repression and expression. The nun, if read as hysterical hallucination, forms the consequence of Lucy's repeated and consistent repression. However, her confession to Père Silas and subsequent breakdown in the streets, and even the nun herself, may be read as a kind of spiritual expression. The nun figures the repression of desire, but she also

figures those very desires themselves, intruding upon and erupting into Lucy's world. Further, neurosis provides a vocabulary for spiritual expression that was not limited to religious sainthood, as offered by an extreme version of ascetic Protestantism (Vrettos 67, 79).

The problem of speaking "I" emerges as a central theme of female Gothic; the impulse to cry out is perhaps the most stifled impulse of the female Gothic (DeLamotte 173). The urge to define or make known the self rises in opposition to patriarchal definitions of woman, which attempt to confine her to a separate sphere, and to limit the exercise of her various faculties. The metaphor of 'burial alive' is a powerful description of domestic entrapment. Burial alive also concerns woman's forced concealment of the suffering that such states caused—her lack of voice (DeLamotte 150-51). In the convent-school, and in her isolation, Lucy is buried alive and thereby silenced. Through her constant misinterpretation by those around her, Lucy is made 'other'. She is a victim of the common misprizing of heroines, which makes it impossible for her to be known even when she speaks. Lucy experiences a stark disjunction between those inner states that are presumed by society to be possible for a woman like her, and her own, radically different, experience of herself. Fundamentally, there is no way for Lucy to say "I" and be heard or understood (DeLamotte 245-46). Thus, in the absence of anyone to hear or care about her psychological state or her very self, Lucy's body expresses her misery and deprivation through illness.

Invalidism and food refusal may have offered Victorian women (and literary characters) some measure of autonomy and a voice for the disenfranchised. The suffering female body may have provided a covert opportunity to express dissatisfaction regarding the domesticated and deprived lives of women, or even a silent symbolic protest. There exists a tendency in some modern feminist thought to interpret female pathology as "*protest*—unconscious, inchoate, and counter-productive protest without an effective language, voice, or politics, but protest nonetheless" (Bordo 175). Such a view might take protest to involve: anger at the limitations of traditional constructions of femininity; rejection of the values associated with it; and rebellion against allowing their future to develop

as their predecessors' did (Bordo 156). As in the cases of Jane and Lucy, nineteenth-century psychological disorders have been interpreted as manifestations of psychic distress in the absence of another avenue for expression: an unspoken protest (Scull 7; Showalter *Female* 147). Susan Orbach suggests that both anorexic women and hunger strikers starve in the name of some 'cause': anorexic self-denial "is, in effect, a protest against the rules that circumscribe a woman's life, a demand that she has an absolute right to exist" (107, see also 101-103, 115; Appignanesi 438).

Criticism is a key form of protest expressed in these Brontë novels. For Charlotte Brontë, in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, hunger is inescapably painful. It is via this pain that she criticises the reality of women's lives (Silver 81, 101). Various critics suggest that fasting women of the nineteenth century flaunted physical starvation, and their own wasted bodies, as a way of highlighting the starvation of their mental and emotional faculties (Showalter *Female* 128; see also Silver 19). We may thus read Lucy's repeated wasting as criticism, not only of her emotional malnourishment, but also of the repeated attempts by M. Paul and others to censor her education and alter her religious beliefs (*V* 385, 390, 457). In a similar way, *Jane Eyre's* repeated wasting may be read as a critique of the denial of her desires and the moral danger represented by Rochester.

In the case of *Villette*, the hysterical nature of the protagonist and the narrative itself points to a kind of literary protest. Because nervous disorders are inextricably linked to narrative-making and identity production, "fictions of the nerves were used to challenge traditional concepts of identity and to act out cultural and intellectual upheavals on the immediate and palpable terrain of the body" (Vrettos 57). In *Villette*, according to Athena Vrettos, the act of narration forms a solution to corporeal uncertainty (50). In this way, hysterical or 'nervous' narrative both solves the problem of Lucy's own corporeal uncertainty, and challenges pathologised constructions of the 'nervous' female subject. Charlotte Brontë is able to codify issues of self and society through her figurations of nervous illness; by employing stereotypes of nervous illness, she illustrates the disjunction between imaginative and material realms of

experience. Brontë expanded the realist genre by linking Lucy's nervous sensibilities to her narrative authority (Vrettos 59). In this way, she opened up a conversation surrounding the imaginative capabilities of the female mind, and of female-authored fiction.

Though she is less overtly disruptive or rebellious than a character such as Vashti or Bertha Rochester, Lucy Snowe is shown to be a powerful force of nonconformity. Charlotte Brontë uses her experiences and narrative to criticise those limited constructions of femininity provided by art, medicine and religion. Moreover, Lucy's very body becomes a disruptive force. Via corporeal suffering, namely hysteria and wasting, her body is able to catalyse an escape from confinement and isolation and the gain of power or autonomy. Finally, Lucy's body is able to communicate in the absence of a heard voice, and even to protest against her circumstances.

3.5 Catherine Earnshaw

To varying degrees, Charlotte Brontë outsources the more extreme forms of bodily rebellion in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, through the presentation of characters such as Bertha Rochester and Vashti. Emily Brontë, on the other hand, allows her female protagonist and supporting characters to rebel themselves. Catherine Earnshaw, in particular, enacts her misery and criticism of the systems that limit her upon her own body, creating an embodied and bodily text that demands to be read. Catherine's suffering and her refusals to capitulate to expectations are echoed in other characters, such as Isabella Linton, her sister-in-law, and her daughter, Catherine Linton.

Prior to her invalid decline, Catherine Earnshaw is perhaps the least conforming protagonist in the three texts analysed in this thesis. Moreover, she is the most monstrous woman in *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine is a resounding departure from a cast of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary angels and morally impeccable Gothic heroines (Conger 92-103). Catherine's "spirits were always at

high-water mark, her tongue always going – singing, laughing, and plaguing everybody who would not do the same”. The “little mistress” was exceedingly forthright and even bossy, in a manner very unlike the ideal Victorian woman (*WH* 42). From the beginning of the text, it is clear that Catherine feels the restrictions of the conventional nineteenth-century feminine role. She is “too mischievous and wayward for a favourite” child (*WH* 38), and she and her adopted brother and soul-mate Heathcliff promise to “grow up rude as savages” (*WH* 46). Catherine and Heathcliff loved to “run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and the after punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at” (*WH* 46). Such behaviour indicates both a physical and symbolic distance between Catherine and the idealised domestic feminine role. Nelly’s comment captures the way in which Catherine is inherently monstrous or un-angelic and thus destined to exist outside heaven: “Well might Catherine deem that Heaven would be a land of exile to her, unless, with her mortal body, she cast away her mortal character also” (*WH* 160). In this way, both Catherine’s body and her character are linked to exile from Heaven.

Catherine’s deliberations and confusion regarding her decision to remain at Wuthering Heights with Heathcliff or to marry Edgar and enter the world of Thrushcross Grange illustrate the conflict between the pressure to conform to constructions of idealised femininity and her true nature. The young Catherine’s convalescence at the Grange results in the first instance of any conformity to ideal feminine codes. Despite this temporary civilisation or feminisation enacted upon Catherine by her time at the Grange, it becomes clear that she remains resolutely unladylike: “the queen of the countryside; she had no peer: and she did turn out a haughty headstrong creature” (*WH* 66). In fact, it is only in the company of the Lintons that Catherine continues to act the lady; “at home she had small inclination to practice politeness that would only be laughed at, and restrain an unruly nature when it would bring her neither credit, nor praise” (*WH* 67).

Catherine’s love for Heathcliff is one of her most subversive aspects, demonstrating a lack of moral virtue and reinforcing her outsider status. Even

leaving aside the somewhat incestuous nature of their love, Heathcliff is certainly an inappropriate love interest for a virtuous young woman. As an orphan of unknown (but certainly non-white) origin who behaves in increasingly brutal and lawless ways, he exists beyond societal norms. Catherine's admission that "it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff, now" (*WH* 81) demonstrates her understanding of the expectations placed upon her by society, and of the condemnation she would suffer upon marrying Heathcliff. During their final tryst before Catherine's death, she and Heathcliff share a passionate embrace that certainly lies outside the bounds of appropriate behaviour for a Victorian woman, let alone a married one. Emily Brontë depicts Catherine as demonic, wild and violent: "Her present countenance had a wild vindictiveness in its white cheek, and a bloodless lip, and scintillating eye; and she retained, in her closed fingers, a portion of the locks she had been grasping" (*WH* 160). Catherine's love is quite unladylike and therefore monstrous. Catherine's intense desire for Heathcliff, in addition to her 'savage' behaviour, links her to the trope of the Gothic anti-heroine. Like both Signora Laurentini and Beatrice de las Cisternas, her desires fall outside the bounds of propriety. However, unlike these traditional Gothic anti-heroines, Catherine is not condemned so severely.

Catherine may be viewed as a new kind of female Gothic heroine or protagonist, who combines both positive and negative attributes of her predecessors. Unlike the Radcliffean heroine, Catherine is committed to her own desires, uninhibited, and her mind is analytical and complicated. On the other hand, like her predecessors, she is "easily tyrannised by emotions and unrealistic fantasies" and prone to illness (Conger 96). Through her portrayal of Catherine, Emily Brontë encourages Victorian readers to entertain the possibility that a woman may be worthy of attention, even if she is not angelically pure (Conger 99). Sydy Conger suggests that, through Catherine Earnshaw, Emily Brontë makes a series of irreverently non-Victorian suggestions regarding womanhood. First, she suggests that in addition to emotional needs and strengths, a woman has physical and intellectual ones as well. Furthermore, a woman also has the right to physical, emotional and intellectual autonomy, both before *and* after marriage. Perhaps the most subversive suggestion is that a woman has the right to be both

imperfect and outstanding, and still command respect and affection (Conger 105). In this way, Brontë directly rejects the trope of the angel. As I discuss later in this chapter, Catherine uses her own corporeal expression to find a voice, express criticism, grasp some semblance of autonomy and enact a feminist protest. Though, by the end of her life, as discussed in the preceding chapter, she resembles more closely an invalid angel, these feats render her monstrous in a series of important ways.

Crucially, Catherine's bodily pathologies, those ways in which she suffers, align her with a tradition of aberrant and terrible Gothic anti-heroines. During her episode of illness in the attic, she exhibits monstrous symptoms. Horrified, Edgar observes "she has blood on her lips!" Within moments, "she started up – her hair flying over her shoulders, her eyes flashing, the muscles of her neck and arms standing out *preternaturally*" (WH 118; my emphasis). Her bloody lips make an oblique reference to the vampire, and she is clearly represented as a creature beyond the normal or natural. Like Bertha, she is aligned with mythical figures of female monstrosity or deviance. Moreover, her illness, horrifying in its extremity, resembles that of Signora Laurentini. Each of these women shriek, faint, and suffer from fits, delirium and convulsions (Radcliffe 644-48). In contrast to her gentle and passive decline, these episodes of hysteria mark Catherine as monstrous.

One particularly salient issue that emerges from an analysis of the ways in which the suffering female body may manifest nonconformity is the rejection of femininity, particularly the idealised domestic femininity prized by Victorians. Catherine's breakdown and illness in the attic forms an excellent exemplar of this kind of bodily rejection of femininity, and of the circumstances of her life. This episode stands in contrast to some of the key scenes of female bodily suffering in Charlotte Brontë's texts. Unlike both Jane and Lucy, Catherine displays an unparalleled agency. Following Edgar's ultimatum regarding Heathcliff, Catherine locks herself in the attic, expresses the desire to be/come unwell and refuses food. Even Catherine's hysterical symptoms seem to some extent self-enacted or self-performed. For example, she throws herself on the

sofa, exclaiming: “A thousand smiths’ hammers are beating in my head! ...should she or anyone else aggravate my anger at present, I shall get wild” (*WH* 116). A moment later, Catherine asks Nelly to tell Edgar, “I’m in danger of being seriously ill – I wish it may prove true” (*WH* 116).

Catherine’s episode of illness in the attic includes fits of unconsciousness or delirium; as is the case with Jane and Lucy, such episodes may be interpreted as an attempt to escape the circumstances of a woman’s life. Immediately preceding the birth of her daughter and her own death, Catherine falls into a final state of unconsciousness. During his final visit to the invalid Catherine, Edgar returns home suddenly and Heathcliff makes as if to leave. Catherine, however, clings fast to him and shrieks at Heathcliff to stay. Finally, just before Edgar’s entrance to the room, Catherine falls unconscious. Edgar and Nelly attempt to awaken Catherine with only limited success: “with great difficulty, and after resorting to many means, we managed to restore her to sensation; but she was all bewildered; she sighed, and moaned, and knew nobody” (*WH* 164). Madness and psychological breakdown may thus constitute a form of escape from confinement. Madness is an escape from the real world of repeated trauma, in this case the repeated limitation and imprisonment within the self and within the domestic female role. Illness may thus be seen as a rejection or evasion of external social control (Massé 35; Torgerson 73).

For Catherine in the attic, the circumstance to be rejected is her marriage to Edgar and her consequent inability to keep Heathcliff as her “friend” (*WH* 116). Faced with this eventuality, which entails both the loss of her true love and her only link to childhood and freedom, Catherine attempts to reject the intolerable circumstance. Catherine’s self-confinement and her self-starvation are intimately linked, each forming an attempt to escape the world that causes her anguish. Moreover, the rejection of food constitutes a suicidal attempt to escape the world through death. If taking in food is equivalent to taking in the world, rejection of food constitutes a severing of connection to that world (Lupton 16; Orbach 62-3; Piatti-Farnell 2011 9; Sceats 93, 115). The hunger strike is not merely about refusing food; rather, it is a question of not accepting food from a specific

oppressing force (Eagleton 205). In this case, the oppressors are Catherine's husband and Nelly—Catherine's rejection of food is a rejection of the reality that they impose upon her. Thus Catherine's self-starvation and self-confinement may be interpreted as an attempt to reject her specific circumstances: a world in which she has become a domestic angel and consequently must be separated from Heathcliff.

Moreover, Catherine's self-starvation may constitute a rejection of femininity itself. Gender politics and the nature of female subjectivity are highly relevant to any exploration of the suffering female body throughout history. Some critics have suggested that ambivalent or negative feelings toward femininity, particularly adult femininity, have played a role in female food rejection, and indeed broader illness, throughout history (see Perlick and Silverstein 77, 80, 89). For women in medieval Europe, the path of monastic asceticism, often characterised by extreme fasting, amounted to a rejection of the traditional roles of wife and mother. Female monasticism or piety created tension between women and their families, particularly the father, as it necessitated a rejection of the family's wishes for their female child. Through ascetic and masochistic practices, women rejected traditional narratives and created for themselves an alternative to marriage and motherhood. Specific issues relating to gender and femininity may thus have played a role in the ascetic practices of famous saints such as Catherine of Siena. For Catherine, and others, the path of monasticism offered an escape from the interlocking feminine worlds of courtship, marriage and motherhood. The ascetic monastic path comprised both rejection of the normative feminine role as functionary to man and rebellion against the social condition of women (Bell 39-42, 51, 55, 65, 82, 148; Bynum 87, 146).

Similarly, modern eating disorders may form a response to gender inequality and to gender inauthenticity. The inability to express female identity authentically, due to constricting normative formations of gender, may lead to conflict and the development of disorder or pathology (Shisslak and Crago 420-23). Eating disorder theorists suggest that the relatively common adolescent onset of anorexia is related to a fear of puberty and adulthood (see Appignanesi

449; Brumberg 28; Warin 8). Wolf describes her own anorexia as a direct rejection of womanhood: “anorexia was the only way I could see to keep the dignity in my body that I had had as a kid, and that I would lose as a woman” (103). A curvaceous body may symbolise weakness and dependence, by linking any contemporary woman to the traditionally powerless woman: changing one’s body may be the most overt or visible way to reject a feminine stereotype (Kilbourne 407). In a culture permeated by sexual violence against women, anorexia may constitute a kind of adaptive retreat from the adult female body (Steiner-Adair 387).

Trapped in a society that demands conformity to normative femininity, women of various historical contexts may refrain from participation, or rebel, by refusing food. Refusing to take food in the family home may have offered young women a way to reject the values of domesticity and idealised femininity propagated by their families and society more broadly (Brumberg 136). In the Victorian era in particular, female sickliness offered a form of temporary escape from those family duties imposed by expectations of ideal femininity (Vandereycken and Deth 202). The ability to evade domestic femininity via illness is represented in the characters of Desiree Beck (Madame Beck’s daughter) and Miss Marchmont. Though Brontë uses these characters to demonstrate the limited and excluded lives of Victorian invalid children and women, illness may also be seen as a rejection of or evasion from external social control. Though neither woman really gains additional power or autonomy through illness, they are no longer required to submit to many of the society’s expectations of them as women (Torgerson 72-73). Catherine’s self-confinement in the attic, self-starvation and resulting acute illness may also be interpreted as a rejection of broader femininity. Her refusal to eat, in particular, indicates her participation in a line of women, from the medieval period to contemporary society, who use the body in order to reject the ideals of domestic femininity. Ultimately, Catherine’s breakdown in the attic forms a rejection of her role as wife to a man she does not really love, and her impending role as pregnant mother: a role which will eventually kill her. The unhappy marriages and

illnesses of Catherine and her daughter position them both as rebels against the twin evils of hegemonic gender roles and bourgeois marriage (Cory 6).

Catherine Earnshaw uses illness and food refusal in an attempt to gain power in her restricted social context. A pivotal event early in *Wuthering Heights* illustrates this potential power of female illness. Catherine and Heathcliff spy on the Lintons and upon discovery, Catherine sustains a dog bite (WH 51). The Lintons take her in and look after her, that night and for weeks after. For Catherine, this is an early introduction to the power wielded by the invalid. Though she and Heathcliff were acting outside the bounds of appropriate behaviour, her injury causes the Lintons to treat her with good will, feed her sweet treats and to invite her into their sphere of culture. From an early age, then, Catherine understands the power associated with female illness. Early in their friendship, she quarrels with Edgar and strikes him. He threatens to never visit her again and she cries “Well, go, if you please – get away! And now I’ll cry – I’ll cry myself sick!” (WH 72). Edgar travels as far as the courtyard, before turning and hastening back to Catherine’s side; Nelly observes that “the quarrel had merely effected a closer intimacy” and ignited their potential as lovers (WH 73). This scene explicitly demonstrates the association between female illness or suffering and power. Catherine’s manipulation of others through illness remains a constant theme throughout the text.

Following Catherine’s first bout of serious illness, upon Heathcliff’s departure, she returns to the family “saucier” and “haughtier” than ever, esteeming herself, in Nelly’s words, “a woman” and “our mistress” (WH 88-89). The doctor surmises, “she would not bear crossing much, she ought to have her own way” (WH 89). According to Nelly, Catherine believes the illness “gave her a claim to be treated with consideration”, and “it was nothing less than murder, in her eyes, for any one to presume to stand up and contradict her” (WH 89). Thenceforth, the combination of medical advice and the fact that Catherine’s rages are often attended by “serious threats of a fit” results in both Hindley and Nelly giving in to her every demand (WH 89). Following Catherine’s move to the Grange, the Lintons behave similarly deferentially: “They were both very attentive to her

comfort, certainly. It was not the thorn bending to the honeysuckles, but the honeysuckles embracing the thorn. There were no mutual concessions; one stood erect, and the others yielded" (*WH* 92). Edgar, in particular, evidences "a deep-rooted fear of ruffling her humour" (*WH* 92). Catherine's illness can thus be seen to gain her power over others, from her family to her new husband.

Catherine's move to the Grange, and to a life of domesticity, signals the loss of both her childhood and her autonomy. Consequently, emotional manipulation, through invalidism and suffering, becomes her only possibility of power (Gilbert and Gubar 279).

In his discussion of Catherine of Siena, perhaps the most famous and extreme ascetic saint in European history, Rudolph Bell points out, "it was Catherine's *will* that shaped the course of her infirmity and gave it meaning" (29). He may as well be describing Catherine Earnshaw here, and the significance of this female "will" points to connections between suffering, particularly *fasting*, women throughout history. Control, power and autonomy emerge as central issues relating to the suffering female body. Food and eating are key vehicles for the expression of conflict surrounding power and autonomy. Food enters the body, breaking the boundaries of the self: it is therefore a liminal substance, occupying a space somewhere between nature and culture, human and natural, outside and inside (Lupton 16-17). Because it allows the world into the body, thus complicating established boundaries, food is also a potentially dangerous substance. It is a source of great ambivalence because, though necessary for biological health and survival, and a source of pleasure and contentment, it carries the threat of contamination and bodily impurity (Lupton 3). The liminal and ambivalent nature of food gestures to the intrinsic power that it holds. The relation of food to bodies is fundamentally a power relation (Probyn 7).

Rejection is one of the most potent symbolic acts that can be performed using food. Control in the context of food rejection may manifest as autonomy over the body; freedom from an oppressive institution or situation; or control over circumstances or events. In the medieval era, monastic asceticism offered women a kind of autonomy and power impossible to find within the mainstream

Church or society (Bell 55-56, 116; see also Bynum 125, 128-29, 146-7, 221). Ascetic practices such as fasting enabled women to determine the shape of their lives: to substitute religious activities for menial ones; to redirect the use of a husband's or parents' resources; to convert family members; to criticise powerful religious and secular authorities; and to claim for themselves teaching and reforming roles (Bynum 22, 125, 147, 220-21). The path of ascetic monasticism also offered autonomy from the broader church institution (Bell 20, 117; Bynum 227-28, 233; see also 128-29).

From the sixteenth century until well into the nineteenth century, 'miraculous' fasting girls gained local and national notoriety via their ostensibly lengthy periods of food refusal. Regardless of the veracity of their fasting, it is significant that nineteenth-century fasting girls such as Sarah Jacob and Ann Moore were able to exploit their fame in order to receive money, gifts and attention (Brumberg 56, 69; Silver 44-5; Vandereycken and Deth 47-50, 52). Like their ascetic predecessors hundreds of years before, these women used fasting, whether fraudulent or real, in order to gain a degree of power. Similarly, nineteenth-century psychological disorders, which often included the symptom of food refusal, may have formed a refusal to capitulate to social expectations. Women may have 'chosen' a life of illness rather than participating in normative gender formations, as discussed above, thereby gaining a certain measure of autonomy or authority (Scull 93, 99; Vandereycken and Deth 201). Fasting, in particular, afforded Victorian bourgeois women a kind of disruptive power within the home (Brumberg 128). Perhaps in response to the perceived dangers of expressing hunger, Victorian literary heroines such as Catherine use the opposite—physical self-denial—to manipulate lovers and families (Michie 25).

Currently, it is widely accepted that eating disorders such as anorexia are related to feelings of powerlessness and the desire for control. Autonomy and choice remain key themes in contemporary eating disorder research (Bell 17; Bordo 68, 149-51; Orbach 14, 139; see also Musolino et al). As highlighted above, anorexia may result from a desire to halt or reject female maturation (see Kilbourne 407; Wolf 103), which can be viewed as the desire to exert control over a changing or

betraying female body. The young anorexic woman, according to Bordo, typically experiences her life and hungers as being out of control. Anorexia itself seems to offer an experience of invulnerability (149, 153). It represents a fear and denial of emotional needs; by controlling the body, anorexic women seek to control their emotions and needs: their “needy, hungry, angry, yearning” selves (Orbach 14).

Whether enacted by medieval ascetic religious women, nineteenth-century ‘miraculous’ fasting celebrities or invalids, or anorexic women in today’s society, self-starvation may constitute a means of acquiring power (Vandereycken and Deth 225). Catherine’s most explicit bid for autonomy, through illness and starvation, occurs during the famous attic scene. As I have demonstrated, her physical and psychological suffering forms an attempt to reject or escape from her reality and from the limitations inherent to domestic femininity. However, her suffering is also specifically aimed at both Edgar and Heathcliff, in order to produce a particular result. Following her argument with Edgar, in which he demands that she forsake Heathcliff entirely, Catherine threatens to “get wild” if anyone should “aggravate my anger at present” (*WH* 116). Catherine explicitly suggests that she will “fit” or fall ill if crossed, and entreats Nelly to tell Edgar of her state (*WH* 116). She explains the motive behind her physical and emotional suffering thus: “Well, if I cannot keep Heathcliff for my friend – if Edgar will be mean and jealous, I’ll try to break their hearts by breaking my own. That will be a prompt way of finishing all, when I am pushed to extremity! (*WH* 116). Next, she elaborates on the manipulative potential of her illness, while admonishing Nelly to be more concerned for her welfare:

To this point [Edgar] has been discreet in dreading to provoke me; you must represent the peril of quitting that policy; and remind him of my passionate temper, verging, when kindled, on frenzy – I wish you could dismiss that apathy out of your countenance, and look rather more anxious about me! (*WH* 117)

Nelly reflects Catherine's own wishes here, naming her as "a person who could plan the turning of her fits of passion to account" (*WH* 117). Following her three days of fasting, Catherine takes some gruel and then explicates her own agency in the situation: "'Oh, I will die,' she exclaimed, 'since no one cares anything about me. I wish I had not taken that'" (*WH* 120). Catherine's starvation in the attic may be viewed as an attempt to gain control through self-destruction—if she cannot control Edgar and Heathcliff, perhaps she can wrest some form of command by controlling herself (Heiland 118-19). Catherine may thus direct anger toward Edgar and Heathcliff via her own body, which lies at the centre of their quarrel (May 420). Though Catherine's self-confinement and self-starvation in the attic ultimately fail to effect any real change in her circumstances, at earlier times, both invalidism and food refusal hold out the promise of power. This manipulative potential of female illness emerges as the subversive underside to damaging constructions of femininity.

There is an important sense in which Catherine's body actually imprisons her. Upon marrying Edgar, her body belongs to him also, and following her breakdown he impregnates her, which ultimately leads to her death. She is confined as a wife of culture *due* to her female body, and the adult female body represents all those aspects of ideal femininity against which she rebels: motherhood; wifeness; and angelhood. Catherine's body, "this shattered prison" (*WH* 162), goes on to fail her as she becomes increasingly unwell and eventually dies. In medieval Europe, ascetic practices such as fasting offered autonomy over the body, a way of taming the unruly female body and its appetites. Literal appetite and sexual appetite are related but distinct bodily urges that the holy ascetic attempts to tame and ultimately obliterate. To obliterate every feeling of pain, fatigue, sexual desire, and hunger is to become, ultimately, the master of one's self (Bell 11, 20). Self-starvation may therefore be viewed as an attempt at emotional containment (Lupton 135).

It is therefore possible that, in confining herself to the attic and starving herself, Catherine seeks to obliterate her own sexual feelings toward Heathcliff, to save herself from further misery or in deference to her husband's wishes. Given

Catherine's continued expression of her desire to be with Heathcliff, however, I suggest that this is unlikely. Rather, it seems likely that Catherine sought to control her unruly female body, which is capable of becoming pregnant, among other things. One central Gothic fear expressed by women writers is entrapment within the female body (Hoeveler 241). Catherine's sickness(es) may thus be interpreted as her attempt to employ a kind of fatal control over, and ultimately destroy, her corporeal prison. In this way, through escaping her corporeal prison, Catherine seeks to escape her corporeal destiny as prescribed by Victorian gender ideology.

Thus far I have demonstrated that Catherine rebels, bodily, against her domestic fate and against her own femininity, in a desperate bid for autonomy and happiness, by locking herself away, starving herself and exhibiting exaggerated symptoms of hysteria and distress. In this way, her suffering body enacts those aspects of femininity both feared and reviled by patriarchal society, and she comes to resemble Bertha Rochester. Early in life, to be certain, illness functions as a means to power and control. However, the ultimately potentially illusory nature of this power through illness cannot be ignored. Catherine's 'illness-as-strategy' may be read as an insufficient and doomed attempt to outmanoeuvre the patriarchy. It is doomed because it is based on the illusion that she can control others through illness (Torgerson 114). It does seem that Catherine's peak episode of illness in the attic fails to achieve anything. Following her fits, starving, insomnia and fainting, she settles into a slow decline and gradually begins to resemble the 'angel in the house'. A kind of resigned wasting decline, caused by tuberculosis, renders her ladylike and passive. In this way, Catherine's suffering rebellion is followed by an inevitable bodily acquiescence to expectations and limitations.

In light of her slow ladylike decline, Catherine's death attains extra significance. As discussed in the preceding chapter, in death Catherine becomes almost beatific—finally, an angel. However, an alternative view might take her death as a final act of bodily rebellion, through refusing to capitulate to the rules of the real world. In dying, Catherine gains a kind of autonomy she never had in life:

she finally rejects Edgar, her new daughter, and the roles of wifedom and motherhood. Moreover, her absence exerts a kind of eternal power over Heathcliff, keeping him in perpetual unfulfilled desire. The dead Catherine, the ghostly visitor, is neither silent nor subdued (May 421; Weisser 108). Moreover, it could be argued that as a ghost Catherine has finally achieved free autonomous selfhood. Heathcliff's death has similarly been interpreted as a release from the acculturated self and a return to nature (Torgerson 105). However, the fact remains that both are dead and thus disempowered in a physical sense, at least. Here we find a central paradox of the text: though Catherine-as-spirit has found a kind of selfhood outside social or gender boundaries, and is finally able to achieve a perfect union with Heathcliff-as-spirit, she remains lacking because she is no longer a living woman (Weisser 108). The figure of the female ghost in *Wuthering Heights* represents dispossession and powerlessness. Those within the patriarchal social system, such as Catherine, are alienated from the body, nature and their true selves. This process of self-alienation drains the life from women and transforms them into ghosts (Torgerson 94-95).

Much like both Jane and Lucy, Catherine uses her body to communicate in situations of desperation and disempowerment. However, she does so in a more active sense, because her starvation is deliberate. In the Victorian era, food refusal or anorexic behaviour may be viewed as a kind of nonverbal discourse that adhered to the emotional guidelines that governed the bourgeois family. The Victorian fasting woman resorted to symbolic rather than rhetorical behaviour, turning to food as a kind of symbolic language, because her options for self-expression were limited by social convention (Brumberg 140, 171, 188). Similarly, the modern anorexic may be viewed as the most recent manifestation of a historical tradition of women and girls who have used food and the body to form symbolic language (Brumberg 2). Orbach draws comparisons between the anorexic and the hunger striker: both are starving in the name of some cause. Unlike the hunger striker, however, the anorexic woman is unable to articulate her cause. In order to decipher the cause, we 'read' her body, her food refusal, and the resulting transformation of her body (102).

The connection between food, eating and voice has obvious implications for literary representations of female behaviour and subjective experience. Female writers often utilise tropes of hunger, starvation and eating to explore issues of female identity and expression. Literary scenes of eating and hungering, representations of female bodies, or scenes in which eating and speaking appear as competing activities, may encode gendered conflicts between embodiment and speech (Heller and Moran 4, 19). Catherine Earnshaw's starving in the attic may thus be read as an attempt to convey the starved nature of her existence, in the absence of a heard voice. She is unable to express to Edgar the consequences of her separation from Heathcliff, or the misery she experiences while confined to Thrushcross Grange. In her own words, Catherine "couldn't explain to Edgar how certain I felt of having a fit, or going raging mad, if he persisted [in asking me to forsake Heathcliff]... I had no command of tongue, or brain, and he did not guess my agony" (*WH* 126). In the absence of "tongue", Catherine's body speaks for her. Unheard and uncomprehended by her husband, who refuses to listen to her desires, she consequently retreats into nonverbal communication of distress. Her literal malnourishment mimics the ways in which she lacks emotional and social nourishment. In light of her desire to gain power through illness, Catherine becomes a kind of hunger striker. However, because she remains unable to clearly articulate her cause, she more closely resembles Orbach's anorexic woman, who performs a hunger strike in the name of some unarticulated or inarticulable cause.

In this way, the female body becomes a mouthpiece: "living within prescribed social boundaries, women's bodies become the vehicle for a whole range of expressions that have no other medium" (Orbach 48). In an attempt to conform to or reject contemporary ideals of femininity, woman uses and speaks with her body. For the feminist analyst, the disordered female body is engaged in a process of making meaning, in an embodied attempt to express certain values and ideas and thus speak for the self (Bordo 67). It is important to note that during the attic scene, Catherine not only starves, but also exhibits a frightening array of physical symptoms. These symptoms, from food refusal to fits, are all manifestations of her corporeal attempts to communicate.

Catherine's death, following her periods of intense breakdown and lengthy invalid decline, is an intensely contested gesture. On the one hand, it is through Catherine's invalidism and eventual death that she most fully conforms to ideal femininity, becoming a kind of angel. However, her death and preceding illness may also be viewed as a bodily rejection of society and the roles it provides for women. The contested nature of her death raises this important question: could Catherine Earnshaw's starving and illness be viewed as a form of protest in this sense—does she, by self-destructing, expose the destructive potential of normative femininity?

Catherine's death may be viewed as an indication that she prefers self-destruction to normative heterosexual marital relationships (May 419). In choosing and to some extent even causing her own death, she rejects Edgar and their marriage. Catherine rejects the world she lives in, her husband and her domestic existence, because they do not allow her to live as she desires. At Thrushcross Grange, she is isolated from the moors and from her true love Heathcliff. When Edgar demands that she forsake Heathcliff, Catherine responds violently, continuing to strive for her own version of freedom via her only remaining weapon: her body. Catherine's death is therefore an expression of the impossibility of living in a world that will not allow her to live her rebellious impulses (Cory 21). Through death, Catherine escapes from a world that won't accept her, and returns to childhood.

It seems clear that Emily Brontë uses Catherine's slow and suffering demise to criticise domestic femininity. According to critics such as Bordo, the anorexic woman exposes and indicts cultural ideals relating to gender, via pursuing these ideals to their destructive extremes (176). Like the anorexic woman, Catherine pushes patriarchal expectations of the feminine to extremes, through her array of afflictions, and destroys herself in the process. If the heroine of female Gothic cannot destroy the patriarchy, she may instead mime it to death (Hoeveler 18). Through orchestrating, to some extent, her own demise, Catherine's final communication is a pointed criticism of the world that she lives in. However, if we take Catherine's illness and death as 'protest' in this way, the dire

consequences cannot be overlooked—Catherine dies young, miserable and suffering. If she is on a ‘hunger strike’ regarding her intolerable circumstances, does it succeed? She certainly doesn’t effect any change in her immediate circumstances; however, she does draw attention to her misery and escapes life through death. Catherine effects a total rejection of wifedom and motherhood, but this is only achieved by exiting life itself: an ultimate state of disempowerment.

On the one hand, we must recognise in female illness a potential dimension of protest, against the limitations of idealised domestic femininity. However, we must also acknowledge that anorexic and hysterical protest is written on the bodies of women, rather than indicating a conscious politics or socio-political understanding. Furthermore, a gesture that expresses protest may at the same time signal retreat (Bordo 159, 176). Thus Catherine’s starving, wasting, physical and psychological symptoms may express protest but may also signal her ultimate retreat from an un-navigable world. It is important to consider the consequences of such protests. On a functional level, sufferers are isolated, weakened and undermined by the symptoms of these disorders. On the symbolic level, “the protest collapses into its opposite and proclaims the utter capitulation of the subject to the contracted female world” (Bordo 176), as demonstrated by Catherine’s eruptive symptoms during her time in the attic, followed by her slow decline into angelhood and death. Thus, any pathology of female protest may paradoxically function as though in collusion with those cultural conditions that produce them. Crucially, such pathologies reproduce rather than transform that which is being protested. Female pathology is therefore a social formation through which a source of potential rebellion eventually acts to maintain the established order (Bordo 177).

Though the actively subversive potential of illness must be considered, glorifying hysteria or anorexia as feminist protest runs the risk of obscuring the physical, psychological and social consequences of such an illness, and the individual subjective experiences of suffering women. Showalter, for example, warns against positive or glorifying interpretations of female lunatics and hysterics,

because such claims risk romanticising and endorsing madness as rebellion rather than the desperate communication of powerless women (Showalter *Female* 5). Critics are similarly cautious regarding feminist interpretations of eating disorders, warning against an endorsement of self-destruction as an ultimately feminist and therefore desirable act. The risk here is one of reduction: if we simplify the actions of women to symbols, we may obscure the personal experience that, in the case of severe mental illness, may be horrific. Finally, Bordo criticises the limiting construction of eating disorders as *either* disease *or* protest, arguing that the two are not mutually exclusive (64-65). Catherine's bodily pathologies and even her death therefore remain contested gestures, expressing both capitulation to and rebellion against restrictive gender formations.

This chapter has analysed the ways in which the suffering female body may be engaged in forms of disruption or rebellion. Both Emily and Charlotte Brontë can be seen to engage with literary traditions of monstrous femininity, from wicked Gothic anti-heroines to the madwomen of Victorian fiction. Characters such as Bertha Rochester exemplify those negative conceptions of femininity utilised by the patriarchy to control women. Vashti, on the other hand, though monstrous, does not fit neatly into Victorian gender formations and is thus a destabilising force within the text. Emily Brontë transforms both Catherine and Isabella Linton from domestic angels into monstrous women, in order to criticise Victorian ideologies of marriage and domesticity.

Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe and Catherine Earnshaw each fail to conform to feminine ideals in some ways. Jane's anger and her rebellious attitude toward confinement place her outside the bounds of acceptable femininity. Moreover, her ill and starving body is used to communicate in situations of extreme disempowerment. Lucy's narrative is used to criticise those notions of femininity espoused by the institutions of art, medicine and religion, as Lucy gradually learns to reject such models. Like Jane, her suffering body is used to communicate in situations of disempowered silence, and even to gain power or autonomy. Catherine Earnshaw is arguably the most monstrous of these women, failing to conform to

normative femininity in various ways, and evoking the trope of the Gothic anti-heroine. Catherine is shown to reject domestic femininity; strive and sometimes gain power or autonomy; and communicate in the absence of a heard voice. Finally, Catherine's symptoms and even her death may be viewed as a kind of protest, though an ambivalent and contested one. Above all, it can be seen that Jane, Catherine and Lucy are each engaged in forms of bodily communication, as they voice that which goes unheard and struggle against the strictures of Victorian femininity. The female body is shown to be a disruptive and eruptive force, capable of deviant communication and outright rebellion.

Chapter 4 – Literary Strategy: Disruption of Genre and Ideology

many, even most, Victorian novels centre on a physically beautiful heroine and trace *the disposition of her body* in either marriage or death. (Michie 5; my emphasis)

Having demonstrated that the suffering female body manifests in response to architectural space and social constructions of femininity, and may gesture simultaneously toward both conformity and defiance, this chapter considers the possibilities imagined for such a body by the authors. A consideration of literary strategy illuminates the ways in which, like the female bodies of their protagonists, Emily and Charlotte Brontë gesture simultaneously toward both conformity to and subversion of Victorian discourse and ideology. In literary terms, the Brontës use female corporeality to both comply with and subvert dominant narratives about women. In much the same way that physical spaces imprison the protagonists, they are also bound by generic conventions; however, the Brontës do find ways of breaching such boundaries.

This thesis so far has demonstrated the ultimate and inevitable vulnerability of the female literary body to suffering in *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Villette*. In light of this ultimate vulnerability, it becomes important to question what these authors sought to express through representations of suffering embodiment. Moreover, given the complicated and contested nature of female corporeality, it becomes challenging to place Emily and Charlotte Brontë either within or outside a tradition of feminist, or indeed proto-feminist, literature and thought. Did they, through their novels, critique and rebel against literary traditions of female representation, or did they merely regurgitate those Victorian ideologies with which we are so familiar? What possibilities are imagined for the suffering female body?

4.1 Female Destiny in Gothic and Victorian Literature

The Gothic provided a space in which Victorian female writers were able to express anxieties and criticism regarding social and cultural ideology and boundaries, and explore female experience, gender oppression and sexual difference (see Botting 1, 19; Fleenor 13; Hoeveler 4). Many critics have therefore interpreted the female Gothic as a politically subversive mode that is used to articulate women's dissatisfaction with and criticism of patriarchal social structures (Wallace and Smith 2; see also Hoeveler 4-5). Where traditional Gothic is often concerned with male usurpation of the home from other men, the usurpation that emerges at the centre of female-authored Gothic is the disempowerment of women who have been erased, or have surrendered their power, in exchange for integration into a culture of enforced domesticity. In an attempt to highlight female disempowerment, there emerges a subversive authorial impulse to "undermine the constitution of the home as a 'place of peace' into which evil never came" (Ellis *Contested* 219, see also 218). The fallen home becomes the site upon which this subversive female Gothic impulse is articulated as resistance (Ellis *Contested* 220).

As I demonstrated in chapter 1, Gothic spaces are inextricably tied to the body of the Gothic heroine; enclosed domestic spaces such as the home or attic may figure the female body, repressive society, or the experience of confinement (Fleenor 12; Heiland 115). The female body is a locus of fears within the female Gothic, regarding both confinement and intrusion from outside. The boundaries of the self held a specific significance, because women are "in a variety of ways—socially, psychologically, even epistemologically—set apart, circumscribed, and subject to intrusion" (DeLamotte 151). Fundamentally, the female Gothic expresses psychological, epistemological, religious and social anxieties that resolve into a central concern about boundaries of the self (DeLamotte 14). The female body, as a space controlled and formed by social and literary ideology, in addition to powerful patriarchal figures and forces, is just as confining and isolating as the locked attic or desolate castle, and may form a fatally permeable vessel, ripe for intrusion.

Despite the ways in which the Gothic may be used by female authors to articulate fears regarding the domestic sphere, disempowerment and the female body, debate exists as to the ultimate subversive potential of the female Gothic. Many critics suggest that female Gothic writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were still bound by the kinds of literary and social conventions regarding all women. Fleenor, for example, denies any true subversive potential, suggesting that “the Female Gothic is conservative not revolutionary, acting always in reaction, tension and dichotomy” (Fleenor 24). Though the female Gothic highlights the dangers to women of patriarchal society, it also contributes to the persecution of women depicted in its texts, via the aestheticisation of female pain and suffering. As I discuss in chapter 2, the constant suffering of heroines such as Emily St Aubert of *Udolpho* is, at times, presented in a positive light. Such representations of female suffering only serve to reinscribe patriarchal ideology and oppression. Though feminist critics have suggested the existence of a radical, proto-feminist edge to female Gothic texts, it seems that this struggle is eventually abandoned in favour of conformity, albeit an uneasy kind (Killeen 173-74).

A brief consideration of traditional Gothic texts will help to elucidate this limited nature of the Gothic mode and even female Gothic. In Lewis’ *The Monk* (1796), following various ordeals and tribulations, some female characters are rewarded via marriage: Agnes is reunited with Raymond and finally married, and Virginia wins the heart of the bereaved Lorenzo (Lewis 418-20). Antonia, however, has perished; following her defilement by Ambrosio, the only possible end for her is death (Lewis 392-93). In *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Radcliffe presents marriage and domestic felicity as the ultimate goals for female characters. Emily St Aubert is finally reunited and married with Valancourt; the Lady Blanche is happily married to Monsieur St. Foix; and Annette is similarly reunited and thence married to Ludovico (Radcliffe 670-72). Signora Laurentini, on the other hand, the monstrous female of the text, dies because she cannot be redeemed (Radcliffe 651). Like Antonia, she has been defiled (though by her own hand) and is no longer virtuous. ‘Good’ women are rewarded by marriage and ‘wicked’ or unvirtuous women are condemned to death. Though Austen satirises the Gothic

mode, particularly tropes of setting and character, the conclusion of *Northanger Abbey* (1817) similarly fulfils every expectation of a classic Gothic novel.

Catherine Morland is married to her chosen partner, thus beginning a life of “perfect happiness” (Austen 261). Eleanor Tilney, a suffering heroine, marries and thus escapes “the evils of such a home as Northanger” (Austen 260).

Marriage is once again constructed as a form of ‘escape’ for women. For Austen, marriage provides security and felicity for female characters.

Moreover, the various marriages or couplings in both *The Monk* and *Udolpho* adhere to the opposing Gothic models of escape and immanence. Ambrosio incarcerates and intrudes upon Antonia’s body; she is thus doomed and consequently dies. The proposals to Emily by ‘wrong’ suitors such as Count Morano and Monsier Du Pont are presented in a similarly negative light. For example, the secret, midnight intrusion of Count Morano, via the hidden staircase, into Emily’s bedroom represents the threat to her physical and sexual safety offered by his ardent desires (Radcliffe 260-61). Conversely, the ‘good’ couplings of Emily and Valancourt, Annette and Ludovico, Agnes and Raymond are each associated with escape: from poverty, ignominy, and physical imprisonment.

Despite the positive association of marriage with escape in these instances, the destinies available to female characters in the Gothic are arguably incredibly limited. A deep contradiction of both traditional and female Gothic is the association of the impulse toward escape or transcendence with the impulse toward marriage, as demonstrated explicitly in both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. Though marriage in these texts (and others) would seem to represent the immanence, characterised by confinement, domination, powerlessness and seclusion, against which heroines constantly struggle, it is also associated with escape. This association undercuts the protest and criticism implicit in the female Gothicists’ depiction of their heroines’ struggles, and represents a certain generic “blindness to their own insight that the happy bounded world of home, the heroine’s compensation for the loss of full self-hood, is the same prison from which she sought to escape” (DeLamotte 187-88).

Generally, within the kind of Gothic discussed above, 'good' women are married and 'bad' or sullied women die. Marriage and death are thus the only destinies available to women in the Gothic. Moreover, although marriage seems to provide an escape for the 'good' woman, it may in fact represent the oppressive and eternal prison that awaits women in the domestic sphere. The escapist female Gothic writer fantasises a reality that culminates in either repression (and thence marriage) as in *Jane Eyre*, or death, as in *Wuthering Heights*. The corresponding attitudes toward heterosexual domestic ideology are to accept and survive or rage and self-destruct (Hoeveler 16, 18).

It is important to highlight again the primacy of female suffering within the Gothic. All women in Gothic narratives suffer, from the virtuous heroine who suffers passively (and beautifully) in order to earn her final reward of marriage to the monstrous Gothic villain-ness who must be punished, via immense suffering and death, for her sins. As I have demonstrated, the Brontë works under review engage with the figure of the suffering woman through their repeated depictions of bodily and psychological suffering. However, they do not aestheticise or valourise female suffering in the same way that traditional Gothicists have. Charlotte Brontë depicts heroines who suffer brutally and harshly, who vocalise their discontents and struggle to end suffering. Similarly, Emily Brontë uses female suffering in order to disrupt social and literary narratives about women's lives. Although Catherine Earnshaw's life does fit the mould of the Gothic monstrous woman who is punished for her sins, Emily Brontë uses the extent of her suffering and the reversal of Gothic ideology surrounding marriage to condemn this same mould. None of these heroines 'deserve' their suffering and this very fact condemns the construction of women, whether Gothic heroines or invalids, as suffering subjects. In this way, both authors interrogate and ultimately denounce the suffering destiny prescribed to Victorian literary women.

As I demonstrate throughout this chapter, Emily and Charlotte Brontë are able to modify female Gothic conventions in order to disrupt and criticise Victorian ideology, particularly surrounding marriage and domesticity. Nevertheless, they

were also bound by the kinds of social and literary narratives available to women in the Victorian era. A careful consideration of the kind of possibilities they imagined for their female protagonists will shed some light on the extent to which they were bound by or able to critique female social narratives. As I suggest throughout this chapter, it is due to the limitations of realism, traditional Gothic and even female Gothic, that both Emily and Charlotte Brontë employ a kind of generic fusion or constant shifting, in order to expand the possibilities expressed by their texts.

Much like Gothic novels, women in Victorian novels are usually faced with one of two destinies: marriage or death. Mary Barton of *Mary Barton* (1848) and Margaret Hale of *North and South* (1855) by Elizabeth Gaskell, and Esther of *Bleak House* (1852-53) by Charles Dickens are all examples of Victorian heroines who are happily married by the ends of their respective texts. Conversely, Ruth of *Ruth* (1853) by Elizabeth Gaskell, Maggie Tulliver of *Mill on the Floss* (1860) by George Eliot and Tess of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) by Thomas Hardy each lose, or are doomed to lose, their lives during the course of their novels.

As in the Gothic novel, the 'good' heroine of Victorian fiction more broadly is rewarded with marriage: the only possible or acceptable destiny for the ideal Victorian woman, the angel in the house. For women, the only real alternative to marriage is death. Fallen women such as Tess Durbeyfield will inevitably die, because they cannot be redeemed. Maggie Tulliver, on the other hand, dies because she does not fit into Victorian conceptions of appropriate femininity. Ruth is both a fallen woman and a self-sacrificing martyr; she is thereby doubly condemned to death. In the world of Brontë fiction, angelic women such as Helen Burns die and those women who do not conform to normative femininity, such as the monstrous Bertha Rochester, also die. Thus it emerges that the path toward death in Victorian realist or social problem novels is more complex than in traditional Gothic novels; it is not only the fallen woman who is destined for death.

Jane Eyre, *Wuthering Heights* and *Villette* have been analysed in various different ways throughout their critical history. DeLamotte (1990), Hoeveler (1995) and Milbank (1992, 2002, 2009) provide classic readings of the works of Emily and Charlotte Brontë as examples of female Gothic. Shuttleworth (1996) and Glen (2004), on the other hand, present Charlotte Brontë's work as deeply rooted in historical context, and therefore a kind of Victorian realism. These differing analyses demonstrate the existence of a tension between forms such as realism and the Gothic. I suggest that this tension warrants specific attention, because it is at the interface between these two modes "that the most disturbing and innovative effects of the Brontë novels occur" (Avery 121). Moreover, clues to the kinds of possibilities imagined by the authors and to the ultimate significance of the suffering female body lie at this interface. Another tension that emerges, particularly in the works of Charlotte Brontë, is the tension between imagination and reason. Both *Jane Eyre* and *Lucy Snowe* muse upon the effects of these forces upon their psyches and their lives. Moreover, in this opposition we may read a direct correlation to the opposition between Gothic and realism. This section therefore considers the interplay between reason and realism on the one hand, and imagination and the Gothic on the other. I explore the ways in which the Gothic disrupts the realist space and the realist text, the ways in which Emily and Charlotte Brontë fuse Gothic and realism, and examine the implications of these kinds of fractured fiction for the suffering female body and for the female Victorian writer. Finally, I demonstrate the ways in which the Brontës' treatment of the Gothic and realist modes resulted in expanding the boundaries of fiction available to women authors in the Victorian era.

In the attempt to uncover what it is the Brontës are trying to convey through their use of the suffering female body, the corporeal destiny of the female bodies described becomes crucial. At first glance, we may say that both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* follow the rubric presented by both Gothic and Victorian fictional ideology; *Jane Eyre*'s body is submerged within marriage and Catherine Earnshaw, along with her physical body at least, self-destructs and eventually dies. In resembling both Bertha Rochester and Helen Burns, like Gaskell's Ruth, Catherine Earnshaw is doubly doomed to death. Yet again, 'good' women are

married and 'bad' women die. *Villette*, on the hand, defies this convention: Lucy Snowe neither dies nor marries.

I suggest that the figuration of female embodiment as Gothic space and embodiment of Gothic fears surrounding both confinement and intrusion from outside is one key to understanding the endings of these novels in question. If the female body, as Gothic space, is inherently confining in this way, then we may ask whether the Brontës envisaged any possible escape from "that most Gothic of nightmares, the female body" (Hoeveler 241). In relation to the female body, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* in particular may be read as both readings and re-workings of female Gothic, that utilise the mode in order to consider the boundaries of the self as a crucial aspect of women's psychological, social, and moral dilemmas (DeLamotte 193).

The suffering female body is used to disrupt Victorian gender and domestic ideology in the texts under review. Moreover, the embodiment of female suffering renders impossible any meaningful distinction between Gothic and realism as written by Emily and Charlotte Brontë. The female body, in its infinite capacity for suffering, particularly those key female experiences of confinement, intrusion and the symptoms provoked by these, renders non-Gothic readings of these Brontë texts implausible. This body therefore Gothicises the realist space and thus the realist text. Just as the figure of the 'angel in the house' haunts Victorian literature, I suggest that the Gothic haunts Victorian realist spaces, particularly those constructed by female authors. Moreover, the omnipresence of the Gothic functions as a form of social critique regarding the oppressions that shape women's lives under Victorian patriarchy.

4.2 *Jane Eyre*

On the surface, *Jane Eyre* seems to present a happy ending for its protagonist. Jane is happily married to the tamed Gothic hero, has become a mother, and lives in ostensible domestic bliss in their forest haven. However, a close examination

of the final chapters, in addition to aspects of Jane's journey throughout the novel, with reference to forms such as the *Bildungsroman* and the Gothic, illuminates the ambivalence and even warning contained in such an ending.

The Victorian era sees considerable overlapping between dominant literary modes, from the *Bildungsroman* to Gothic and realist novels. The heroine of traditional Gothic escapes the terrors of confinement and intrusion, usually at the hands of a corrupt patriarch, to be rewarded by marriage. As discussed above, the heroine of realist Victorian fiction may either die or get married, depending on whether she is 'fallen', nonconforming or virtuous. Both forms are linked via the representation of marriage as the ultimate goal for female characters. Significantly, the Gothic or realist heroine does not necessarily 'progress' throughout her text. The *Bildungsroman*, on the other hand, may combine with either form, but entails a specific central plot of 'development' and no set ending for its protagonist. However, as this section demonstrates, the ending of the *Bildungsroman* emerges as deeply problematic for the female protagonist; the *Bildung*, or quest, is inevitably set aside or repressed, by either marriage or death (DuPlessis 3-4). *Jane Eyre* may be considered in terms of Gothic, realist and *Bildungsroman* forms.

The *Bildungsroman* is a novel about human development and formation, usually involving a youth who, through a series of events, grows up and comes of age (Maynard 279, 281; Moretti 15-17; Summerfield and Downward 1). The form would have been familiar with many Victorian readers: prominent examples include *Emma* (1815) by Jane Austen, *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Great Expectations* (1861) by Charles Dickens and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) by Mark Twain. *Jane Eyre* has been examined as a classic example of nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman*: the novel of education, coming-of-age or identity formation (see Gilbert and Gubar 336-37, 339; Locy 105-120; Weisser 64). Each stage in Jane's life is marked by a move to a new location; the progression of physical spaces through which Jane moves may therefore be said to represent those stages of development that form the focus of the *Bildungsroman*. Moreover, Jane progresses from childhood to adulthood, gaining

both independence and self-determination, much like the traditional protagonist of the form. By the end of the text, the ugly orphan child has gained her “fortune” and extended family, and a home inhabited by loving husband and child (*JE* 426, 429-30, 498-501).

Traditional romance and courtship novels of the time posed marriage as the developmental goal for female protagonists. Consequently, the woman’s early life was often un-depicted in these texts, because she is a ‘blank’ until she encounters the man who will shape her into his wife. *Jane Eyre* is therefore atypical in its depiction of Jane’s formative childhood years, and fits more with a tradition of male *Bildungsroman* than the traditional Victorian courtship novel (Locy 105-107). In keeping with the tradition of English *Bildungsroman*, Jane’s childhood is granted an “emblematic and lasting prominence” (Moretti 182). Though Rochester threatens Jane’s independence and freedom earlier in the novel, he is finally punished by and put in service of “an all-conquering female *Bildungsroman*” (Milbank *Daughters* 148). Susan Ostrov Weisser suggests that through invoking the *Bildungsroman* and a search for positive female identity, the text asserts “the innate, lawful power and dignity of sexual love” (64). In these ways, the movement of Jane’s life, particularly her childhood and early adolescence, seems to mimic the male-pattern *Bildungsroman*. Charlotte Brontë may be said to subvert the plot of the traditional courtship novel, by ascribing a ‘male’ literary destiny to Jane, in the form of these *Bildungsroman* elements.

However, it must be noted that the spaces through which Jane moves do not necessarily “evolve from narrowness and enclosure to expansiveness and freedom” as they do in the male story of maturation and increasing self-determination (Locy 108). Perhaps most importantly, Jane’s final ‘destination’ becomes Rochester himself (Locy 108): “I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth” (*JE* 500). If the destination of the *Bildungsroman* protagonist is an emblem of development, the ending of *Jane Eyre* is deeply problematic. Ferndean and Jane’s life as an ‘angel in the house’, wife and mother, represent enclosure and dependence, rather than freedom and self-determination. Rather than development of the self, the focus of the final chapter

becomes Jane's "services" to Rochester, her "doing for him what he wished to be done" (*JE* 500). Moreover, Rochester's attitude toward Jane aptly describes the self-abnegation expected of the 'angel in the house'; "he felt I loved him so fondly, that to yield that attendance was to indulge my sweetest wishes" (*JE* 500). Though Charlotte Brontë seems to offer a male-pattern *Bildungsroman*, the fairy tale romance ending, complete with domestic servitude, does not fulfil these expectations. In enclosing Jane within her husband's home, the novel in fact capitulates to the familiar and inevitable conclusion of the Victorian courtship novel (Locy 118, 120). For women, the traditional *Bildungsroman* plot constructs "'happiness' as the highest value, but only to the detriment and eventual annulment of 'freedom'" (Moretti 8).

This contradiction highlights the way in which the traditional *Bildungsroman* form is fundamentally problematic for Victorian female protagonists: it "[fails] to account for a specifically female experience" (Summerfield and Downward 5). Heroines of the female *Bildungsroman* are faced with a dual problem: not to marry represents a deep failure in itself, but "to marry threatens to end any other development in favour of a peculiarly female destiny" (Maynard 282; see also DuPlessis 3, 6). Jane, for example, gives up her teaching work, her education at St John's side, and her life in the broader world to marry and care for Rochester (*JE* 467). This dilemma reflects the contradiction that also lies at the heart of the Gothic: marriage and domesticity, presented as reward and escape, may merely be a new form of confinement. How indeed does a woman conform to expectations of gender performance without compromising either her education or career prospects: her life outside marriage? In this way, for female *Bildungsroman* authors and protagonists, the form cannot really depict the development of a secure and independent identity (DuPlessis 3, 6; Maynard 282-83). In the case of *Jane Eyre*, the ending of the *Bildungsroman* may only offer "a possible niche in a dangerous world" (Maynard 300).

Beyond the inadequacy of the ending as a true *Bildungsroman* conclusion, we must look carefully at Jane's 'progress' throughout the text. Madeleine Wood, for example, reads the series of physical spaces in *Jane Eyre* as a repeated motif of

enclosure and escape rather than progression; Jane's 'progress' may be read as a rocking see-saw rather than a linear journey (95, 109). Jane is "locked" within the Red Room at Gateshead, before being released as a consequence of her fainting fit, and eventually escaping to school (*JE* 25-26, 44). At school, she is confined by the physical walls and Lowood's "rules and systems" (*JE* 99). Following Miss Temple's departure, Jane desires "liberty" and escapes to Thornfield (*JE* 99). During Jane's passionate musings on the third story, her reference to "restraint" and "stagnation" conjures once more this motif of female enclosure. At Thornfield, Jane is also at risk of being enslaved to Rochester's bigamous desires; finally, she must "elude his sorrow" and "[evade] the embrace", in order to "flee temptation" (*JE* 357-58). Upon reaching Marsh End, Jane escapes the dangers of being homeless on the moors (*JE* 377). However, she is threatened once more by confinement in the form of St John's will: "by degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind" (*JE* 443). Upon hearing Rochester's cry, Jane "broke from St John; who had followed, and would have detained me" and travels alone in search of Rochester (*JE* 467). She finds him at Ferndean, and settles down in this "desolate spot" (*JE* 477). Her final accounts of their life together suggest one of isolation and narrowed scope; Jane is fully submerged in Rochester and hidden away at Ferndean, with "no opening anywhere" (*JE* 478, see also 498-502).

Read in this way, Jane ends the text enclosed once more, therefore denying the educative and developmental possibilities of her journey. In fact, Charlotte Brontë subverts the *Bildungsroman* form by appearing to follow its developmental pattern, but instead offering the reverse of progress: Jane is psychologically identical as both child and adult, and her desires have not been tempered by the world around her (Shuttleworth 159; see also Glen 54, 58; Summerfield and Downward 142). Jane's anger, her "ridge of lighted heath", first unleashed upon Mrs Reed at Gateshead (*JE* 47), appears again at Lowood when she tears the sign from Helen's head and "thrust it into the fire" (*JE* 86). Jane's passion lives on at Thornfield as she demands of Rochester: "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? – You think wrong! – I have as much soul as you, – and full as much heart!" (*JE* 284).

Jane remains every bit as passionate and strong in her final confrontation with St John, explaining, "it was *my* time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play, and in force. I told him to forbear question or remark... Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails" (*JE* 467). This thread of passion and anger emerges throughout Jane's tale; though she gains fortune and power, Jane remains psychologically identical in some important ways.

By invoking and subverting the form in this way, through seeming to offer education and progress, but instead delivering enclosure and stasis, Charlotte Brontë condemns Victorian society for the limited lives it prescribes for women. Brontë therefore denounces the *Bildungsroman* form as a male-only space, and one that consequently fails to adequately capture the lack of possibilities available to Victorian women. In so doing, she criticises those forms of literary and social narrative available to women. However, though Charlotte Brontë condemns the *Bildungsroman* as inadequate in this way, *Jane Eyre* ultimately conforms to dominant literary and social narratives for women, whether *Bildung*, Gothic or domestic realism.

In addition to the *Bildungsroman* form, which is ultimately rejected, though only partially, *Jane Eyre* also engages with both realism and the Gothic. In comparison with Emily Brontë's overtly omnipresent Gothic, Charlotte Brontë uses the Gothic in quite different ways. Where the Gothic eventually pervades every space in *Wuthering Heights*, connecting to both heaven and hell, Charlotte Brontë uses some strategies of containment regarding the Gothic (Avery 126, 131). She also uses Gothic markers to warn of danger. However, her use of the Gothic is highly ambivalent (Homans *Bearing* 87); though Gothic tropes and architecture may function as warnings, the Gothic is also associated with female imagination and, to some degree, female empowerment.

Jane Eyre evinces the constant disruption of the realist by the Gothic, and vice versa. The scene in which Jane Eyre is intruded upon and attacked by John Reed in the living room forms an example of the Gothic intruding upon the realist space (*JE* 13-17; Avery 123). As I have discussed, John Reed is a classic Gothic

villain and represents the oppressive forces of patriarchy; his attack results in Jane's terrifying incarceration within the red room, which is one of the most overtly Gothic scenes in the text. Conversely, the scene in which Jane meets Rochester for the first time demonstrates the primacy of realism. The Gothic, in the form of Rochester and his horse, imagined by Jane to be the mythical Gytrash, is quite literally brought down to earth when Rochester falls off his horse (*JE* 128-29). This refiguring of Gothic elements within the world of reality emerges as one central component of Charlotte Brontë's manipulation of the mode at this stage of her career (Avery 124-25). These scenes demonstrate the way in which the real and the Gothic constantly jostle for supremacy in *Jane Eyre*.

Like Radcliffe, then, Charlotte Brontë at times makes use of the Gothic explained. Initially supernatural-seeming figures such as Bertha Rochester (and the nun in *Villette*) are eventually revealed as grounded in the world of reality. However, this process is far from straightforward. *Jane Eyre* entertains Gothic possibilities, then undermines them with rationality, then undermines this very rationality (Homans *Bearing* 87). For example, the ghostly and "preternatural" laughter heard by Jane is rationally explained as belonging to Grace Poole (*JE* 122-123). However, the discovery of the Gothic Bertha as the source of this laughter undermines this rational explanation, proving it to be a red herring. Here, Brontë emulates Lewis, who similarly subverts his explanation of the bleeding ghost as the young Agnes in masquerade via the later revelation that the ghost is real (Miles 106). However, unlike the ghostly bleeding nun, Bertha is only a woman: a terrifying and bestial Gothic anti-heroine, but a woman nonetheless. In this way, Brontë could be said to synthesise the Gothic approaches of both Radcliffe and Lewis; she undermines rationality only to eventually explain the supernatural.

Bertha Rochester herself is a powerfully ambiguous figure. Though she initially appears as a Gothic monster, comprising vampire and witch among others, she is revealed to be merely a madwoman or, more tragically, a woman deemed mad. However, she remains an obviously Gothic villain-ness, who stands in the way of Jane's happiness and represents those reviled aspects of femininity within the Victorian era and Victorian literature. Conversely, despite her monstrous nature,

Bertha also functions as a double for Jane and acts as a warning against the dangers entailed in union with Rochester. Bertha Rochester is thus a complicated figure, comprising both threat and ally to Jane. Bertha's character highlights the overwhelming ambivalence of Charlotte Brontë's Gothic. Her Gothic is sometimes superseded by and sometimes triumphs over realism; sometimes the Gothic and real continually vie for supremacy. The Gothic also comes to be associated with female empowerment and freedom.

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë begins to play with an idea that finds its fullest representation in *Villette*: the battle between imagination and reason, or passion and duty. *Jane Eyre*, and to a greater extent, *Lucy Snowe*, explicitly discuss these opposing strains and the effects that they have on their psyches and experiences. Though less explicitly than *Lucy*, Jane also evidences a battle between reason or sense and imagination or memory (of hopes, wishes and sentiments) (*JE* 182-83). Jane's transcendent tale of "incident, life, fire, feeling" is formed by her imagination (*JE* 125), but harsh reason is shown to triumph repeatedly: "Sense would resist delirium: judgement would warn passion" (*JE* 172). For example, upon receiving the knowledge of Rochester's impending marriage to Blanche Ingram, Jane "reviewed the information I had got; looked into my heart, examined its thoughts and feelings, and endeavoured to bring back with a strict hand such as had been straying through imagination's boundless and trackless waste, into the safe fold of common sense" (*JE* 182). In his gypsy guise, reading the physiognomy of her face, Rochester describes the primacy of reason in Jane's temperament:

The forehead declares, "Reason sits firm and holds the reins, and she will not let the feelings burst away and hurry her to wild chasms. The passions may rage furiously, like true heathens, as they are; and the desires may imagine all sorts of vain things; but judgement shall still have the last word in every argument, and the casting vote in every decision. (*JE* 227)

In *Jane Eyre*, the opposition or tension between the Gothic and realist modes is reflected in this opposition between imagination and reason: indeterminate dream-like states contrast with “intrusive concrete realities” (Henson 33). In Jane’s own life, “fantasied female power is continually tethered and troubled by the realist narrative of social determination and patriarchal imbrication” (Boumelha 77). This opposition is reflected in generic terms—fairy tale and Gothic elements of the text belong to an undetermined nonfactual world, which is associated with female imagination and parallels the text’s firm bourgeois realism (Henson 50). This tension between Gothic and realist, or fairy-tale and novel, textual elements gives *Jane Eyre* force; the tension between and incompatibilities of desire and restraint, imagination or Gothic and realism, are acted out at the very level of form (Boumelha 77).

For Jane, reason is above all a force for repression. It appears that reason is complicit in confining and reducing the female body, thus condemning it to suffering. Imagination, on the other hand, may form the only possibility for freedom and growth. Glen, for example, argues that the discourse of Jane’s rational achievements is at times supplanted by the more compelling discourse of transcendent desire (99). Repeatedly, “the discourse of duty and discipline, of rational application and moderate satisfaction, gives way to a more potent language of energy and desire” (Glen 100): Jane’s tale of “incident, life, fire, feeling” (*JE* 125). This imagination/reason dichotomy may therefore be recast as one of desire/duty. The scene in which Rochester’s cry somehow reaches Jane and rouses her from her stupor in St John’s presence affirms such an interpretation (*JE* 466-67). Jane’s sense of duty threatens to bind her to St John, despite her knowledge that she will die with him: her sense of reason is thus mortally dangerous. Rochester’s cry, on the other hand, represents the force of her desire. Moreover, and significantly, this cry is never ‘explained’ in the same way that Bertha’s laugh is; in remaining within the realm of the impossible or supernatural, it allows the Gothic, imagination and desire supremacy over realism, reason and duty.

The primacy of Gothic, imagination and desire over realism, reason and duty necessarily raises questions regarding the boundaries of genre. As demonstrated through depictions of imagination and reason, or the internal life of women, Charlotte Brontë explores territories of female emotional life that lie outside the realm of the ordinary Victorian novel (Heilman 121). In both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, the discovery of passion and rehabilitation of the extra-rational is “no longer oriented in marvellous circumstance but moves deeply into the lesser known realities of human life” (Heilman 123). In this way, Brontë begins to broaden the scope of the Victorian novel.

Though *Jane Eyre* is often read as psychologically realist, Glen argues that the text is more extreme than this. In terms of nineteenth-century reality, *Jane Eyre* depicts “the prescriptive, self-abnegating, death-shadowed world of its ideal womanhood” (Glen 94). In so doing, Charlotte Brontë presents the female life as under constant threat of obliteration. In this way, Brontë both creates and flouts a realist illusion: women’s lives and relationships are represented in configurations more violent, extreme and disquieting, than a realist reading is able to contain (Glen 54, 95). Arguably, some of the more violent, extreme and disquieting elements of the text are Gothic elements. In much the same way that the Gothic and Jane’s imagination are used to tell women’s stories, the female story of *Jane Eyre* “articulates a cultural unconscious that the realism of its period could not express” (Glen 95). In this way, through her complicated fusion of Gothic and realism, and the ways in which she pushes against the boundaries of the established Victorian novel, Charlotte Brontë begins to carve fresh space for female authors.

Much like Brontë’s use of the Gothic throughout the text, the ending of *Jane Eyre* is deeply ambivalent. The conclusion of *Jane Eyre* has been viewed variously as: the triumphant negotiation of a true companionate marriage; the triumph of a natural paradise over a Christian paradise; and Jane’s achievement of status, money and love and therefore her besting of the patriarchy at its own game (see Gilbert and Gubar 370; Glen 130; Hoeveler 215, 219, 222). However, modern feminist critics have also viewed the ending in starkly negative terms.

Rochester's maiming, in addition to Bertha's death, is the final event that makes his union with Jane possible. Earlier in the text, when Rochester was physically whole, they could not see each other truly; each were blinded by the social disguises such as master/servant or Byronic hero/princess that they superimposed upon the other. Now that these discourses have been discarded, they have become equals and can see each other: "they can (though one is blind) see and speak beyond the medium of the flesh" (Gilbert and Gubar 368; see also Hoeveler 222). Moreover, Rochester, "blind and a cripple" (*JE* 477), has lost a significant degree of power. His diminished power, in addition to Jane's increased usefulness to Rochester following his maiming, frees her to express her sexuality because they are finally equals. Rochester's appeal and his sexual desires are altered in quality, rather than quantity, which in turn enables the fulfilment of Jane's own desires (Weisser 71). Where previously social disguises, in addition to Rochester's manifest social privilege, rendered their relationship inherently unequal, now they share a similar standing. Jane has in fact gained the power to 'read' the world for Rochester, becoming "his vision... 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" (*JE* 500; Henson 55). Jane governs this natural Gothic world, and in so doing ensnares Rochester, who is unable to negotiate this external space in her absence.

The merging of Rochester's class with Jane's moral purity represents, according to Hoeveler, one female gothic goal: that the corrupt aristocracy will be absorbed by the bourgeoisie, which will in turn be controlled by strong women and their daughters. The ideal daughter of the female gothic will absorb the patriarch, consume his power, emerge as a goddess, destroy patriarchy and instil herself as a new matriarch (Hoeveler 215). Though she has no daughters at the close of the text, Jane is arguably the matriarch of Ferndean: she has gained wealth and status, and wields power over her maimed and blind husband. By the end of the text, Jane has become somewhat omnipotent: evildoers have been punished, her decisions are vindicated and her desires fulfilled (Glen 58). Such an interpretation may suggest that Jane desires enclosure at Ferndean, and that

such enclosure represents empowerment. However, as I highlight shortly, this desire may well be misplaced or misguided.

As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the ending of *Jane Eyre* may be interpreted as the negotiation of a true companionate marriage. The physical isolation and enclosure of Ferndean, which can barely be seen, “so thick and dark grew the timber of the gloomy wood about it” (*JE* 478), seems to imply that the lovers must retreat from the world in this way, in order to escape or circumvent the strictures of a hierarchical and patriarchal society that does not allow for egalitarian companionate marriage (Gilbert and Gubar 369; see also Moore 84). The material demands and realistic constraints on Jane’s story, such as Jane’s plainness and poverty and the physical obstacle of Bertha Rochester, are eventually displaced, making room for the natural and romantic paradise she creates with Rochester. In this way, we may say that *Jane Eyre*, both character and novel, flees both restrictive society and realism itself (Schor 177). The marital idyll seems to exist as a final fairy tale element of the text.

Despite a sense of empowerment and achievement, however, the Gothic and “gloomy” nature of Ferndean, the surrounding forest of which has “no opening anywhere” (*JE* 478), serves as a warning against imprisonment therein. As I have demonstrated, Charlotte Brontë uses Gothic tropes to hint at the dangers that lurk in domestic spaces such as Thornfield and Ferndean. Links are repeatedly constructed between the domestic sphere and female disempowerment. At Thornfield, Jane is vulnerable to Rochester’s controlling tendencies, and his desire to make of her a mistress and thus ruin her moral life. At Ferndean, Jane seems resigned to domestic confinement and even erasure in her marriage to Rochester, having released her desires for liberty and transcendence.

During her time at Thornfield, *Jane Eyre* criticises the lot of women, indicating her keen awareness of the confinement of all women within the “customary” bounds of femininity:

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. (*JE* 125-26; my emphasis)

Despite her keen awareness of the confines of domestic femininity, Jane ultimately ensconces herself within just such a situation. To modern feminist readers and critics, Jane's 'radical revolt' transforms too easily into a happily-ever-after ending – no longer requiring social reform, she is seemingly happy just to have the right man (Stoneman *Charlotte* 46). This, according to DeLamotte, is "the final and deep contradiction of *Jane Eyre*", and at the heart of women's Gothic more broadly. In terms of central Gothic ideals, *Jane Eyre* conflates transcendence (or escape) with immanence, or obscures immanence with the appearance of transcendence, in its depiction of Jane's happy marriage to Rochester. For *Jane Eyre*, the search for transcendence was really a search for domestic love, and thus a bending to Victorian romantic and domestic ideology (DeLamotte 225): the traditional courtship plot of the time. At the close of the text, Jane remains imprisoned within both the female body and the domestic fate she herself earlier denounced.

Though we might recognise the small achievements of natural paradise, companionate marriage and relative success *within* a patriarchal society, it seems impossible to find ultimate satisfaction in Jane's capitulation to feminine ideals. Within this space, she submits to her gendered fate through marrying Rochester and bearing his child. In settling down at Ferndean and undertaking to re-humanise Rochester, Jane becomes the 'angel in the house'. Her highest calling and deepest happiness is to be found in marriage: "To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth" (*JE* 494). Though marriage fulfils Jane's desire, she also abnegates herself in the care and companionship of Rochester. She becomes a surrogate mother to Adele, though only sometimes, as she explains: "my time and cares were now required by another – my husband needed them

all" (*JE* 499). When Jane's marriage and Bertha's demise are viewed alongside one another, it seems that, far from female refusal to submit to ownership, *Jane Eyre* documents the transformation of two rebellious women from free agents to quasi-slaves (Killeen 100). Perhaps most chillingly, Jane ends the text in servitude to her master, Rochester (*JE* 500).

Some critics have taken an even darker interpretation of the ending. Although Jane gains power, through wealth and family, the text culminates in her complete disappearance: Jane Eyre ceases to exist, becoming instead Mrs Rochester (Glen 62). According to Shuttleworth, Jane subscribes to nineteenth-century oppositional principles of selfhood; the self is always defined *against* the other (176). In light of this ideology, the fulfilment or union of marriage can only mean one thing for Jane: death, the ultimate dissolution of self (Shuttleworth 181-2). The language Jane uses to describe her marriage confirms this sense of dissolution: "I know what it is to live entirely *for*... what I love best on earth" and "to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking" (*JE* 500; my emphasis). Jane appears as the antithesis to an independent and liberated woman. As I discuss in relation to *Wuthering Heights*, the Gothic has been described as a quest-form; however, the heroine of the female Gothic strives for "a false ideal created by a patriarchal society" (Fleenor 11). In Jane's case, as in Catherine's, marriage may emerge as one such false ideal, and consequently bring destruction rather than happiness and fulfilment. Once again, the ostensibly happy world of home, offered as compensation for the heroine's repression of her desire for independence and full subject-hood, may be revealed as "the same prison from which she sought to escape" (DeLamotte 187-88).

Jane is finally enclosed within Victorian literary, and particularly Gothic, expectations for the female body: marriage and motherhood. The Gothic nature of her final home indicates both her fulfilment of the Gothic 'quest' for domesticity, and also the dangers inherent to such fulfilment. Though Charlotte Brontë apparently could not imagine or create any alternative fate for her protagonist, she includes a warning, through her overt use of Gothic imagery. The ambivalence surrounding the conclusion of *Jane Eyre* highlights the limited

nature of literary narratives available to Victorian female protagonists. As I have already demonstrated, the marriage ending cannot truly fulfil a male-pattern *Bildungsroman* due to its failure to offer personal development. Though Brontë highlights and criticises this limitation, Jane is still seen to fulfil the destiny for Victorian realist and Gothic heroines: marriage. Though marriage has been posited as the highest goal for Victorian literary women, Brontë's use of the Gothic in the final scenes of the text undermines this construction. In this way, Charlotte Brontë both conforms to and subverts generic expectations of female destiny. Jane remains, until the end, locked within the female body and attendant roles so feared by female Gothicists.

This discussion of Jane's corporeal and narrative destiny points to the text's "curious mixture of radical and conservative elements" (Stoneman *Charlotte* 46-47). Critical debate regarding the meaning encoded in the ending points to the existence of opposing desires and a strong sense of ambivalence within the text. Various critics have suggested that this narrative conflict, exemplified by the ending, points to women's contradictory desires for both openness or freedom and security or enclosure (see DeLamotte 195; Henson 36-7; Stoneman *Charlotte* 97). Stoneman, for example, suggests that *Jane Eyre's* refusal to give clear answers, instead offering only ambiguity and ambivalence, is an important achievement (*Charlotte* 97). In her presentation of Jane's marriage and in the closing scenes, we may read Brontë's ambivalence toward Jane's journey: "the ending is more than a compromise: it is utopian, unworldly, and shrouded in ambiguity" (Wood 109). The qualified and indecisive endings of her novels, particularly if we also consider *Villette*, suggest that Charlotte Brontë was not able to imagine a viable solution to the problems of patriarchy and women's oppression (Gilbert and Gubar 369). Though still somewhat ambiguous, *Villette* begins to move toward a viable solution: an alternative and therefore subversive possibility in terms of female destiny.

4.3 *Villette*

When viewed alongside *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* clearly presents an extension of many of the ideas explored in Charlotte Brontë's most popular text. *Villette* is arguably both more ambiguous and more subversive than *Jane Eyre*. Though the conclusion of the text is somewhat unclear and deeply ambivalent, Brontë appears to seek an alternative ending for her female protagonist. This ending exists outside both marriage and death, and does not abandon Lucy to the Gothic horrors of the female body and female corporeal destiny.

One of the most significant ways in which *Villette* develops ideas presented in *Jane Eyre* is the treatment of the Gothic. Compared to *Jane Eyre*, in which the Gothic is, to a certain degree, confined to settings such as the Red Room and Thornfield, the Gothic in *Villette* spills over and outside boundaries. It even spreads over the entire city itself (Avery 132), which is populated by threatening men, "dreaded hunters" (V 70), and labyrinthine, "narrow streets of picturesque, ancient, and mouldering houses" (V 180). With the exception of Lucy's new home, the final setting of the text, the Gothic fills and constantly irrupts into every space in *Villette*. As demonstrated by the insistent themes of confinement, isolation and silence, as well as the Gothic nature of almost every setting, "Charlotte Brontë... [allows] the gothic to filter through the whole of her work, suggesting that surface appearances cannot be trusted and that a whole realm of horrors might break through at any moment to attack the unsuspecting" (Avery 134). Simon Avery suggests that Charlotte Brontë's revision of the Gothic in *Villette* may be attributed in part to her editing of *Wuthering Heights* following Emily Brontë's death (132). Much like her sister, Charlotte Brontë gestures to the omnipresence of the Gothic, even within a seemingly realist text.

Despite the all-pervading nature of the Gothic, Charlotte Brontë's use of the mode is far from straightforward. Like Bertha Rochester, the nun in *Villette* is an ambiguous figure. Though she initially appears a spectre, capable of terrorising Lucy to illness, she is eventually revealed to be a mere costume: the lover in disguise. However, like Bertha, the figure of the nun also warns of the dangers

threatening Lucy in the *pensionnat* and women in broader society: chastity, burial alive and silence. The nun is thus an ambivalent, even paradoxical figure: she is both fully clothed and a spectre, the embodiment of repression and transgression, the nun and the lover (Milbank *Bleeding* 91). Moreover, the nun is used to bring Lucy and M. Paul together: their shared vision of the spectre fosters trust and kinship between them. In this way, the nun figure is used to create more than simple 'Gothic thrills'. Finally, the nun is connected to Lucy's imagination and used to explore the inner realities and psychic depths of humanity (Heilman 128).

In *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë extends the discussion of imagination and reason that began in *Jane Eyre*. Despite Lucy's sober demeanour and repressive nature, her internal life is described using a "lurid metaphorical language", comprising personified abstractions and allusions, from the biblical to the artistic and intertextual (Glen 200). This language seems to speak of various emotional energies—anxiety, dread, desolation, excitement and uncertainty—that "threaten to burst the bounds of realism" (Glen 200). Lucy describes this metaphorical language as "Imagination", and its opponent, the realism with endangered boundaries, thus corresponds to "Reason". I suggest that imagination may therefore be viewed as a force that pushes against the boundaries of established realism.

Lucy invokes both imagination and reason to explain her opposing impulses regarding communication with Graham: the conflict between her self-repression and those libidinal desires that she both fears and hopes will possess her (Gilbert and Gubar 411). Reason, described as the "hag", is "withered" and "chill" and hell-bent on silencing Lucy: "[she] would not let me look up, or smile, or hope: she could not rest unless I were altogether crushed, cowed, broken-in, and broken-down" (V 255). On the contrary, Lucy describes imagination thus:

My hunger has this good angel appeased with food, sweet and strange, gathered amongst gleaned angels, garnering their dew-white harvest in the first fresh hour of a heavenly day; tenderly

has she assuaged the insufferable tears which weep away life
itself – kindly given rest to deadly weariness – generously lent
hope and impulse to paralysed despair. Divine, compassionate,
succourable influence! (256)

Lucy explains that without imagination, she would have long ago died from reason's "ill-usage: her stint, her chill, her barren board, her icy bed, her savage, ceaseless blows" (V 256). Both forces are shown to be extremely potent. Despite imagination's appeasing of Lucy's hunger on this evening, and through the night, "at dawn Reason relieved the guard" (V 257), taking Lucy under its thrall again: "By degrees, a composite feeling of blended strength and pain wound itself wirily round my heart, sustained, or at least restrained its throbbings, and made me fit for the day's work" (V 258). Throughout the text, however, imagination is also shown to be a powerful force in Lucy's life. Upon being drugged by Madame Beck, Lucy remains vividly awake in an almost altered state, suggesting that "Imagination was roused from her rest, and she came forth impetuous and venturous" (V 496-97). For a short time at least, imagination triumphs over reason. Significantly, in this state Lucy finds a new sense of empowerment, in addition to the discovery that M. Paul has not yet left Villette.

The primacy of imagination in this scene is linked to Charlotte Brontë's unique depiction of nervous sensibility and the creation of a new kind of psychologised fiction. The surreal nature of Lucy's drugged experience is only possible because she exhibits a special sensitivity. Some critics have argued that the creation of this partly pathological, 'nervous' sensitivity is one of the most significant innovations of Charlotte Brontë's work. Robert Heilman and Athena Vrettos disagree on the kind of genre within which Brontë writes, the former describing a kind of psychologised Gothic and the latter a psychological realism. However, each agrees that the inclusion of psychological elements, particularly relating to nervous sensibility, enabled Brontë to depict the 'nerves' in new ways and expand the bounds of literary genre (Heilman 129; Vrettos 59). Again, it is apparent that illness becomes a condition of narrative authority. Moreover, Charlotte Brontë employs these tropes or stereotypes of nervous sensibility in

order to describe a disjunction between the imaginative and material (realist) realms of experience (Vrettos 59).

The battle between reason and imagination emerges at the centres of both Charlotte Brontë texts. The ghostly nun in *Villette* may be viewed as an embodiment of this central battle. Though she is ultimately revealed to be a mere lover's disguise, and is summarily torn apart by Lucy (V 519), Charlotte Brontë leaves this revelation until the very end of the text, thereby allowing the nun to assume multiple roles. The nun forms the confluence of Gothic metaphor, spiritual expression and medical diagnosis, representing spiritual expression and repression, imagination and disease. Graham, representing the patriarchal medical force of reason, dismisses the nun as hallucination or "spectral illusion", borne of "the nerves" (V 278). Brontë carefully demonstrates the devastating effect that the doctor's reason has upon Lucy, in addition to the ultimate falsity of his claims. Though the nun is eventually revealed to be a product of the rational world, Brontë allows her such narrative life, and even causative agency in bringing Lucy and Paul together, that we cannot dismiss her as a mere plot device. In this way, the figure of the nun works to convey the importance of imagination in Lucy's spiritual and emotional development. This conflict between reason and imagination highlights the existence of "an older form of Gothic imagination, which is at odds with reason, and fights with it for supremacy" (Milbank *Daughters* 148). Charlotte Brontë's fusion of Gothic and realism, and embodied representation of the forces of imagination and reason, may thus form an attempt to depict the ways in which the female imagination struggles against the confines of patriarchal realism.

In the work of Charlotte Brontë, then, a kind of disjunction or tension between imagination and reason emerges at the core of the different narratives. Reason is inextricably linked to both repression and confinement, and the banal horrors of realism, or 'real life'. Imagination, on the other hand, is shown to represent freedom, expansion, empowerment and the Gothic. Further, in *Villette*, it is linked to nervous sensibility, the depiction of which is used to broaden the bounds of

the genre within which Charlotte Brontë writes, whether conceived of as psychologised Gothic or psychological realism.

Heilman has described the 'new Gothic' written by Charlotte Brontë as a kind of 'Gothic of the mind', or psychological Gothic (131). In *Villette*, the Gothic appears not only in settings such as the convent-school and figures such as the ghostly nun and sinister priest, but also "as emanations from Lucy's own feverish brain" (Cozzi 93). The scene in which the beds in Lucy's room turn into "spectres" and "death's [heads]" is a perfect example of this (*V* 177). In *Villette*, the responses of the female subject to existence develop into sufferings that eventually transform into disorder (Heilman 129). In this way, psychological pathology is represented as a response to reality, rather than the simplistic sentimental or Gothic expression of distress. Charlotte Brontë thus presents psychological pathology as both worthy of literature, and also a condition of narrative authority. Moreover, this kind of pathology is linked to both imagination and the Gothic, suggesting the existence of a kind of freedom for women in their interior emotional and psychological lives.

Though the Gothic permeates *Villette* more constantly than it does *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* is also in some ways more realist. There exist no unexplained phenomena or coincidental circumstances, such as Rochester's cry in *Jane Eyre*, which serve to render Lucy's life better or easier. *Villette* may thus be read, in one way, as more realist (or less melodramatic) and thus more extreme than *Jane Eyre*, in its presentation of a darker view of the possibilities available for a poor, insignificant and plain creature (Glen 197). Lucy's bleak world of boundaries and objects contrasts with Jane's somewhat hopeful world of opening vistas and distant horizons, the "busy world, towns, regions full of life that I had heard of but never seen" and the "tale my imagination created... quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence" (*JE* 125; Glen 234). Moreover, Lucy's longing is countered with a more extreme brutality than any of Jane's efforts at self-control. For example, when Lucy discovers (though this is later shown to be untrue) that M. Paul is to marry Justine Marie, she responds with brutal pragmatism:

I hastened to accept the whole plan. I extended my grasp and took it all in. I gathered it to me with a sort of rage of haste, and folded it round me, as the soldier struck on the field folds his colours about his breast. I invoked Conviction to nail upon me the certainty, abhorred while embraced, to fix it with the strongest spikes her strongest strokes could drive. (V 516)

The crucifixion metaphor expresses the crushing force of Lucy's repression, and general lack of hope. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, to a certain degree, the world of *Villette* is firmly bounded by materiality, rather than opening into possibility (Glen 234). As in *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë uses Lucy's narrative to break the bounds of genre, by presenting a realism that is more extreme and more disquieting than the standard Victorian realist text: "Her narrative cannot assume the configurations of a realism that presupposes that all inhabit the same reassuring world" (Glen 257). In a literary world that has thus far not been much permeated by female accounts of the suffering of women, *Villette's* brutal examination of a neglected female life offers something new to the construction of female subjectivity in the Victorian era. The boundaries of realism are thus pushed back by the new inclusion of never-before-depicted narratives of suffering.

The ending of *Villette* is arguably both less contested and more ambivalent than that of *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte Brontë is more critical of the marriage institution than in *Jane Eyre*, though still less overtly critical than Emily Brontë. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, or indeed most Gothic and Victorian novels, *Villette* does not conclude with a portrait of domestic married bliss. Lucy does not end her text, as Jane does, in a state of marital (domestic) enclosure. Rather, she is a self-employed teacher and head of her own school, and owner of her own house (V 537). Unlike Ferndean, Lucy's final home is described in emphatically non-Gothic terms; as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the house is full of light, fresh greenery, and warm, bright colours. Following Lucy's near-fatal enclosure in the Gothic confines of Madame Beck's school, this school provides a welcome contrast. In terms of genre markers, it would seem that Lucy has found a *safer* final home than Jane Eyre. Like Jane, Lucy also transcends some of the suffering she has experienced

throughout her life. However, rather than capitulating to gendered expectations and resigning her self to domestic confinement, Lucy does this through renouncing the need for a man and enjoying her own independence. In so doing, she rejects literary conventions surrounding female corporeal destiny.

At the close of the text, M. Paul is absent and probably, though not explicitly, dead. Though Lucy desires not to “trouble” the “quiet kind heart” of the reader, and to “leave sunny imaginations hope”, several paragraphs earlier she states that the storm raging around M. Paul’s arriving ship “roared frenzied for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks” (V 546).

Moreover, Lucy’s reference to those “signs of the sky” that she has “[noted] ever since childhood” connects M. Paul to her family, who also perished, similarly described by Lucy using a storm and shipwreck metaphor (V 545; see also 39). Unlike Rochester, who must admittedly be maimed and punished but whose partnership in marriage is still desired as the ultimate goal of the text, M. Paul proves unnecessary at the text’s close. Rather, by the end of the text, we may view Lucy’s relationship with M. Paul as instrumental rather than ideally romantic.

In simple terms, her relationship with M. Paul leads Lucy to gain independence, security and a voice of her own, which are each uncharacteristic for a poor, plain, orphaned woman of the time. M. Paul gives Lucy the house that will become her home and her own school. Moreover, through his affection and love for her, Lucy learns to value and express her own desires and emotional character (Hoeveler 234). When faced with the imagined threat of Justine Marie, Lucy is finally moved to overcome her repressive nature and tell him how she really feels: “the whole history, in brief, summoned to his confidence, rushed thither truthful, literal, ardent, bitter” (V 541). This admission leads M. Paul to declare his own feelings for Lucy: “Lucy, take my love. One day share my life. Be my dearest, first on earth” (V 541).

Despite this romantic connection, Lucy needs M. Paul merely as a male muse, a guide who leads the heroine to self-discovery and her own place in the world

before magically disappearing (Hoeveler 240). First as avowed “friend” (V 355), then as “brother” (V 451), and finally as lover (V 541), M. Paul gives Lucy value. M. Paul may be interpreted as some ideal combination of roles: father, brother, lover, teacher and priest (Hoeveler 236). As teacher, albeit through criticism and ridicule, he leads Lucy to appreciate and revel in her own intelligence: “Whatever my powers – feminine or the contrary – God has given them, and I felt resolute to be ashamed of no faculty of His bestowal” (V 390). Through M. Paul, Lucy learns to love and also to escape or control the social and personal forces that discipline her (Hoeveler 236). M. Paul is thus for a time necessary for Lucy’s wellbeing, because he helps her discover self worth, independence and freedom (Stoneman *Charlotte* 77-78).

However, even as he endows Lucy with the gift of her own school, and thus her autonomy and independence, M. Paul exhibits a controlling attitude toward Lucy. In terms of the future, he directs her thus: “you shall live here and have a school; you shall employ yourself while I am away; you shall think of me sometimes; you shall mind your health and happiness for my sake” (V 537). It seems that even in the act of bestowing upon Lucy her financial independence, he still seeks to control her. Moreover, his instruction reminds the reader of other times when M. Paul controlled or confined Lucy, such as her incarceration and starvation within the attic, or his censorship of her reading material (V 148-50, 385). I suggest that this direction therefore contains a warning regarding a potential future with him. This interpretation is supported by Lucy’s comments a few pages later. M. Paul departs overseas immediately and Lucy’s description of this time is deeply significant: “M. Emmanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the happiest years of my life” (V 543).

In these two sentences alone, Charlotte Brontë violates expectations regarding the necessity of romantic love for female happiness. Lucy’s seemingly easy dismissal of M. Paul may reflect the primacy of her self above his, of her “self-sustaining inward intensity” over all else (Kucich 923). Beyond demonstrating that a physically present partner, or indeed husband, is not necessary for ultimate female happiness, Brontë suggests that *only* in his absence can Lucy

truly be happy. In this way, Brontë implicitly criticises the restrictive construction of nineteenth-century marriage and domestic life for women. Brontë thereby courts the idea that free female sexuality or sexual union is dangerously close to annihilation (Weisser 89): Lucy can only survive through remaining alone. Unlike Jane, who is submerged in Rochester and arguably disappears as 'Jane Eyre', Lucy remains un-annihilated. It is through her separation from M. Paul that Lucy achieves the Gothic feminist ideal of self-sufficiency, and escapes the central female Gothic nightmare: entrapment within the female body and all that existence therein entails (Hoeveler 240-41). In avoiding marriage, Lucy has "escaped or at least elided the demands and pitfalls inherent in the flawed female body" (Hoeveler 241). In stark contrast to *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* eschews the need for embodiment of desire in a female body (Wein 743).

In terms of form, Brontë also repudiates the need for narrative closure (Wein 743). Though M. Paul's absence is explicit, the ambiguous nature of the text's ending, particularly regarding his fate, has garnered much attention. This ambiguity may be the consequence of questions regarding female sexual love, revisited following *Jane Eyre*: does sexual love affirm the self or corrupt, through dependence on another, the quest for female identity (Weisser 74)? It seems that Charlotte Brontë, on an authorial trajectory from *Jane Eyre* to *Villette*, moves ever closer to constructing sexual love, or Victorian hetero-normative sexuality and romance, as a dangerous force. The ending of *Villette* points to the impossibility of conciliation between free female sexuality and those oppressions that shape female sexuality and identity (Weisser 90). In other words, Charlotte Brontë paints two simultaneous and probably incompatible endings: the gaining of both independence and assurance of love from another (Stoneman *Charlotte* 78).

Charlotte Brontë's ultimate refusal to offer closure may also be viewed as an act of narrative resistance. Lucy's suspensions of her own love and happiness, of M. Paul and of the reader, may be viewed as the exertion of authorial power (Kim 424-25). Michie casts the ending as Lucy's revenge on M. Paul; ultimately, she resists his reading of her through the "overtly textual double ending, where she

manipulates M. Paul's destiny and displays the power of her own language" (117). By the end of the text, M. Paul has become a mere pawn in Lucy's extended shipwreck and storm metaphor, used to describe various significant events in her life, such as the death of her family: "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" (V 39). Through manipulating M. Paul's destiny in this way, Lucy demonstrates the power of figurative language: the narrative remains firmly her own, and hers the powers of conclusion and control (Michie 117-18).

One other issue of particular relevance for an analysis of Lucy's ending, within the context of this thesis about female suffering, is that of health. The creation of *Villette* itself, as narrated by Lucy, may be taken as proof of her eventual psychological health (Torgerson 88). According to Lucy herself, she ends the text healthy and happy: "Few things shake me now; few things had importance to vex, intimidate, or depress me: most things pleased – mere trifles had a charm" (V 544). However, Lucy's narrative evasion throughout *Villette* must lead an aware critic to question whether she is telling the truth here. Hodge suggests that the pattern of *Villette* shows Lucy repeatedly relapsing, rather than ever recovering in a meaningful sense (909-10). Furthermore, her writing draws on both obsession and melancholia: her psychological condition may thus be "a source of intellectual growth and expression" (Hodge 910). Because Lucy describes her symptoms of hysteria throughout the text in metaphors of the ocean, the storm described by Lucy at the close of the text may figure the real story of her own continued nervous illness (Vrettos 63, 77-78). As I have discussed, Charlotte Brontë's depiction of Lucy's illness, and its relation to imagination, sensitivity, and narrative authority, emerges as one of the ways in which she expands the bounds of realism.

Auerbach draws attention to Lucy's final state of singledom, suggesting that *Villette* is radical among Victorian novels for its use of "the perilous journey [into spinsterhood] as a shaping principle" (*Woman* 128). Fiction rarely allows the spinster mobility, exile or happiness, perhaps in order to subdue the old maid's

capacity for defiance and self-renewal (Auerbach *Woman* 128). I suggest that the portrayal of Lucy as a happy and independent 'old maid' is the final and true subversive achievement of *Villette*. Rather than becoming an angel, like Polly Home, or indeed Jane Eyre, Lucy becomes a spinster. The spinster forms a figure of female power: "The old maid, tolerated most easily as society's piteous victim, is in her fullest incarnation its leader, endowed with ambiguously awesome powers that intimate the destined future of the race" (Auerbach *Woman* 145). Significantly, the old maid is a figure free from both Gothic mythology and Victorian domestic ideology: she exists outside normative narratives.

Moreover, Brontë uses other female characters to illustrate the strength of the single woman or spinster. Though Madame Beck does have children, thus fulfilling one aspect of Victorian ideal femininity, she is single, powerful and in many ways unfeminine; "she did not wear a woman's aspect, but rather a man's. Power of a particular kind strongly limned itself in all her traits" (*V* 86). Though her controlling administrative tendencies are monstrous in their effect on Lucy, she presents a "less cloying" alternative to the interdependence of Graham Bretton and his mother, or the overwhelmingly angelic passivity of Polly Home (Auerbach *Communities* 103). Madame Walravens, the "barbarian queen" forms an even stronger representation of female power, appearing to be a more potent ruler of Villette than the gloomy hyponchondriac king (*V* 432; Auerbach *Communities* 107). These examples of strong independent (and old) women reinforce the figuration of the spinster as, above all, powerful. Through representations such as these, *Villette* provides "a welcome departure from the Victorian cant that justified woman's work only by making it a natural outgrowth of familial duties" (Auerbach *Communities* 105).

Through the figuration of Lucy as a single old maid, Charlotte Brontë allows her to escape those limited corporeal destinies offered to women within the Gothic and within Victorian literature more broadly. Moreover, Brontë allows some of her female characters, those who do not conform to strictures of angelic femininity such as Madame Beck, a measure of power unusual in Victorian novels. In so doing, Brontë condemns marriage and domestic ideology as

confining and even dangerous for women. The male lover is shown to be instrumental and, ultimately, unnecessary for female happiness. In discarding the lover, Charlotte Brontë allows Lucy Snowe to escape the Gothic prison of the female body. In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë paints an even more overtly damning picture of domestic and romantic ideology. Unlike Charlotte Brontë, she refuses to entertain the possibility for any end other than death for her heroine.

4.4 *Wuthering Heights*

Where *Jane Eyre* reproduces one dominant literary narrative for women through Jane's final hard-won marriage, *Wuthering Heights* offers the opposite fate for its heroine: death. Though Catherine Earnshaw's death occurs halfway through the text, and is followed by the narrative concerning the second generation, this event is crucial in considering the kinds of endings available to women in the world of Emily Brontë's fiction. In dying, Catherine echoes both Helen Burns and Bertha Rochester: the martyr and the monstrous woman who must be punished via death. Unlike Lucy Snowe, there is no conceivable escape for Catherine from the female body.

Female disempowerment, or 'usurpation', is central to Emily Brontë's portrayal of domesticity. Brontë reverses Gothic tropes in order to present Thrushcross Grange, bastion of culture and domesticity, as a place of overwhelming danger and misery for Catherine Earnshaw. Upon marrying Edgar and moving to the Grange, Catherine effectively loses her home. She is further disempowered through illness and, despite her severe condition, subordinated to the need of the Lintons' for continuity of their line (Homans *Dreaming* 275), as the concerns of patriarchal lineage once again take precedence over female wellbeing and desire. Through her use of the Gothic mode, Brontë demonstrates that the home, particularly the genteel cultured home, is not a place of peace, but rather one of suffering, nightmare and confinement. Emily Brontë in fact presents both Thrushcross Grange and *Wuthering Heights* as places of unrest, or the unravelling of peace. Although the violent, Gothic space of *Wuthering Heights* is

presented in some ways as a place of wild freedom for the Catherine, she remains vulnerable even in this space to those patriarchal institutions of marriage and property inheritance: her brother “wished earnestly to see her bring honour to the family by an alliance with the Lintons” (*WH* 89). It seems that any home, and thus any woman, is vulnerable to the intrusions of patriarchy.

Unlike *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* presents those central Gothic impulses toward transcendence, as represented by Heathcliff, and immanence, as represented by Edgar, as clearly contrasting (DeLamotte 191). At the Heights, Catherine is a “wild, hatless little savage” (*WH* 53), clearly existing beyond the bounds of gender conventions. Through Catherine’s passage from the Heights to the Grange, Emily Brontë reverses the conventions of sentimental female Gothic: marriage becomes a prison. Catherine explicitly details her confinement:

the thing that irks me most is this shattered prison, after all. I’m tired, tired of being enclosed here. I’m wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; but really with it, and in it. (*WH* 161-62)

Emily Brontë thereby demonstrates the dangers of immanence and domestic confinement in marriage and the prison-like home: Catherine has clearly made the ‘wrong’ choice. Similarly, Isabella Linton is forcibly confined at the Heights following her marriage to Heathcliff: he “being [her] legal protector, must retain [her] in [his] custody” (*WH* 151). In this way, Emily Brontë uses the narratives of both Isabella Linton and Catherine Earnshaw to criticise romantic and Gothic notions of love, marriage and domesticity: “underlying Brontë’s urge to modify Gothic conventions is a dissatisfaction with contemporary fictional definitions of femininity and feminine happiness” (Conger 92).

Beyond inverting or subverting the Gothic, however, Emily Brontë begins to dismantle the boundary between the Gothic and the Victorian domestic novel. My analysis of space in *Wuthering Heights* cast *Wuthering Heights* as a space of

nature and the Gothic, and Thrushcross Grange as a space of domestic culture and realism. However, a closer examination, particularly in terms of genre, will demonstrate that each of these spaces is inherently Gothic. Emily Brontë reveals the Gothic as an inescapable force that permeates everything: “the gothic is everywhere, always ready to make its presence felt and undercut any security we may feel in what we think is real or civilised” (Avery 131). This instability of genres and constant oscillation between the Gothic and realism marks one difference in the way that Emily and Charlotte Brontë, particularly in *Jane Eyre*, use and manipulate literary modes (Avery 127).

One of the most significant generic innovations of *Wuthering Heights* is the way in which the text ruthlessly undercuts any opposition between Gothic and domestic forms of the Victorian novel (Rena-Dozier 758-59). Like other female Gothicists, Emily Brontë undermines the “constitution of the home as a ‘place of peace’ into which evil never came” (Ellis *Contested* 219). However, she takes this issue further, to overtly claim the omnipresence of the Gothic, and to dissolve any meaningful distinction between the Gothic and domestic worlds. By presenting Thrushcross Grange, the cultured world of home, haven of the Victorian domestic novel, as even *more* Gothic than the hyper-Gothic *Wuthering Heights*, she collapses the distinction between these generic forms.

Upon first glance, the Heights is constructed as an obviously Gothic, “grotesque” space, populated by violent men and dogs, weapons and piles of dead animals (*WH* 4-7), whereas the Grange is a beacon of culture and civilisation, named as “heaven” (*WH* 48). As the narrative progresses, however, Emily Brontë demonstrates that these appearances are deceptive and the Gothic manifests everywhere. Violence toward women is a core concern of female-authored Gothic literature, and Brontë explores the ways in which violence manifests in relation to different female characters. Women are subjected to overt violence at the Heights; Isabella, for example, is literally beaten and locked up by Heathcliff. She displays evidence of Heathcliff’s violence upon escaping the Heights, possessing “a deep cut under one ear, which only the cold prevented from bleeding profusely, a white face scratched and bruised” (*WH* 172). However,

violence is not restricted to the world of *Wuthering Heights*. Beneath the beautiful, cultured surface of the Grange exist covert and brutal systems of power and confinement that work to eventually kill Catherine (Avery 128). Though we might expect to read a contrast between Heights and Grange, we instead find that the two are similar, that “the domestic space is as affiliated with violence as the gothic” (Rena-Dozier 772).

Emily Brontë utilises dogs to further illustrate the confusing connections and interactions between violence and domesticity. The threatening dogs that guard *Wuthering Heights* seem part of its Gothic energies. It is worth noting that although the “four-footed fiends”, “combatants” and “hairy monsters” menace Lockwood, they do not actually injure him; “Fortunately, the beasts seem more bent on stretching their paws, and yawning, and flourishing their tails, than devouring me alive” (*WH* 7, 17). Regardless of any real damage done to Lockwood, these dogs, in addition to the Heights itself, contrast strongly with a reader’s first impression of Thrushcross Grange as a “beautiful” and “splendid” haven of domesticity (*WH* 48). As Catherine discovers, however, dogs also guard the Grange. Unlike those at the Heights, the dog at Thrushcross Grange bites Catherine: its lips are “streaming with bloody slaver” and Catherine falls “sick; not from fear, I’m certain, but from pain” (*WH* 49). Moreover, Catherine’s injury is so severe that she must recuperate at the Grange for five weeks (*WH* 53; see also Rena-Dozier 770, 772). In this way, Emily Brontë uses dogs to illustrate the presence and degree of violence in different settings and within different fictional modes. In manipulating reader expectations of the Gothic Heights and the domestic Grange, she undercuts the association of domesticity with peace, suggesting that violence lurks just beneath the surface of culture and civilisation, despite all appearances of “heaven” (*WH* 48).

Though Thrushcross Grange first appears as a classic home of Victorian domestic or realist fiction, Brontë’s construction of this as a dangerous space undercuts Victorian domestic ideology. *Wuthering Heights* breaks down the opposition between gothic and domestic modes, by illustrating how “the domestic is predicated on acts of violence” (Rena-Dozier 760). As discussed above, the

Grange is defended from outsiders by vicious dogs. Similarly, Lockwood, who functions as an emblem of culture within the text, sadistically slits the wrist of the ghost Cathy upon the broken window, “[rubbing] it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes” (*WH* 25). The defence of the civilised or domestic self is shown to require such violence as to negate any domestic pretensions to moral superiority over the Gothic (Rena-Dozier 773). Ultimately, this action reveals the brutality, horror and violence that lie just beneath the surface of Emily Brontë’s ‘civilisation’ (Avery 129), rendering it inescapably Gothic.

Finally, unlike traditional Gothic novels, or even to some extent Charlotte Brontë’s novels, *Wuthering Heights* refuses to erase or confine its Gothic energies (Avery 127, 131). Unlike Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, and the nun in *Villette*, the supernatural aspects of *Wuthering Heights* are never assigned rational explanation. Though Heathcliff and Catherine are both dead by the close of the text, there remains the suggestion of their disembodied ghostly existence on the moor. Their Gothic energies are not confined or erased by death. Moreover, other ghosts, such as the young Catherine’s ghost who intrudes upon Lockwood in his bed, are not explained away either. Though the marital triumph of Catherine Linton and Hareton over Heathcliff’s revenge plot may represent the domestic defeat of the gothic, or the civilized defeat of the wild (Rena-Dozier 771), the insistent presence of ghosts works to undermine any such triumph. The supernatural and Gothic elements, which are ever-present through the novel, breaking through any surface of reality or civilisation, are never ultimately eradicated or explained away (Avery 131). To the very end, then, Emily Brontë demonstrates the omnipresence of the Gothic within her narrative worlds, and within Victorian literature and society more broadly.

If the appropriate sphere of existence for the Victorian woman is the domestic sphere, and the Victorian domestic (realist) narrative is, as Emily Brontë demonstrates, constantly permeated by the Gothic, then women’s lives must also be incessantly permeated by the Gothic. The domestic reveals itself to be Gothic, which in turn renders non-Gothic realist depictions of women’s lives impossible.

Moreover, existing in a Gothic nightmare world, whether real or fictional, causes women to suffer. As I have demonstrated, the Gothic constructs women as suffering subjects, whether they are sweetly suffering heroines or monstrous women, destined to suffer and ultimately die. In Emily Brontë's narrative world, the extreme suffering of female characters draws attention to the kinds of violence enacted upon these women by oppressive structures. In resulting from experiences such as confinement and intrusion, the suffering female body may render the space, the narrative and the text Gothic. In this way, the suffering female body emerges as a tool for social criticism.

Crucially, unlike both Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, Catherine Earnshaw does not survive her text. Following an acute breakdown and a lengthy period of illness, "the invalid" (*WH* 135) perishes as the combined consequence of pregnancy, starvation, illness (tuberculosis) and emotional distress. Marriage is shown to have a devastating effect upon Catherine; from the moment she decides to marry Edgar, she is plagued by illness and madness. The interlocking spheres of marriage and domesticity cause her to suffer, often bodily: her body becomes a "shattered prison" (*WH* 162). Catherine's death, in addition to her various physical and psychological pathologies, may be viewed as an ultimate rejection of a world that disallows her true self: "Cathy becomes Brontë's revisionary version of Eve, who resisted her inferior status in the Garden of Eden by eating the apple" (Ellis *Contested* 212).

The overwhelming dangers of marriage and motherhood for Catherine demonstrate that, unlike Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë could imagine no solution to the problem of the female body as Gothic body. In the absence of a solution or escape from the female body, Catherine destroys her corporeal 'prison', by pushing patriarchal expectations to extremes, thus transcending the suffering female body through death. If the female Gothic heroine is unable to destroy the patriarchy which confines her and makes her suffer, "she can attempt to outsmart it; she can mime it to death" (Hoeveler 18). It is the very bleakness of Emily Brontë's criticism of normative heterosexual romance and culture itself that presents the greatest threat to nineteenth-century social

ideology. Through Catherine's devastating fate, elaborated in great detail, Emily Brontë denounces the limitation and suppression of female passion (Davison *Victorian Gothic* 131). Catherine's illness, comprising "fits", "rages", "[bloodied] lips", "bewilderment", "brain fever", "paroxysm", fainting, and her eventual death are relentlessly played out before the reader (*WH* 116-18, 122, 134, 161, 164-6). Moreover, her death is duplicated through connections to the deaths of other women; this multiplicity of deaths savagely indicts the space of society or culture as mortally dangerous for women. Further, Emily Brontë's linkage of Catherine's invalid decline and ultimate death with her increasing resemblance to the 'angel in the house' denounces Victorian domestic ideology as inescapably harmful.

Isabella Linton is another woman who does not survive *Wuthering Heights*. Though, as I have described, she transforms from a position of abused objecthood to an empowered speaking subject, and flees her incarceration at the Heights, it seems that Emily Brontë was unable to envisage a possible future for Isabella. She is able to give birth to Linton, but eventually and inevitably dies, far from home (*WH* 191, 199). Like Frances, Hindley's wife, and Catherine Earnshaw, she eventually perishes from tuberculosis, that disease of Victorian domestic femininity: "a kind of fever, slow at its commencement, but incurable, and rapidly consuming life towards the close" (*WH* 191). In this way, Isabella's death echoes Catherine's; neither woman is able to find both happiness and freedom. In terms of Gothic and broader Victorian literary narratives for women, it seems that because Isabella renounces and flees her marriage, she necessarily becomes 'fallen' and must therefore die.

In addition to Catherine's ending, it is important to look at the ending of *Wuthering Heights* itself. Beyond Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, the second generation of the text may offer some insight into the possibilities imagined by Emily Brontë for women and for heterosexual romantic relationships. As I have discussed, Catherine Linton begins life as a more ideal or angelic example of femininity than her mother. Her first marriage (to Linton Heathcliff) is disastrous and mirrors Isabella Linton's miserable marriage to Heathcliff, through violence and imprisonment: as Linton himself explains, "she's not to go; we won't let her"

(WH 279). Following her ill-treatment at the hands of Linton and Heathcliff, and Linton's eventual death, Catherine degenerates into a monstrous figure. Despite this monstrous nature, Catherine Linton ends the text married once more, thus fulfilling her domestic and narrative destinies. This aspect of *Wuthering Heights* has been interpreted in different ways, particularly in comparison with the 'first generation' love story between Catherine and Heathcliff.

The marriage of Catherine Linton to Hareton Earnshaw may be seen as the final unification of the two families, and therefore an end to the animosity and violence that has characterised their interaction throughout the text. Nelly's observation of the two reading together is telling in this regard: "I perceived two such radiant countenances bent over the page of the accepted book, that I did not doubt... the enemies were, thenceforth, sworn allies" (WH 315). Moreover, their union may be viewed as a more 'successful' iteration of Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship. In stark contrast to her mother's relationship, Catherine is successful in drawing a circle of ostensibly happy domesticity around herself and Hareton. This may be because those things that were lacking in the original Earnshaw home, and even the Linton home, such as healthy parental love, have been supplied or replaced (Ellis *Contested* 216): "one [is] loving and desiring to esteem; and the other [is] loving and desiring to be esteemed" (WH 316). The younger Catherine moves from a position of virtual imprisonment at the Grange, and then at the Heights during her first marriage, to relative freedom in her second marriage. In her success, we may read "the Gothic theme of a 'castle' wrested by a woman from the control of the morally flawed but perfectly legal patriarchal inheritance system" (Ellis *Contested* 209). In creating this scenario, Emily Brontë paints a picture of 'readers' sitting in domestic bliss, and the professionally feminine girl-woman as the saviour of the civilisable man (Hoeveler 203). Moreover, it may be the blossoming love between Catherine and Hareton that allows Heathcliff to let go of the hatred that has propelled him for so long, and therefore join his Catherine in the afterlife (Stoneman *Catherine* 533).

In accordance with Victorian domestic ideals, the marriage between Catherine Linton and Hareton Earnshaw has been interpreted as the reinstatement of patriarchy and order: the triumph of the domestic over the Gothic, and the civilised over the wild (Rena-Dozier 771). Hareton himself, who earlier appeared a miniature version of Heathcliff, seems 'civilised' by his relationship with Catherine; he becomes both "respectably dressed" and "handsome" (*WH* 307). Even the physical nature of their relationship, presented in terms of discrete "kisses" (*WH* 308), is a far cry from the violent embraces of Catherine and Heathcliff (*WH* 160-64). Those rebellious elements, Catherine and Heathcliff, have been tamed via death, and the union of Catherine and Hareton represents a 'better' and more civilised domestic pairing: "the best possible solution within a diseased cultural system" (Torgerson 122). Heathcliff and Catherine, those wild figures of nonconformity, are angered and horrified by the domesticated forces of the Linton family and of culture, and thereby provoked into self-destruction and revenge. Ultimately, they are defeated by those forces of domestication embodied in the final union between Catherine Linton and the newly literate Hareton Earnshaw (Rena-Dozier 771). Within this cultural system, there is no room for Catherine and Heathcliff to be fulfilled and happy; the union of Catherine Linton and Hareton Earnshaw represents the only chance for a 'happy' union between these two families.

Though this interpretation implies that the ending of the novel represents a restoration of conservative, patriarchal, capitalist values, some critics have pointed to the persistence of disruptive elements until the very end of the text. Like Heathcliff, Hareton begins life outside the system of culture, as an orphaned "ruffianly child, strong in limb, and dirty in garb", who cannot read or write (*WH* 137). Compared to those genteel children of culture, Edgar and Isabella Linton, and even his eventual wife Catherine Linton, Hareton is clearly a child of nature, rather than culture. Given Emily Brontë's starkly negative portrayal of patriarchal institutions such as patrilineal inheritance and marriage, particularly marriage into the world of culture, it might be assumed that this marriage between the outsider Hareton and Catherine Linton will be somehow different. According to Abbie Cory, the disruptive female gaze is a device used by Emily

Brontë to convey “[female] rebellion against hegemonic socio-political structures” (14). For example, during his visit to the Heights, Catherine Linton “kept her eyes on [Lockwood], in a cool, regardless manner, exceedingly embarrassing and disagreeable” (*WH* 10). In possessing this disruptive gaze, both Catherine Earnshaw and her daughter may be viewed as insurgents against Victorian gender roles and bourgeois marriage (Cory 6). Significantly, this disruptive female gaze is not ultimately put to rest. Both Catherine and Hareton possess “eyes [that] are precisely similar, and they are those of Catherine Earnshaw” (*WH* 322). Through their inheritance of the revolutionary Catherine’s eyes, Emily Brontë may imply that Catherine’s disruptive qualities have survived her death and endure via the next generation (Cory 24).

In terms of subversive achievement, both Hareton Earnshaw and Catherine Linton gain access to property that would ordinarily have been out of their reach, as a member of the working class and as a woman, respectively. Moreover, Amy Carol Reeves argues that Emily Brontë creates a subversive “pedagogy of desire”, in which women are permitted agency through the power to penetrate male ignorance (Reeves 16, 20). If the success of various relationships in the text depends largely on the man’s attempts to gain knowledge, Catherine Earnshaw’s relationship with Heathcliff is doomed, according to Reeves, because he never learns to read, and consequently to ‘read’ Catherine. Hareton, however, is taught by Catherine Linton to read; by allowing her to have an effect over his ignorance, he recognises her agency. Their relationship therefore functions as “the full assertion of female agency” (Reeves 20). Reeves characterises their union as the “death of patriarchy” and the beginning of a new, radical era in which self-assertion, equality and mutuality can exist between lovers (20).

This seems an overly optimistic interpretation of the ending, however, given the world in which the lovers remain. It is likely that trouble lies with Hareton himself. Given the overwhelming power of hegemonic socio-political systems such as ownership, inheritance and marriage throughout the text, it seems likely that through his marriage into the Linton family and the acquisition of property, Hareton will become part of patriarchal culture and hence an agent of that order

himself. Catherine Linton would therefore be doomed to follow in the footsteps of her mother Catherine, Frances and Isabella (Torgerson 124). Given Emily Brontë's depictions of the harsh reality of marriage, through the unions of both Catherine Earnshaw and Isabella Linton, it seems naïve to assume that Catherine Linton will find anything other than confinement, limitation and oppression. In this way, she is bound by the same Gothic corporeal fate as her mother: the female body.

Perhaps the crucial question is whether *Wuthering Heights* contains any message of hope? There exists a certain ambiguity surrounding the state of Catherine and Heathcliff, following their deaths. The reader is given two discordant descriptions of the pair (Stoneman *Catherine* 533). A little boy and an old man both give descriptions of the ghostly pair wandering the moors on rainy nights (*WH* 336). Lockwood, on the other hand, questions "how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers, for the sleepers in that quiet earth" (*WH* 337). Given Lockwood's tendency to woefully misapprehend the situations around him throughout the text, however, it seems reasonable to doubt his assertion regarding Catherine and Heathcliff. These ghostly figures may be said to have transcended their earthly bodies and all the limitations entailed therein. Though patriarchy has arguably been re-established by the end of the text, and Heathcliff and Catherine both vanquished, Gilbert and Gubar suggest that *Wuthering Heights* is "haunted by the ghost of a lost gynandry, a primordial possibility of power" (306). If Catherine and Heathcliff's love is "a primitive neo-pagan ecstasy at odds with the nineteenth-century domestic novel in which they find themselves" (Killeen 76; see also Hoeveler 192, 194), the suggestion of their surviving, even as ghosts, forms a disruptive element within the novel.

Ultimately, however, given the absence of any discussion or description of Catherine and Heathcliff's afterlife, in comparison with the pages devoted to Catherine's suffering decline and death, it seems clear that Brontë's final message is one of futility. Despite the possibility of a 'haunting' hope, or the subversive existence of Catherine Earnshaw herself, Emily Brontë ultimately denies "a love that knows no boundaries can triumph over the conditions of the

world that create class divisions and sexual ‘spheres’” (Ellis *Contested* 215). Rather, she suggests that the conditions that create such boundaries cause irreparable damage (Ellis *Contested* 215). Isabella Linton’s disappearance from the narrative, until the brief mention of her inevitable death from tuberculosis, confirms Emily Brontë’s bleak view of the possibilities available for women. It seems that Brontë had difficulty imagining any kind of real, non-suffering future for her (Pike 379). In exiting the narrative twelve years before her death, Isabella also becomes a kind of ghost. As for Catherine Earnshaw, an embodied and free existence is not possible. Through the desolate marriages and deaths of various women, in combination with perceived freedom or ‘better’ marriages, Emily Brontë ultimately frustrates a reader’s attempt to find positive meaning or hope in the end of the novel.

It is clear that Emily and Charlotte Brontë each approach the problem of female embodiment in different ways. Emily Brontë emphatically denies the possibility of a solution, through her repeated and savage indictment of marriage and of the domestic space. Death is positioned as the only escape from the female body. Charlotte Brontë likewise exposes the suffering caused by the imposition of patriarchal spaces and ideology upon the female body, however she tries to find a solution. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë seems to offer a conformist, though to some degree separatist, solution to the problem of the Gothic female form. However, the Gothic warnings about Ferndean and marriage foreshadow her treatment of female destiny in *Villette*. Through Lucy Snowe, Charlotte Brontë suggests that the only way freedom can be found, in terms of freedom from the Gothic nightmare of the female body, is in the form of spinsterhood. If we assess *Wuthering Heights* and *Villette* as the final novels of Emily and Charlotte Brontë, it seems clear that the authors viewed female embodiment as so problematic that heroines must escape the body physically, through death, or symbolically, through spinsterhood and isolation of the self. Moreover, marriage is presented as a fate worse than death.

In addition to problems of embodiment, Emily and Charlotte Brontë also address problems of genre, through their use, subversion and fusion of both the Gothic and realist modes. Whether critics have defined *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* and *Wuthering Heights* as predominantly realist or Gothic texts, it seems clear that each text resides somewhat uneasily in the realms of both Gothic and realism, or perhaps on the borderline between these two modes. As Martin Willis has pointed out, it is important to question why and how the Gothic functions within other textual modes, rather than focussing on what exactly might be claimed as Gothic: to focus on Gothic epistemology rather than ontology (16-17). Significantly, it would be remiss to define any of these texts as non-Gothic or wholly realist, given the prevalence of Gothic tropes and Gothic themes such as confinement and live burial. Moreover, the constant suffering of the heroines renders each text inescapably Gothic.

It is at the intersection, or perhaps the 'front line', between the Gothic and realist modes that we find the most interesting innovations of Emily and Charlotte Brontë. Though each of the texts under review exhibits tension between the Gothic and realism, the most striking innovation by these authors is the final admission that the Gothic is in fact everywhere. In each of these novels, the Gothic emerges as omnipresent: it lurks behind every painting and around every corner, even in those spaces of heavenly domesticity. What the Brontës achieve is "an often realistic environment but one in which the gothic is constantly making itself felt" (Avery 134). This omnipresence of the Gothic mode enacts an important modification of the ostensibly realist text or space: "the hole torn in the realist text by the discovery of the Gothic allows Gothic meanings to pour in" (Willis 17). In the case of Emily and Charlotte Brontë, these moments of realism-rendering allow female Gothic themes such as confinement, suffering and silence to take centre stage.

Moreover, this omnipresence of the Gothic implies something very significant about Victorian women's lives: the impossibility of non-Gothic or realist depictions of women's lives. The constant breaking-in or breaking-out of the Gothic demonstrates the Gothic nature of women's lives. Women's lives in these

novels are defined by the construction of the female body as object of Gothic horror: such bodies are incessantly confined and intruded upon, silenced and suffering. As far as the female body is concerned, there is no tangible difference between Gothic and realism—the realist is the Gothic, and vice versa. The suffering female body thus disrupts the realist text, by Gothicising the realist space and thus the realist text. The reader of such texts is confronted with the horror of ‘real’ lives rather than those symbolic manifestations of traditional Gothic such as the murderous usurping uncle or bleeding spectral nun. This reader recognises Gothic tropes, but is forced to reckon with the reality of women’s lives under Victorian patriarchy.

The question remains as to whether Emily and Charlotte Brontë were inescapably bound by or able to subvert social and literary discourse surrounding women’s lives. In terms of female embodiment, Emily Brontë emphatically denies a solution to the problems faced by the female subject: the only escape is death. However, through her use of omnipresent Gothic, she is able to dismantle hegemonic ideals of domesticity and marriage. Though Jane Eyre ends her text married, bound by dominant narratives regarding women’s lives, in *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë is able to offer her heroine an escape from female corporeal destiny through spinsterhood. Moreover, she more readily admits a kind of omnipresent Gothic, which is also connected to the powers of female imagination. In this way, though patriarchy inevitably ‘wins’ in both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, through the capitulation of Jane to marriage and Catherine to death, it is also destabilised throughout the text via representations of the suffering female body and the disruption of realism. The Gothic becomes a means by which patriarchal spaces are “exposed as ideological rather than natural, and allow the woman writer, for a brief period, to destroy that space” (Killeen 174).

It is through their depictions of the suffering female body, in relation to space and various ideologies surrounding femininity, that Emily and Charlotte Brontë are able to disrupt representations of female destiny, as prescribed by patriarchy, as ‘natural’ and to briefly destroy patriarchal spaces, from the

architectural to the generic or realist. Their manipulation of the Gothic emerges as the key to understanding the ambivalent and proto-feminist ways in which the authors were able to subvert dominant ideologies regarding women's lives.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the nature and significance of the suffering female body in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* by Charlotte Brontë and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. As elucidated in chapters 2 and 3 in particular, the suffering female body is a form that simultaneously conforms to and disrupts Victorian ideology surrounding female corporeality and subjectivity, and femininity itself. Because this suffering body is a contested site, one that gestures simultaneously toward acquiescence and rebellion, it becomes necessary to look towards the authors' use of genre, particularly the Gothic, in order to discover whether they were able to criticise or disrupt dominant Victorian social and literary ideology. Ultimately, the Brontës' use, manipulation and subversion of the Gothic, coupled with their novel presentations of the suffering female body, allows them to push against the boundaries of Victorian realism and carve new spaces for female writers of the Victorian era.

The first chapter of this thesis demonstrated the ways in which physical space is used by Emily and Charlotte Brontë to map female subjectivity and trace the journeys of their protagonists through Victorian worlds. Of particular interest for this thesis are the ways in which space is used to illustrate how the female body is intruded upon and confined, and consequently suffers. For Charlotte Brontë, architectural space directly reflects both those forces acting upon the protagonist, such as education, the church, and patriarchal power, and the protagonist herself. Emily Brontë, on the other hand, uses space to embody opposing forces in *Wuthering Heights*: nature and culture, or the Gothic and the domestic. Crucially, each author uses space to articulate those ways in which the protagonists are confined and intruded upon: confinement and intrusion are two of the key experiences that cause female suffering.

The Gothic mode is key to understanding the authors' construction of space. Charlotte Brontë uses Gothic tropes as a warning; within both seemingly realist and overtly Gothic settings such as Thornfield, the heroine is under threat. More

subversively, Emily Brontë replaces the traditional locked castle or attic with marriage itself: through reversing Gothic tropes in this way, she presents marriage as the central or ultimate danger, usually found in the centre of traditional Gothic texts. The authors can thus be seen to use physical space to both exert pressure on the boundaries of traditional Gothic and to expand the stories that are being told about female lives in the Victorian era. Both Emily and Charlotte Brontë construct and utilise space to demonstrate intrusions upon female subjectivity and the female body, and to directly criticise domesticity as the central threat to female happiness and health.

The second chapter moved from the spatial to the corporeal, as I considered those ways in which protagonists and minor characters adhere to expectations of Victorian femininity. I detailed prevailing conceptualisations of femininity, from the literary to the social, with references to tropes such as the 'angel in the house' and the Gothic heroine; the interlinked 'cults' of domesticity and invalidism; and those female behaviours and attributes most prized by Victorian society. Various characters are shown to acquiesce to gender norms through the discipline of external appearance and body, spectrality, wasting, repression, psychological deterioration, invalidism and even death. Helen Burns, Paulina Home and the Linton women emerge as embodied representations of ideal femininity, from the Gothic heroine to the 'angel in the house'.

Moreover, I demonstrated how each protagonist conforms to contemporary expectations relating to gender. Jane adheres to ideal femininity through her incorporeal, wasting body and firm sartorial sobriety. Lucy's repression forms the clearest manifestation of her acquiescence to gender norms; this repression in turn causes her body to waste and her mind to deteriorate. Despite Catherine's initial monstrosity, her myriad ailments indicate some conformity to normative femininity. Her final descent into an angelic illness exemplifies the 'cult of invalidism', and her death finally renders her utterly ladylike and composed. Ultimately, both Emily and Charlotte Brontë demonstrate the ways in which prevailing constructions of femininity are harmful or even fatal for these characters: ideal femininity is inextricably linked to wasting, illness and death,

particularly in the case of Catherine. It can therefore be seen that Jane, Lucy and Catherine each suffer in conforming to and as a consequence of Victorian notions of ideal femininity.

The third chapter considered those ways in which the suffering female body may be engaged in forms of disruption or rebellion, rather than conformity or acquiescence. Both Emily and Charlotte Brontë engage with literary traditions of monstrous femininity, from wicked Gothic anti-heroines to the madwomen of Victorian fiction. I examined representations of un-ideal femininity in the texts under review, from those ways in which the protagonists fail to conform to normative feminine ideals, to the transformations of minor characters from angelic to monstrous in *Wuthering Heights*. The inclusion of *Wuthering Heights* alongside both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* enables a fresh perspective on physical pathology such as wasting, which may result as the response to confinement and limitation, as in Jane and Lucy's cases, or form the manifestation of rage, as in Catherine's case.

Jane, Lucy and Catherine each fail to embody ideal femininity in various ways. Jane's rebellious and angry attitude toward confinement falls outside the bounds of acceptable feminine behaviour. Moreover, her wasting body is used to communicate in situations of extreme disempowerment. Lucy's narrative directly criticises those forms of femininity promoted by institutions such as art, medicine and religion. Like Jane, her suffering body is used to communicate in situations of disempowerment and silence, and even to gain power or autonomy. Charlotte Brontë uses the suffering bodies of both Jane and Lucy to criticise those oppressive structures operating on these women. In Lucy's case, her body and her 'hysterical' narrative form a kind of embodied protest. Catherine is the most monstrous protagonist of the texts under review. She is linked to the Gothic anti-heroine and fails in numerous ways to conform to normative gender ideology. Through her embodied pathologies, Catherine rejects domestic femininity, gains power or autonomy, and communicates in the absence of a heard voice. Her symptoms and eventual death may be viewed as a kind of protest, albeit a problematic and ambivalent one. Finally, the suffering female body is shown to

be a disruptive and eruptive force, capable of deviant communication and outright rebellion.

In the fourth and final chapter of this thesis, I turned to a consideration of literary strategy, and what it is that the authors might have wished to communicate through their representations of the suffering female body. As demonstrated in the first chapter, the female body is subject to both confinement and intrusion; within the Gothic, these form central fears described by female authors. Accordingly, the question of female destiny emerges as central to understanding the aims of the authors. Emily and Charlotte Brontë approach the problems of female embodiment in different ways. Emily Brontë emphatically denies the existence of a solution, through her repeated and savage indictment of marriage and of the domestic space. Charlotte Brontë likewise exposes the suffering caused by the imposition of patriarchal spaces and ideology upon the female body, however she tries to find a solution. Though Jane arguably finds some degree of power by the end of the text, she ultimately capitulates to the expected destiny for any Victorian heroine: marriage and domestic enclosure. In *Villette*, on the other hand, Charlotte Brontë suggests that the only way freedom can be gained, from the Gothic nightmare of the female body, is in the form of spinsterhood. It therefore seems clear that the authors viewed female embodiment as so problematic that heroines must escape the body physically, through death, or symbolically, through spinsterhood and isolation of the self.

This final chapter also investigated the authors' use and subversion of genre, in order to uncover the degree to which they were bound by Victorian social and literary ideology. Each text lies somewhere within both realist and Gothic modes, or somewhere in between—accordingly, tension exists between these generic forms. The most striking innovation by the authors is the final admission that the Gothic is omnipresent, even within seemingly realist domestic spaces. These moments of realism-disruption or –rending allow confinement, suffering and silence to emerge as central Gothic themes. Moreover, this omnipresence of the Gothic in turn implies the impossibility of non-Gothic or realist representations of Victorian women's lives. As I have already demonstrated, the suffering female

body, constantly confined and intruded upon, is an object of Gothic horror and therefore disrupts the realist text, by Gothicising realist spaces and thus the text. Though the reader may recognise Gothic tropes, he or she is forced to reckon with the reality of women's lives under patriarchy.

Neither Emily nor Charlotte Brontë is able to overcome the problems of female embodiment and offer a triumphant, concrete and living solution. Heroines either bow in submission to the primacy of marriage and domesticity, die or live ambiguously (probably) alone. However, through their use of the Gothic, and demonstration of its omnipresence, they were able to criticise hegemonic constructions of marriage and women's roles. Moreover, the Gothic is linked to female empowerment and the powers of female imagination. The Gothic mode offers a space for female authors to voice criticism and depict the *real* horrors of women's lives under Victorian patriarchy. Though patriarchy inevitably 'wins' in each of these texts, particularly *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, it is also destabilised via representations of monstrous femininity and the disruption of realism. Through manipulating both the Gothic mode and representations of suffering female corporeality in novel ways, Emily and Charlotte Brontë expanded the boundaries of Victorian realism and Gothic, and began to carve fresh space for female writers.

In terms of Victorian female-authored literature, the Brontës achieved an important blending of the Gothic mode with domestic realism. This fusion demonstrates an awareness of the usefulness of Gothic tropes in representing female subjectivity and also a desire to focus readers' attention on the 'real' nature of traditionally Gothic narrative elements for Victorian women. For example, though undoubtedly Gothic in appearance, *Thornfield* is haunted by the ghost(s) of the patriarch's real past misdeeds and the confined and controlled women existing within its walls, rather than any supernatural presence. The representation of suffering in the texts considered also marks an important departure from more traditional women's Gothic. Though female suffering still sits at the core of each novel, its presentation is less voyeuristic and positive than the depictions of sweetly suffering heroines in Radcliffean Gothic. By presenting

female suffering as inherently painful and messy, as both angelic and monstrous, both conformist and subversive, Emily and Charlotte Brontë move the Gothic conversation forward, raising important questions about the nature of female suffering and those possible 'endings' available to the suffering female body.

Through fusing genres in order to focus attention on the plight of Victorian women's lives in reality, Emily and Charlotte Brontë arguably become proto-feminist authors. However, as I have demonstrated, such an interpretation proves to be reductive and fails to capture the nuanced nature of these depictions of female subjectivity. It is just as important to recognise those ways in which canonical authors such as the Brontës were bound by the discourses of the their time, and conform to social and literary expectations, as it is to celebrate those ways in which they subverted expectations and broke literary boundaries. In the current era of feminism, we must move beyond reductive interpretations of women's art and women's bodies, and employ a trajectory that aims to capture all of those stories told by the female form and by female pathology in literature. Such an approach will avoid silencing any story that does not fit into the dominant paradigm as well as reflecting the multiply varied nature of the female body. My hope is that the greater understanding of gestures made by the suffering female body produced by this thesis will aid future feminist scholars in uncovering the meanings encoded in all kinds of women's bodies, from the pathological to the pathologised to the loudly communicative. Given the repressed, suppressed and silenced nature of women's bodies and women's voices under patriarchy, it is our job as feminist scholars to seek out the untold, the complicated and the difficult stories. This thesis complicates the conversation around Emily and Charlotte Brontë, creating space for new perspectives on their work in an already saturated field; like female literary bodies themselves, the texts produced by these canonical authors are shown to gesture paradoxically in the directions of both compliance and rebellion.

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