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GENDER AND CLASS IN VILLETTE AND NORTH AND SOUTH

Sally Minogue

'For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.' In her fine ending to *Middlemarch*¹ - a novel which begins with promises of female heroism and ends with unhistoric acts - George Eliot deliberately undercuts, almost rebukes, the expectations of her readers (especially of those who might have been disappointed in Dorothea's marriage to Will). In doing so she makes an appeal to universal suffering humanity much as she does in her mention of the unity of 'struggling erring human creatures',² though she also focuses that unity through a particular lens, that of the 'hidden life'. At first sight (and given Eliot's preceding image of rivers and tributaries) we might be tempted to apply to this William Empson's acute observations on Gray's 'Elegy': 'by comparing the social arrangement to Nature he makes it seem inevitable, which it was not, and gives it a dignity which was undeserved.'³ But Eliot goes a step further than Gray, for she makes Dorothea's 'hidden life' her apotheosis. The force of her 'that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been', wonderfully qualified by the honesty of 'partly dependent' and 'half owing', is that Dorothea's true heroism is in living just that kind of life, as so much of humanity must. The more Dorotheas who can pour their strength, as well as exact their price (Dorothea's may be Will), into the business of living, unheroic and unhistoric as it is, the more things will be 'not so ill with you and me', we who must also end in 'unvisited tombs'. Gray's poem, as Empson concedes - or rather asserts against himself - stated 'one of the permanent truths';⁴ Eliot's strength is that she half-states a half-truth.

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Eliot's appeal to the errant, to the stoical struggle to find a way forward through life, even one which will necessarily digress and divert, as the unifying, perhaps the constitutive, feature of humanity is one which the main thrust of both feminist and Marxist criticism of fiction has opposed. Indeed, feminist and Marxist critics oppose any notion of unification, since that is to betray the oppressed group for whom each speaks. The concept of the universal in literature has called forth their strongest opprobrium. Terry Eagleton, in an analysis close to Empson's of Gray's 'Elegy', argues that both in *Middlemarch*'s central web image, and 'in the novel's closing trope of the river, which in diffusing its force to tributaries intensifies its total impact, natural imagery is exploited to signify how a fulfilling relation to the social totality can be achieved, not by ideological abstraction, but by pragmatic, apparently peripheral work'.⁵ Meanwhile Mary Jacobus, looking at Eliot's changes to a previous version of that ending, can find comfort in it only by seeing the river image as referring to the act of authorship itself: 'Dorothea's hidden life and entombment make her a silent reformer, an unremembered protester; but her silence and anonymity are the sacrifice which allows "George Eliot" speech and name.'⁶ While Eagleton and Jacobus disagree in their particular interpretations of this ending (a disagreement which incidentally points towards an inevitable conflict between Marxist and feminist positions), none the less both are in agreement that the dependence of the realist novel on some notion of universal truth is to be attacked; indeed, it is the very business of the critic to attack it. Both are looking for fissures in the text. Jacobus characterizes such fissures as (using Virginia Woolf's words) 'awkward breaks', and she sees one such in the original ending of *Middlemarch*, which makes a specific attack on the 'social air' in which a woman's greatness is not allowed to flourish. She sees the ending as closing down that criticism into a universalization which is diffused into the particular.⁷ Eagleton echoes the criticism:

What cannot be resolved in 'historical' terms can be accommodated by a moralising of the issues at stake. This, indeed, is a mystification inherent in the very forms of realist fiction, which, by casting objective social relations into interpersonal terms, constantly hold open the possibility of reducing the one to the other.⁸

Both Eagleton and Jacobus, and Marxist and feminist critics in general, so far as they can be thus characterized, place the critic at the intersection of ideology and text. (Eagleton in *Criticism and Ideology* has a full and complex account of this placing, which none the less can be boiled down to the view that the text is the product of the relationship between the prevailing ideology and the general mode of production; that relationship issues in the literary mode of production, and the text is further modified by the author's own interaction with the prevailing ideology. The relationship between general ideology, literary mode of production and authorial insertion produces aesthetic ideology, which is but one form of general ideology. Thus the author and so the text is always a bearer, in some form, of the prevailing ideology.) But then each takes their interpretative position from their commitment to a particular base of analysis; for the feminist that analytic base is gender; for the Marxist it is class. Thus in each case the placing, and so the interpretation, will be determined by the base. Inevitably then, Marxist and feminist critics will arrive at different, and often conflicting, judgements.

That this conflict exists (creating particular problems for Marxist feminists) should lead us to look at its implications more closely. For while Eagleton and Jacobus might agree in their view of literature as a product of ideology, to be critically deconstructed in order to reveal its own determinants, how that deconstruction takes place may become a matter of competition. And the competition is not between ideologies so much as between oppressed groups; in fact, the high flown theorizing of both feminist and Marxist comes down eventually to what each considers to be the more important oppression. The oppressions in question issue, indeed reveal themselves, in terms only too real. While they may be the product of ideology, most people experience them in the real world, a world little touched either by ideological theory or by literary criticism. In this chapter I shall argue that an analysis of a novel mounted in terms of a single oppressed group will fall short, both in terms of our understanding of the novel and in terms of our understanding of the real relations (of gender or of class) of the world. I take as my primary example Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, but introduce my discussion with a brief account of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. The nineteenth century naturally raises the question of class and the female authorship the question of gender, but my

examples choose themselves since both novelists, and both novels, pervasively concern themselves with both issues. My claim is that if we reduce them critically to only, or either of, those issues, we reduce the novels. Furthermore, we reduce the sum of human understanding, rather than extending it. Finally, I would argue, a theoretical analysis in terms of gender or class actually draws our attention away from the real difficulties experienced by those oppressed groups, even as it pretends to address them. Thus I seek to argue for the importance of the novel's representation of universal truths, and at the same time to suggest that certain novels (*Villette* and *North and South* being examples) actually lend the oppressed a better model of subversiveness through a realist reading than through a Marxist or feminist one; and that furthermore the 'universal' and the 'subversive' come together in such novels.

My choice of George Eliot's remarks as touchstones — she who had to drop her given name and, arguably, her female identity in order to be published — might be seen as sufficient to throw doubt on her proud embrace of 'struggling erring human creatures'. It is one of the odd and impenetrable ironies of the nineteenth century that the writer who was most scornful in her actual life of social conventions and conditioning has survived in literary history with her pen name intact; while Charlotte Brontë was quickly freed of the liability of Currer Bell (an androgynous choice anyway); and Elizabeth Gaskell seems to be inextricably connected to her husband by the prefix Mrs. These ironies are certainly suggestive, as are the bare facts of a publishing world where both women and those struggling in an economic and social sense were not regarded as fit for authorship. Yet it is here that the first conflict between analyses in terms of class and gender threatens. It is a brute fact that in the nineteenth century women were remarkably successful as authors and remained critically successful, since the 'big names' of the period in which fiction itself was the flourishing and predominant form are female. And they are *women's* names, and we know them to be so; that is, we know that it was a woman who wrote *Middlemarch* in spite of the fact that we call her by a 'man's' name — indeed, our perception of that name *as* male is altered by our knowledge that the owner of the name was female. The pre-eminence of female writers in that period is such that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, writing about the absence of female poets in the tradition,

see the nineteenth-century novel as definitely female in origin.⁹ Yet working-class writers have no recognized place in nineteenth-century fiction, with the exception of what is seen as a different sort of fiction, popular fiction, that categorization itself militating against a serious consideration or evaluation of the work (and even where that is undertaken, it must be marked by a certain kind of artificiality, with its attendant dangers of patronization or annexation).¹⁰ Thus we cannot even equate the kinds of silencing of minority voices which took place in the novel tradition; suddenly in the nineteenth century, women - of a certain class - were freed into print; while the working man - and, of course, woman - remained, unsurprisingly, in chains.

Does this distinction affect the way in which we look at the nineteenth-century novel? Should it? For the feminist, certainly it should, since she is committed to the view that oppression and misogyny had characterized both the representation and the writing power of women up to that point. If in the nineteenth century that gave way to something different for women, while it did not for another oppressed group, should not the other oppressed group be given priority, particularly as that group contains women? But here is the problem. The oppressed class in the one case is determined by gender; in the other case it is determined by socioeconomics. While class cuts across the category of gender, gender cannot contain the category of class. Analogies of disadvantage are not sufficient to settle this difference, which cuts to the heart of both politics. As a result, there is a certain embarrassment for the feminist critic who looks at nineteenth-century fiction without an awareness of class; for if the critic is to expose the oppression of her own sex, must she not be equally aware of the double oppression suffered by members of her sex who are also members of an oppressed class? Yet characteristically that question is not addressed. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*¹¹ clearly announce their terms of interest in the nineteenth-century novel, and while their theory may be sophisticated, their sense of priority is not. Gender is the key, even while women write the novels and working people of either sex remain unheard. Similarly, Terry Eagleton, in his influential *Myths of Power*, announces his view that in the conflicts within Charlotte Brontë's work 'it is possible to decipher...a fictionally transformed version of the tensions and alliances between the two social classes which dominated the

Brontës' world: the industrial bourgeoisie, and the landed gentry or aristocracy;¹² and while he pays lip-service to the Brontës' being women, 'members of a cruelly oppressed group whose victimized condition reflected a more widespread exploitation',¹³ his analysis of the novels themselves belies that awareness. Feminists and Marxists, instead of being generous to each other's oppressions, have placed themselves in competition.

A further difficulty with both sorts of analysis is that they find duality attractive. The analysis in terms of class tends to set up a productive conflict; the feminist analysis tends to deconstruction, inserting itself in the gap between what is 'there' and what is 'not'. In either case the result often is to simplify into opposition elements which actually have a much more complex, shifting and fruitful relationship.

Elaine Showalter characterizes fiction written by women in three ways, as feminine, feminist and female, each progressively more progressive. She places Elizabeth Gaskell firmly in the first category, the 'prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition'.¹⁴ At the same time, she also categorizes her as a social novelist, one intimately concerned with the effects of industrialization, and genuinely interested in the nature of class conflict. These fixed characterizations imply a necessarily rigid reading of Gaskell's *North and South*, which the very title also seems to invite. A gender-based characterization would notice the emphasis in the novel on self-fulfilment and independence in the heroine, the rejection of obvious forms of dependence (as typified by the silly Edith and Mrs Hale), yet at the same time the celebration of female virtues of sensitivity, the reduction of large-scale issues to the level of individual relationships; and the ultimate capitulation, of heroine and author, to marriage, with the handy proviso of the heroine's holding the economic whip-hand. The independence is illusory, the patterns patriarchal. A similar compromise might be noted in a class-based characterization, but this time between an effete and cultured bourgeoisie and a rampant manufacturing class, the latter brought to heel by the former's possession of capital, but also injecting a strain of new blood into the old to revitalize and regenerate it. The unusual step taken by Gaskell of giving the working class a voice in the novel leaves them in just the same place at the end; the change has taken place in their masters. And furthermore this change has been represented in terms of

interpersonal relationships, as, indeed, has the voicing of working-class ideals. Genuine address of the systems of ideology is thus side-stepped, subsumed in the ideal of the individual happy within the institutionalized relationship, with a modicum of independence – but only a modicum.

Key to either analysis is the central figure of Margaret (who was originally intended as an eponymous heroine) who mediates between North and South, between an agrarian economy and a manufacturing one, between master and man, and even between 'dissenter' and 'infidel'. In the gender-based analysis she stands uncomfortably between these categories, opposing the simple femininity of her cousin and mother, yet demonstrating the feminine virtues of service and self-sacrifice, refusing offers of marriage and imagining a life without marriage, only to succumb to it in the last reel. In the class-based analysis she might represent compromise without opposition, the colonial missionary gone native who influences her lover to be kind to the exploited even as she lends him the money with which further to exploit them. Crucial to either analysis is the ending of the novel, when Margaret suddenly and, some might say, improbably, nestles her head on her lover's shoulder as he had imagined in his dreams, thus closing the novel firmly against any more ambiguous or uncertain reading.

In fact, the abruptness of the ending derives from the practical demands of serialization, though Gaskell rather conveniently reflects that she is not sure but that it might not have happened like this, when it happened, anyway. *Pace* reader response, perhaps we should curb our desires to read anything significant into an ending thus determined by pragmatic rather than creative considerations (though the Marxist would certainly see such considerations as part of the restrictive apparatus of the prevailing ideology). Certainly, the ending belies the emotional, social and moral complexity of the novel; and the monolithic readings sketched – albeit with a touch of caricature – above, give no clue to the genuine revolutions of thought and feeling with which the novel is concerned.

Suppose we take the representations of reality in the novel temporarily at face value. How many nineteenth-century novels allow the direct expression of a working-class voice? We need only think of the representations of the union in Dickens' *Hard Times* to appreciate Gaskell's chapter 'What is a strike?' There we

find a good question – and a good answer. Furthermore, the answer is couched as a dispute, with Higgins getting the better of Margaret. Margaret may be there because of her patronizing instincts carried through from Helstone; but that is not why she remains, nor why she sustains her relationship with Higgins. We further see him disputing with Mr Hale (about religion) and then with Mr Thornton (about the conditions of working men) on even terms, and thus presenting his arguments directly to the reader. Higgins' place in the narrative structure of the novel, his direct speech (in dialect) and his moral place (as questioner of prevailing values), render him a central figure, especially as an agent of change. We see this change taking place on the surface, through discussion; on a symbolic level, through action; and in the interior, through changes of value and judgement.

Margaret is a further agent of this impulse to change. We see her early priggish judgements about tradesmen, at Helstone, give way to a much more considered and intimate understanding, to a point where, when she sees her brother Frederick express an easy contempt for the rough figure presented by Thornton, she remembers and regrets the days when she too made such judgements. The same shift of awareness is carried through many times in the novel, most powerfully in the narrative return to Helstone seen from a post-Milton viewpoint. The return is prefigured in Mr Bell's dream of the Helstone of his and Mr Hale's youth: 'Over babbling brooks they took impossible leaps, which seemed to keep them whole days suspended in the air. Time and space were not, though all other things seemed real. Every event was measured by the emotions of the mind, not by its actual existence, for existence it had none' (XLV, 377).¹⁵ When Margaret and Mr Bell arrive at the real Helstone, Margaret finds that her view of the place is indeed measured by the emotions of the mind; and she finds it wanting. It is not the golden and unchanging place she goes to look for; not only has the vicarage been altered – is in the process of alteration – to accommodate new generations of children; even the trees have changed, including the beech where she and Lennox sketched, the scar on its trunk erased by its own disappearance, presaging the idea of the scar left by Lennox's proposal. Summarizing the idea makes it crude; but Margaret's visit confirms a lesson she has been learning and which is perfected by her Cromer holiday with its long bouts of reflection, that she herself is constantly changing

and that 'the emotions of the mind' are themselves subject to change. But they are also subject to reflection and to the power of the will. 'All this time for thought enabled Margaret to put events in their right places, as to origin and significance, both as regarded her past life and her future...she had learnt, in those solemn hours of thought, that she herself must one day answer for her own life, and what she had done with it' (XLIX, 409-10).

Gaskell manages to marry here a representation of reality (the relations of Margaret's everyday life, for example, and the pressures which changing circumstances exert upon her) with an awareness of the shifting nature of that reality and of the falsity of individual representations of it (revealed in Mr Bell's dream, and in the gulf between the 'old' Helstone and the 'new'). Likewise, she persuades us of the truth of the perception that events are measured 'by the emotions of the mind', even as she shows us that those emotions will not in themselves suffice when each of us must one day answer for our own lives. This truth applies to Higgins as well as to Margaret. Higgins finds a public as well as a private solution; he strikes because he is not only a private man; he goes to work for Thornton because he is not only a public one. The two are married by his sense of responsibility for the family of Boucher. For Margaret, her grappling with Eagleton's 'objective social relations' can only be managed in personal terms; they are all that are available to her. So it is with many people, who attempt to work out the relations of public and private responsibility, and attempt to work them out in the constraints provided. Even so, Margaret challenges the accepted social relations of her gender, in her response to the demands others make upon her. She is her father's spokesman, the family decision-maker, protector of Thornton against the strikers even while she sympathizes with their cause through her conversations with Higgins. Her terrible anguish in deciding to call home her brother Frederick to her mother's deathbed, and her deep sense of shame that Thornton has taken her humane act of protection as a personal one, deepened by her different (and revealing) shame at her immoral (and illegal) concealment of the truth to protect her brother - all show the great burden of responsibility placed on her. We do not need the contrast of the vivid Edith to point this out.

North and South is constantly questioning, by engaging the reader narratively with its own processes of change and shifts of

judgement. Mr Hale dissents from the religion he has been preaching for twenty years; his son Frederick is in exile because of his part in a naval mutiny; Margaret up-ends her whole way of life when she arrives in Milton, taking on the responsibilities abdicated by both her mother and her father; Thornton abandons the fixed precepts by which he had formerly lived; even Mrs Thornton bends sufficiently at the dying Mrs Hale's request to look on Margaret in a kinder light. In one sense the worker Higgins and his daughter Bessie are the most unbending of the characters represented, yet they are so in ways directly opposed to each other! Why should we not take this questioning at face value and see it as instructive about our objective social relations? It is not as if, by doing so, we are abandoning our sense of disbelief. We know that this is a novel, we know that it embodies certain conventions, that those speak to a prevailing set of social expectations. We know that *North and South* sufficiently accepted those conventions and expectations; after all, it was published. But, being published, and so being read, it could reveal its subversiveness to the thinking reader; in the light of the extraordinary challenges it offers to accepted thinking, about class and about gender, but also about love, and religious belief, and authority, and law, the sweetness and completeness of the ending may disappoint. But we may also be free to think that Margaret deserves her supporting shoulder. Unless we sustain some acceptance of the realist aims of the novel, we cannot learn the complicated truths it is offering, within whose truths we also see conventional stereotypes of class and gender overturned. Would we learn so much from a Marxist or feminist reading?

North and South stands against absolute judgement, nicely caught at the end by Margaret's and Thornton's parody of themselves in others' eyes as 'that man' and 'that woman'. Like *North and South*, *Villette* slips the harness of the conventionally judgemental structure of the novel, espousing the power of change, indeed of revolution. Yet it does so in 'incalculably diffusive ways' which defy the constrictions of class or gender which critics have tried to place upon it. Under its power the categories themselves begin to fall away, and the difficult, complex, slippery nature of the fiction is revealed, rendering the comparison of oppressions or conflicts myopic.

The various feminist analyses of Charlotte Brontë, and of *Villette* in particular, share the view that Brontë's is undoubtedly

an unusual and individualistic voice. Yet, with the notable exception of Kate Millett¹⁶ (which must now be counted an early version of feminist criticism, though it continues to be an influential one), there is always an element of doubt in the analyses. This doubt characteristically expresses itself, more or less strongly, in terms of Brontë's interaction with the male tradition. Her case highlights the difficulties feminists encounter in applying a feminist analysis to women writing in a male-dominated society. These writers cannot be admitted to be entirely free; if they were it would undermine some of the central tenets of feminist criticism (that male culture has unvoiced women, that women writing in a patriarchal culture must conform to some extent to its norms, that none the less the main thrust of such women writers is a hidden subversiveness). Thus the analysis emerges that such writers made some sort of pact or compromise with male convention. The task of the feminist critic becomes the deconstruction of that compromise, and the seeing through to what 'really' underlies it. For instance, Rosalind Miles is categorical in her account of Brontë: 'Ultimately, then, Charlotte always supports the conventional assumptions in her use of the traditional theme of the woman's need of man.'¹⁷ Further, 'Nowhere in Charlotte's fiction is there any attempt to challenge these assumptions of her society in ways which insist on appropriately feminine modes of self-expression.'¹⁸ Quite why Miles calls the writers she considers by their first names, which to me seems to reduce their importance beside our critical practice with men's names (imagine chatting familiarly about Marcel's understanding of memory or David Herbert's forked flame). She also sticks to Mrs Gaskell in spite of her strictures against marriage as a destructive force for women writers. But Miles' view is a rather more aggressively stated and less thoroughly argued position than that extensively explored in Gubar and Gilbert's now classic text, *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Gubar and Gilbert's overall thesis, strongly argued in their first two chapters, 'The queen's looking glass' and 'Infection in the sentence', is that women up to the nineteenth century were systematically denied the rights of authorship ('If a pen is the metaphorical penis, with what organs can females generate texts?'),¹⁹ and that those who attempted the pen thereafter were forced into certain conflict between the two images of women (angel and harlot), the role of woman and the role of author, and

their own 'female' identity and that forced upon them by male literary convention.

Specifically, Gilbert and Gubar identify the outcome of some of these conflicts as a central motif in nineteenth-century female fiction, that of 'the madwoman in the attic' who, they suggest, embodies the anger, resentment and repression which the female author really wants to express, but which she has had to constrain within patriarchal convention, both social and literary. A key passage defines their thesis:

Even the most apparently conservative and decorous women writers obsessively create fiercely independent characters who seek to destroy all the patriarchal structures which both their authors and their authors' submissive heroines seem to accept as inevitable. Of course, by projecting their rebellious impulses not into their heroines but into mad or monstrous women (who are suitably punished in the course of the novel or poem), female authors dramatize their own self-division, their desire both to accept the strictures of patriarchal society and to reject them...[this madwoman] is usually in some sense the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage.

(p. 78)

Gilbert and Gubar argue that this conflict and duality itself begins to form a new, essentially female, tradition, which can be traced through different writers' engagement with it. 'For the great women writers...danced out of the debilitating looking glass of the male text into the health of female authority' (p. 82) – but with the final caveat that none the less secrecy characterized the process, and 'to be secret is to be secreted' (p. 83).

Both Miles' and Gilbert and Gubar's views are developed critiques embracing the categories suggested in Elaine Showalter's formative feminist work, *A Literature of Their Own*. Brontë is subsumed in her 'feminine' category as imitating patriarchal convention and internalizing 'its standard of art and its views on social roles'.²⁰ Interestingly, one of the foremost expressions of a Marxist view of *Villette*, Eagleton's *Myths of Power*, characterizes the work in a similar way, feeling that since it attempts to be revolutionary, its failure to carry that through is the more disappointing: '*Villette* is in some ways a more tragic work than *Jane Eyre*, but it is also more accommodating, more concerned to muffle

direct antagonism'. And again, 'The world is to be temporised with rather than severely challenged...as Lucy goes on to tease out the contradiction [between the value and non-value of social position], the balance tips quietly on the side of the world.'²¹

When many people argue the same position, even from different intellectual bases, we need to look closely to see whether there is truth in what they say. How far is *Villette* in complicity with patriarchal literary convention, and are those critics who argue that it compromises too much (with the social order, capitalist or patriarchal) correct? It is my contention that if we look at the work untied as far as possible from a preconceived political/critical position, we shall see that it is far more subversive than either feminist or Marxist will admit. Further, I would argue that this subversion depends for our understanding of it on a freeing of ourselves from any position other than that of being 'struggling erring human creatures'.

I recall very clearly my first reading of *Villette*. For the first few chapters I felt quite sure that the work centred on Polly, and I had no awareness of Lucy Snowe, narrator.

Thus, so cleverly, and with a studied but hidden cleverness which we may notice only on re-reading, does Brontë irresistibly establish the way in which society tends to ignore people such as Lucy Snowe.²² As society ignores her – even as her closest companions ignore her – so does the reader. It is not until chapter IV that Lucy swims more centrally into the picture, and even here Brontë casually dismisses a whole portion of her life without much consideration: 'I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass....Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft.' We know at once that the statement is ironic; yet Brontë allows us, the reader, the luxury of imagination (a fiction within a fiction), even before her gently puncturing remark: 'However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen overboard',²³ which leads us directly into the transformed metaphor – the first of the several storms which are to punctuate the novel.

Brontë's handling of tone throughout these first four chapters is nothing short of stunning; even in the brief passage just quoted, she has the reader guessing, complicitous in her irony, and then plunged into passion a few lines later. None of it rings false,

perhaps because we have been wrong-footed from the start. As it begins to dawn that Lucy is both worthy of our interest and is, in fact, going to be the centre of our interest (like it or not), we become ready for anything. It is not unlike Emily Brontë's device in *Wuthering Heights* – the stolid Lockwood listening to the unshakeable Nellie Dean – what chance does the humble reader have of entertaining a doubt about the extraordinary events related? Except that here the device works in the opposite direction: from Polly we expect passion and sensation; when we realize that Lucy is our central interest, since we have scarcely noticed her, we expect nothing – and so she is free to do anything, everything.

Gilbert and Gubar, Miles *et al.* see this, and other, novels as reflecting a duality of spirit; Egleton likewise. But there are more than two voices in *Villette*. What the shiftingness of style and narration in the early part of the novel does, as it unsettles the reader, is to make the reader ready to listen to more than one voice. Stability is there in the presence of the I that is Lucy Snowe; her quiet start paradoxically makes her more reliable as a presence. Yet almost from the start we are aware that the I that is Lucy is no simple ego. Consider this passage, just after Polly's beloved father has left Bretton: 'During an ensuing space of some minutes, I perceived she endured agony. She went through, in that brief interval of her infant life, emotions such as some never feel....Nobody spoke. Mrs Bretton, being a mother, shed a tear or two. Graham, who was writing, lifted up his eyes and gazed at her. I, Lucy Snowe, was calm' (ch. III). It is true that Lucy is calm; but her full knowledge and complete understanding of the child's sufferings, which she has not yet learnt to contain, her predictions of her future ('she would have more of such instants if she lived'), and the weight and depth of these and of her contained calmness beside the rapid responses of Mrs Bretton's motherly 'tear or two' and Graham's lack of action, tell us that Lucy has already known such sufferings, already learnt to contain them, and to be calm in the face of them. Lucy's is the calm of knowledge. Nor is it without sympathy, of a deeper nature than Mrs Bretton's, but a sympathy tempered by both the knowledge that survival necessitated the suppression of such uncontained grief, and by her own success in doing that.

Much of *Villette* is about suffering – its power, its centrality, the power it bestows on those who learn to survive it. Even at this

stage, Lucy has learnt to survive it; and we know why she has had to do so, because we as readers have been enmeshed in the responsibility of ignoring her.

These remarks are, of course, interpretative. But they are interpretative remarks which do not try to blinker themselves in advance. What I am writing here may certainly be reactive, that is, I am actively seeking evidence in the work counter to the evidence put forward by feminist critics. But what I have to say here remains broadly true to my first experience of the work, an experience which still seems to me to answer to the central qualities of the novel. Gilbert and Gubar state that 'Lucy's repression is a response to a society cruelly indifferent to women'; Miles states that Brontë's heroines 'fight with traditionally masculine weapons of courage and self-assertion for the masculine rights of liberty and work',²⁴ (this is seen as a succumbing to male conventions and values). Eagleton meanwhile, responding precisely to the passage I discuss above, describes her 'coolly analytic brand of observation',²⁵ and later generalizes her attitude to Polly (which he sees suppresses some of Polly's own emotion) as 'a subconscious tactical conversion of suppressed jealousy to mature condescension',²⁶ (so much for Eagleton's understanding of 'a cruelly oppressed group whose victimised condition reflected a more widespread exploitation'). Are any of these what Lucy Snowe's suffering, her repression of suffering, her coming to terms with it, and her finding for a strong and fruitful way of life, are really about?

Certainly, Lucy's suffering springs in large measure from her being a woman, and Lucy's plight speaks strongly and in a particular way to women. But might it not - *does* it not - also speak to men, particularly those who have known loneliness, isolation, the peculiar feeling of being alien (in religion, country, culture)? Does it not also speak to those, like Graham and Mrs Bretton, who know the familial and familiar comforts, and perhaps even the added comfort of ignoring those who lie outside that, once they are not needed? Does it not speak to anyone who has been on the edge of any of these feelings or situations, but not fully realized them, or realized the positions of those who find themselves in them? It is wonderful, and brave, that Charlotte Brontë revealed these feelings and situations, through the exploration of the life of a *woman*, a woman who was *single*, a woman who was friendless and without economic

support, and who thus had to *work*, and find her own means of support, social and emotional as well as economic, who was in both a foreign country and one dominated by an alien religion, where she had to expose herself by teaching, and where her strongest hopes and feelings were constantly disappointed. These are human conditions. Any one of them might reduce a person to the defences Eagleton eagerly identifies. They are not specific to being a woman, even as they are accentuated by so being; they would be similarly accentuated by being disadvantaged in a number of ways, for example, being working-class, though of course a working-class person would not have had the means to travel abroad. My point is this: when, for example, we get to the central section where Lucy Snowe is left isolated, truly single, in the ominously titled 'The Long Vacation', caring for the poor 'deformed and imbecile pupil', is an analysis in terms of either gender or class to the point? M. Paul leaves her with 'Pauvrette!'; Mme Beck takes her children to the seaside; teachers go to friends; Lucy is alone. The language of the passage which explores her mental chaos, her despair and terrible loneliness of spirit, recalls the storms of the beginning and end of the novel (this is intentional on Brontë's part, as I shall show), and much of it is melodramatic. But within the structure of the novel it transcends its own melodrama. As at the beginning of the novel, Brontë shifts her reader from any preconceived stance, forestalls any uncertainty:

Religious reader, you will preach to me a long sermon about what I have just written, and so will you, moralist: and you, stern sage: you, stoic, will frown; you, cynic, sneer; you, epicure, laugh. Well, each and all, take it your own way. I accept the sermon, frown, sneer, and laugh; perhaps you are all right: and perhaps, circumstanced like me, you would have been, like me, wrong. The first month was, indeed a long, black, heavy month to me.

(ch. XV)

Lucy's extremity is so great that she seeks out a priest of the Catholic religion so alien to her. Indeed the narrative structure of this chapter is essential to the way it moves us; it is the very *realism* of Lucy's situation which cannot fail to grip us here, whatever the metaphorical excesses embodied within it. And her direct address to the reader, just quoted, disarms any criticism. Who would be certain enough not to recognize this grief? When

Lucy, in the agony of her mind, seeks an ear – any ear – she tells us ‘the mere relief of communication in an ear which was human and sentient, yet consecrated – the mere pouring out of some portion of long accumulating, long pent-up pain into a vessel whence it could not be again diffused – had done me good, I was already solaced.’ Lucy does not repeat the experience; feeling stronger, she feels again fearful of Catholicism; but she says, ‘He was kind when I needed kindness; he did me good’ (ch. XV). Lucy’s sacrifice of her religious prejudices, and the priest’s of his, indeed represent the beginning of salvation for Lucy, the beginning of a way out of the long tunnel of loneliness which is the long vacation; the Bretons, with their bourgeois generosity, which is generosity even as the gift is limited, do the rest.

Eagleton’s comment on this section is: ‘it is precisely in the disproportion of sensibility to material situation, the imaginative surplus value, as it were, that the measure of Lucy’s victimisation can be taken’ but ‘There is little in *Villette*, however, to motivate Lucy’s emotional torment’.²⁷ Miles does not specifically discuss the passage, but she seems to rule out anything subversive about it when she states that ‘nowhere in Charlotte’s fiction is there any attempt to challenge these assumptions of her society’ (the assumptions being the ‘rights of liberty and work’).²⁸ For this exploration of an individual’s suffering, abandoned by all around her, with the charge of someone suffering even more than herself (to whom, incidentally, she is unable to give the comfort she in turn seeks from others), her decline almost into madness as the result of others’ carelessness of her, her preparedness to cross stark religious and dogmatic boundaries (and the priest’s in return) – are these not subversive? Gubar and Gilbert discuss this passage with an awareness of Lucy’s suffering; yet again it is made subject to their thesis: ‘the cretin is a last nightmarish version of herself’, ‘she can only escape one confining space for an even more limiting one, the confessional’, ‘Catholicism seems to represent the institutionalization of Lucy’s internal schisms’, and ‘Lucy will become increasingly certain...at the church is a patriarchal structure with the power to imprison her’ (pp. 414–15). Like Eagleton, Gubar and Gilbert find Lucy’s breakdown to be ‘mysterious’: ‘unless one interprets backwards from the breakdown, it is almost incomprehensible’ (p. 416). One cannot help but think again of Lucy’s – Brontë’s – words: ‘perhaps, circumstanced like me, you would have been, like me, wrong.’

The subversiveness of the novel, I am suggesting, lies in the way it concentrates the reader’s attention on areas not usually the focus of attention, even in the ever-changing and developing nineteenth-century novel. It further lies in the way the author constantly keeps the reader imaginatively, emotionally and morally on his/her toes, unable to maintain any preconceptions in these vital areas; ready, in the end, to be surprised. And this subversiveness also extends to the exploitation of the romance conventions within which the novel is assuredly written, in a way which eventually undermines and disempowers those conventions. Beyond that, do we have to limit or define the nature of the subversiveness, that is, see it as anti-patriarchal (or failing to be so) or anti-ruling class? If we look at the three areas of subversiveness I have suggested, we shall find that either narrowing perspective actually detracts from the potential ‘disruptiveness’ of *Villette*.

I have begun to outline above some of the ways in which the novel makes us think about what is often held aside in the nineteenth-century novel. Again, the narrative structure of the novel emphasizes this, beginning with what we should expect to be central. Cleverly, that ‘false’ beginning itself deals with some genuine suffering, that of Polly on being left (abandoned, as she feels it) by her father. But it is in the excesses of *this* grief that we can find the ‘flamboyant Romanticism’ which Eagleton characterizes as one side of the duality to be found in Brontë’s work (the other half is ‘bourgeois rationality’, and Eagleton sees the opposition of the two as structurally reflecting the ‘complex structure of convergence and antagonism between the landed and industrial sectors of the contemporary ruling class’).²⁹ This grief, with its wild outpourings, is solacing within the solid, comfortable, emotional calm of the Bretton household, and its transference to a besotted love for Graham (eventually to be requited and consummated) is what Lucy Snowe – and with her, in the narrative structure, Charlotte Brontë – rejects, indeed, almost contemptuously. As Lucy knows, she is in the real world, not a child (which Polly never truly ceases to be), and there will be no reliable comfortings or magical passions to assuage her grief. She sticks to stoicism and thus wards off possible disappointment; if no one sees her suffering, she won’t feel the positive lack of solace which might be the response to *seen* suffering. This initial narrative device works all the more

powerfully because, as the novel progresses and more and more of Lucy's inner self is revealed to us, so does she relax her tight grip upon herself and accept more potential happiness with its attendant risk of being disappointed. And of course, she is not disappointed in being disappointed! So Lucy's stoicism is shown, as we come to know her, and as she is freed into a foreign culture, not even to be a standard stoicism, simply opposed to the passions of a Polly. Indeed, when Polly reappears in the novel, we see that her childlike passions have not progressed or developed in any way; they are static, petrified into the patterns set in her early experience in the Bretton household (obsessive love of her father, transferred into similar love for Graham/John). How little has changed in Polly actually re-emphasizes how much has changed in Lucy (or at least in our understanding of her) since the beginning of the novel. We remember Lucy's earlier fears for Polly, and she reiterates what they *had* been after Paulina tells her of the mutual love between herself and Graham/John; Lucy puts Polly's escape from those projected unhappinesses down to Providence and circumstance, and certainly she has not had the hardship which Lucy has known. But when, for example, M. de Bassompierre says, somewhat reprovingly, to his daughter, who has been naively enquiring into the way Lucy makes her living: 'If my Polly ever came to know by experience the uncertain nature of this world's goods, I should like her to act as Lucy acts: to work for herself, that she might burden neither kith nor kin' (ch. XXV) we feel that the circumstance itself is unimaginable. Even her fond father sees his daughter's shortcomings here, and knows that Lucy is the worthier of the two women. Lucy is a woman, while Polly is, and will remain, a girl.

Yet – and here is the true quality of the novel's tone – Brontë does not condemn Polly. Lucy's words to her, as it were, giving her blessing to her union with Graham/John and recognizing its rightness, are both generous and correct. Again, the shifting nature of the narrative helps to emphasize this, for while Lucy in the novel's narrative is at the mercy, at the call of the Brettons and the de Bassompierres (she goes through a period of being ignored after the Vashti fire, no doubt because Polly is the Brettons' new toy), it is Lucy's moral judgement which Polly needs; and it is her moral judgement which also carries the reader. We see her approval of the match as both generous and just – aptly because she has prepared us for it by distancing herself morally from Dr

John by this stage. She does this first at the Vashti performance where, even with her loving eyes, she sees and understands John clearly: she has just described her own intense reactions to Vashti's wild, amoral plunging into passion, when she looks at her companion: 'it amused and enlightened me to discover that he was watching that sinister and sovereign Vashti, not with wonder, nor worship, not yet dismay, but simply with intense curiosity' (ch. XXII). Curiosity is the coolest of responses that Lucy could imagine to this performance; her name may be Snowe, but the benevolent Dr John is at heart much colder. It is not surprising that John saves Polly from the fire, as it were, generated by Vashti; neither has a truly fired soul. That belongs to Lucy, who sits calm when told to, finds strength to follow John when told to, and remarks, without irony but with understanding, 'Next morning's papers explained that it was but some loose drapery on which a spark had fallen, and which had blazed up and been quenched in an instant.'

We are not surprised, then, to find that the next chapter begins with Lucy's abandonment, not to someone but by someone. The disappointment she had foreseen, continues to foresee and understand, is at hand. We move from the overt symbolism and theatrical drama of the Vashti chapter back to the introspection and directness of:

Those who live in retirement, whose lives have fallen amid the seclusion of schools or of other walled-in and guarded dwellings, are liable to be suddenly and for a long while dropped out of the memory of their friends, the denizens of a freer world. Unaccountably, perhaps, and close upon some space of unusually frequent intercourse...there falls a still pause, a wordless silence, a long blank of oblivion.

(ch. XXIV)

Anyone who has known loneliness at the hands of a sociable and institutionalized society will feel a shiver at these words – man and woman alike. Lucy's recounting of the receipt of the longed-for letter, only to find it is from the mother rather than the son, similarly strikes at the heart. What prevents Lucy's almost stoical response from being self-sacrificing and (ch. XXIV) self-effacing ('Life is still life, whatever its pangs')? Again, I suggest, the narrative technique, which gives us first another voice, the epistolary voice, here carrying with it the normality of ordinary,

protected life against which our knowledge of Lucy's is set (note the tone of 'It occurs to me to enquire what you have been doing with yourself for the last month or two...'). Yet what is this ordinary voice saying? The letter is a long and self-indulgent account, to an ear which it *knows* will share its feelings, of a mother's almost passionate admiration for her son. Introducing a playful anecdote in which she has wound a turban round her son's 'dark, glossy chestnut' hair while he slept, she says: 'While he slept, I thought he looked very bonny, Lucy: fool as I am to be so proud of him; but who can help it? Show me his peer.' Later, she talks of him as 'my lord' and wishes Lucy could have shared the moment.

This extraordinary contrast of tone, reminding us of both the difference of the Brettons' life from Lucy's, and yet also its lack of ordinariness, the passion which can underlie the bourgeois mother's constantly ironic playfulness with her son (and which perhaps can only be admitted to one such as Lucy, even within an epistolary anecdote), could only be carried off within a narrative which has so many shifts about it. And the biggest shift (one difficult to recall after many readings) is that which now brings the Polly of the first chapters into proper focus in the later. It is at this moment revealed that the young lady saved by Dr John is the Polly of the beginning of the novel; the moment recalls the earlier one, after Lucy's breakdown, when she wakes, so it seems, in Bretton, to reveal to the reader, what she herself has known for some time, that Graham and Dr John are one and the same. But here the change in narrative, the bringing of the beginning back into the centre of the story, marks a greater and sadder change for Lucy; where before it brought the growth of intimacy with Dr John, now it cancels it, as has already been signalled in the period of Lucy's abandonment. When she meets and knows Polly again, her intercourse with the Brettons is resumed, but it is no longer the close connection with Dr John, but the difficult position of confidante to the woman who has won his love.

Lucy – and Brontë – do not stint the suffering this causes Lucy. But I believe that suffering is saved from a sort of masochism by the fact that Lucy fully admits all her previous feelings and their worth. That they have led to suffering does not lead her to pretend they are worthless. That she has begun to see Dr John as in many ways a lesser person than herself does not mean that she does not deeply regret the loss of his incipient feeling for her (and

his letters). That she sees Mrs Bretton as dropping her and picking her up again, in the accepted manner that happier people do with less happy people, does not stop her from recognizing what drives Mrs Bretton, and that it in some ways answers to her own feelings. And that she sees that Polly is still the child that she was a decade earlier does not stop her from seeing that she is the best partner for Dr John. This in turn might almost be too much for the reader – too good, as it were – if there were not also some acerbity of tone at times in Lucy's perception and understanding. She describes Dr John thus, on seeing him part from Paulina, just before Paulina reveals their love to Lucy:

How animated was Graham's face! How true, how warm, yet how retiring the joy it expressed! This was the state of things, this the combination of circumstances, at once to attract and to enchain, to subdue and excite Dr John. The pearl he admired was in itself of great price and truest purity, but he was not a man who, in appreciating the gem, could forget its setting. Had he seen Paulina with the same youth, beauty, and grace, but on foot, alone, unguarded, and in simple attire, a dependent worker, a demi-grisette, he would have thought her a pretty little creature, and would have loved with his eye her movements and her mien, but it required other than this to conquer him as he was now vanquished, to bring him safe under dominion as now, without loss, and even with gain to his manly honour, one saw that he was reduced; there was about Dr John all the man of the world; to satisfy himself did not suffice; society must approve – the world must admire what he did, or he counted his measures false and futile.

(ch. XXXII)

This is the same Dr John Lucy had glimpsed at the theatre watching Vashti; he is reminiscent of 'the beady-eyed Tudor' Orson Welles so acutely saw the Hal of *Henry IV* to be; yet in between, Lucy willingly admits to herself and the reader that he was what she had desired. There is no conflict between reason and passion; Lucy sees the man for what he is *and* desires him. The conventional readings, embraced by the feminists, of Lucy's 'schizophrenia' are surely wrong. Lucy has to bury her love for John as she buries the letter, but in so doing she does not bury her passion in favour of reason or even repress it. In one such as Lucy,

passion is ever-present; it is what she recognizes in Vashti. It is what she does *not* see in Dr John. And she continues to embrace it in the novel even as she buries the letters: they have to be buried, or the sight of them might cause too powerful a feeling. This is passion, not its repression. That it can be combined with the accepting generosity which Lucy achieves testifies to the maturity she has reached, which Paulina has not reached, that complexity of understanding which enables her to move from the pain, yet strength, with which she first buries the letters, to the resigned warmth with which she recalls them:

Was this feeling dead? I do not know, but it was buried.... I learned in time that this benignity [of Dr John's], this cordiality, this music, belonged in no shape to me: it was a part of himself; it was the honey of his temper; it was the balm of his mellow mood; he imparted it as the ripe fruit rewards with sweetness the rifling bee; he diffused it about him, as sweet plants shed their perfume. Does the nectarine love either the bee or bird it feeds? Is the sweetbriar enamoured of the air? 'Goodnight, Dr John; you are good, you are beautiful; but you are not mine. Good night, and God bless you!'

(ch. XXXI)

I would suggest that this acceptance is itself subversive rather than the opposite, for it suggests that life can be lived without a particular system of judging or of making one's way. Lucy has to deal with what comes to her; as she does she grows, changes, develops; her actions and feelings are often contradictory, but that is because she has a complex and complicated character, and the events and situations she encounters demand flexible reactions. This flexibility is further suggested by the narrative technique I have outlined. Far from being simply an expression of a simple duality or schizophrenia, and certainly far from being simply an expression of 'a response to a society cruelly indifferent to women' (Gilbert and Gubar, p. 401) or of 'the destructive effect of the buried life on women who can neither escape by retreating into the self...nor find a solution by dehumanising the other into a spiritual object' (Gilbert and Gubar, p. 403), *Villette* embraces a number of different possibilities in life. Dr John can be good and beautiful *and* world-serving; Mrs Bretton can be terrifyingly the embodiment of the bourgeois (how fitting that she ends up in a

town such as Villette which breathes the same feeling), and yet she can admit to a passion for her son different in expression but similar in nature to Mrs Morel's for Paul.³⁰ Even the chilling Mme Beck is given her moments; her brief entertaining of soft feelings for Dr John, her attempts to ensure that she is always well turned out for his visits, her openness to the charms of a man fourteen years younger than herself, are described by Lucy with both clear-sightedness and compassion. But her true moment of revelation comes when she describes Mme Beck after one of John's visits, and when she has realized he is merely trifling with her attentions:

When he was gone, Mme Beck dropped into the chair he had just left; she rested her chin in her hand; all that was animated or amiable vanished from her face: she looked stony and stern, almost mortified and morose. She sighed; a single but deep sigh. A loud bell rang for morning-school. She got up; as she passed a dressing-table with a glass upon it she looked at her reflected image. One single white hair streaked her nut-brown tresses; she plucked it out with a shudder. In the full summer daylight, her face, though it still had the colour, could plainly be seen to have lost the texture of youth; and then, where were youth's contours? Ah Madame, wise as you were, even *you* knew weakness.

(ch. XI)

As readers, we certainly judge all of these characters as inferior to Lucy, but we see – as she sees – that such judgements are not simple. Misjudged herself, she is careful of making monolithic judgements of others; she has high standards, but applies them with generosity. And since we have already been warned ourselves about misjudgement, in our narrative misjudgement at the beginning of the novel, we are the reader to accept the importance of generosity.

This moral expansiveness is further highlighted in the way religion is dealt with in *Villette*. It has often been criticized for its anti-Catholic stance, and it is true that there are some low blows at that religion. Yet the strong emphasis on religion in the novel is rather to accentuate further Lucy's isolation and alienation within a foreign culture; and at the height of that sense of aloneness, in the long vacation, to whom does she turn, and by whom is she kindly received? By the Catholic Père Silas. When she

finally gives and receives the full force of love, it is to and from whom? A Catholic, and a Catholic ready to allow her her own faith. ('Remain a Protestant, my little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in you. I own its severe charm. There is something in its ritual I cannot receive myself, but it is the sole creed for "Lucy".' If there is prejudice in the novel, it is not one which prevents Lucy's sources of consolation at two key moments in her despair from being Catholic.

I have been trying to show that an analysis of the concerns of the novel, and of the personality of its central character and narrator, Lucy Snowe, is incomplete and untrue to the novel if it focuses on duality or schizophrenia (as both many feminist analyses and Eagleton's Marxist analysis do). Within this I have also tried to show that an analysis which perceives the novel solely as a response to patriarchy (in content and in form) misses that suggestiveness and generosity, that moral sensitivity and expansiveness, which many accounts seem to miss (again I'd want to except Kate Millett). Nowhere is this more evident than in accounts of two formal elements of the novel which are crucial to it. One shows us Brontë's masterly dismissal of a Romance/Gothic convention – the apparition of the nun – and the other her (possibly failed) attempt to resolve the difficulty of an ending to a novel which cries out for a twentieth-century whimper rather than a nineteenth-century bang.

The use of the Gothic device of the nun is yet another way in which Brontë displaces the reader from a simple relationship with the narrative. Just as Brontë keeps us in ignorance of some of the things which her narrator already knows (through devices such as the dual names, e.g. Graham/John), just as she initially keeps us guessing about the central character in this story, just as she employs coincidence in a way which almost does not strike us as that, so ingeniously does she reintroduce the Brettons and Paulina into Lucy's life (and note that the narrative technique means that they are indeed introduced into hers and not vice versa) – so does she tease us out of certainty with the device of the nun. In fact, so complex are the narrative shifts and surprises in *Villette* that it is truly a different novel upon second reading, further proliferating its imaginative effects. Feminist responses to the Romance genre have been ambivalent; some see it as the antithesis of what a female tradition should contain, since it has been the convention responsible for many of the stereotypes of

women in fiction; others see it as being the authentic vehicle for the female voice, because of its embodiment of myth and fantasy, which such critics argue have been denied women in the tradition. It is interesting, therefore, to see how the nun in *Villette* is interpreted – especially since she is in fact a *he!* Miles does not discuss specific examples, but she is sufficiently confident to assert that 'Charlotte's almost exclusive concentration on women led imperceptibly to a situation in which romance becomes *the* female form, the form chosen for fiction written by, for, and about women.'²¹ Both Elaine Showalter and Gilbert and Gubar see Gothic elements in Brontë's fiction as emblematic of forces which the writer was unable to admit as present in the female identity in any other way. (Thus Showalter, who does not specifically discuss *Villette*, connects the Gothic mad wife in *Jane Eyre* with madness and with repressed sexuality, and sees her as the personification of urges in Jane which could not be all wed 'out'.²² Gilbert and Gubar similarly see Bertha as an *alter* Jane (p. 359), indeed one can see here (and in Showalter) the seeds of their strong thesis. But Gilbert and Gubar also incorporate a psychoanalytic element into their interpretation of Brontë's Gothic, and this can be seen most clearly in their discussion of the nun in *Villette*. Gilbert and Gubar sometimes seem to vacillate in their interpretation of the nun, a vacillation they correctly perceive in the novel: 'Dr John is correct, then, in assuming that the nun comes out of Lucy's diseased brain: Lucy has already played the role of de Hamal on the stage, and now *he* is playing her role as the nun in Mme Beck's house. But this psychoanalytic interpretation is limited, as Lucy herself notes' (p. 425). Gilbert and Gubar argue, first, that the nun represents both a desire and a fear in the female psyche (thus she represents both an approved chastity and a feared loss of both sexuality and worldly identity for Lucy); second, that the way in which the nun surfaces suggests that 'Lucy may very well be moving towards some kind of rejection of her own convent-like life-in-death' (p. 426). Third, they link M. Paul into the experience of the apparition, 'For both Paul and Lucy are tainted by the manipulative, repressive ways in which they have managed to lead a buried life, and so both are haunted by the nun...their relationship is constantly impeded by the haunting which the nun represents' (p. 429); and here the mysterious Justine Marie, a real nun romantically linked to Paul, is connected with the apparition. Finally, the true identity of the

'nun' is revealed, and Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation is this:

Thus, for Lucy to liberate herself from Ginevra and de Hamal means that she can simultaneously rid herself of the self-denying nun. In fact, these mutually dependent spirits have been cast out of her house because, in the park, unable to withdraw into voyeurism, she experienced jealousy. Hurt without being destroyed, she has at least temporarily liberated herself from the dialectic of her internal schism. And to indicate once again how that split is a male fiction, Brontë shows us how the apparently female image of the nun masks the romantic male plots of de Hamal.

(p. 436)

Curiously, Gilbert and Gubar scarcely mention the way in which the *déroulement* of the nun narrative completely undercuts its apparent significance earlier in the novel. Their psychoanalytic interpretation is happy to marry inner and outer, the nun of the imagination with the nun of impersonation, and they don't even change critical gear in moving from the one to the other. For them, the nun is symbol of Lucy's duality again; once brought to the surface through her actually experienced jealousy (and thus her admission of desire) she is expelled and expunged, and Lucy is freed to pursue her own (undiseased) desires. Yet is it not a difficulty for Gilbert and Gubar that, once brought to the surface, we see that the nun is in fact not a nun at all, but a silly young man who has conveniently exploited the disguise, innocent of its effect on Lucy? So how can a nun who is not a nun at all simultaneously be the product of Lucy's diseased imagination and the 'expression' of her desire, 'expressed' by her recognized jealousy of M. Paul? Of course, fictional narratives can easily sustain both realistic and imaginative, symbolic truths, and this could be one such. But a psychoanalytic interpretation surely depends upon our being able to believe that the nun is indeed a product of Lucy's mind; if we discover that it has an all too rational explanation, where does this leave the psychoanalytic one?

Here we can compare Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, where similar supernatural events take place. In *Jane Eyre*, when Jane feels Rochester's voice calling to her, what are we to believe? Is his voice really, that is to say supernaturally, projected across the miles to call her back? Or is it simply the literary and dramatic expression of her intense desire to go back? Or is the outward epiphenomenon

accompanying a suppressed desire? The nature of literary devices, their ability to sustain different weights, both realistic and symbolic, makes it difficult to answer these questions with certainty. What is certain is that Brontë does not insinuate any doubt into her narrative in *Jane Eyre*; there is no deflation of the mysterious voice, and indeed its supernatural origin is endorsed by the fact that the fire had razed Thornfield at much the same time as Jane heard her summons. Now, certainly, it is open to the twentieth-century critic to proffer a psychoanalytic reading here (Gilbert and Gubar do: 'Her new and apparently telepathic communion with Rochester, which many critics have seen as mindlessly melodramatic has been made possible by her new independence and Rochester's new humility' (p. 377)); but such a reading is open to the same vagaries as a psychoanalytic reading of a real person's behaviour and experience, and compounding this is the difficulty of testing critical interpretations in general. So psychoanalytic critical interpretations are particularly difficult to submit to any process of falsification. Such a judgement, which wilfully ignores a matter of fact which undermines it (as, incidentally, both the judgements on *Jane Eyre* and on *Villette* do), must be suspect. In the case of *Jane Eyre*, Jane cannot know of Rochester's 'new humility' when she hears the cry – unless it is genuinely telepathic, that is to say, she actually has communicated with Rochester across the airwaves; and if she does so communicate, the force of the experience as expressive of what is repressed is lost. In the case of *Villette*, when Brontë reveals that the nun was simply a man in disguise, neither a nun, a ghost, nor a product of Lucy's 'diseased' imagination, this *must* reflect on earlier representations of the nun. Since Brontë is here employing a well-recognized Gothic device within a novel otherwise free of such devices and committed to a combination of realistic narrative, melodramatic metaphor and psychological introspection (a combination which can sustain another different element, but one which is not in its overall sweep Gothic in nature), we see the nun as a device which stands proud of the narrative. Given that we have already been made uncertain by the narrative structure (not unlike walking on one of those disconcerting spongy surfaces in the fairground House of Fun), we are not likely to take it straightforwardly. In this way it is quite unlike the Gothic elements in *Jane Eyre*, where there is *no* questioning of the force of the devices. It is almost as though, in *Villette*, Brontë deliberately

set out to question such melodramatic images, to question the rather straightforward solutions of the previous novel. *Villette* is in many ways committed to realism (psychological as well as narrative), and the nun sticks out oddly. Furthermore, Lucy, while being (very naturally and realistically) disturbed by the apparition, always doubts it, at least sufficiently to try to question it. As is characteristic with this novel, we, as readers, are kept in ignorance of the full complexity of her feeling about the nun; and that is because Brontë is playing a narrative game with us. Her description – Lucy's description – of her first encounter with the nun occurs in chapter XXII, in the wake of the genuine psychological crisis in the novel. True, imaginings could well follow such an event; but Brontë strongly emphasizes that Lucy, even in her greatest extremity, is in her senses – even to the point where she enters the Catholic confessional. So Lucy sees the nun. This is the description: 'Say what you will, reader – tell me I was nervous or mad; affirm that I was unsettled by the excitement of that letter; declare that I dreamed; this I vow – I saw there – in that room – on that night – an image like – a NUN.' The style of this is strongly reminiscent of the passage in which she earlier remonstrates with those who would judge her (readers, critics) about her desolation of spirit in the first month of the long vacation. She questions (even in accepting the plausibility of various 'rational' judgements, but affirms the nature of her own experience, just as she affirms her misery in the earlier passage. The affirmation itself seems to cast doubt upon any judgements upon it ('tell me I was nervous or mad'); and it also casts doubt upon Dr John's diagnosis ('I think it a case of spectral illusion: I fear, following on and resulting from long-continued mental conflict'). The good doctor goes on to make his prescription: to cultivate happiness. Lucy's response is predictable, but enjoyable nevertheless: 'No mockery in the 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.' The exchange might remind many women of being told by men that their ailments were the products of nerves and could be cured by cheerfulness; Lucy sees the greater truth, that happiness cannot be cultivated, but that unhappiness need not, either, mean visions of nuns. Do not Gilbert and Gubar, in their psychoanalytic mode, behave rather like the good doctor? They diagnose repression and recommend

'expression'; the nearer 'the nun' is brought to the surface, the nearer Lucy will be to health and independence. This view is linked to their interpretation of Lucy as schizophrenic, which they further link to Brontë's own duality (torn between male convention and female independence). They are not even embarrassed when M. Paul sees the vision of the nun. Instead of seeing this as objective proof that the nun exists and is not a figment of Lucy's imagination, they see it rather as an image of the joint repression of Lucy and Paul. And just how does the nun fit into the male psyche? Gilbert and Gubar do not follow this hare, yet are happy to assert a causal relationship: 'Paul and Lucy are tainted by the manipulative, repressive ways in which they have managed to lead a buried life, and so both are haunted by the nun' (p. 429). Yet even if we were to agree that the device is largely symbolic, what are we to do with the logical *détournement*? It is simply not explicable in the psychoanalytic terms Gilbert and Gubar have defined. If Lucy is liberated from the nun by an admitted jealousy, how is Paul liberated? If the apparition of the nun is linked with Justine Marie, and dissipated by the explanation of Lucy's misunderstanding, how does this explain the apparition's occurring while Lucy is still enmeshed emotionally with Dr John? It *might* be argued that the nun should disappear when Lucy finds happiness (as she does, with Dr John's prescription and through his actions, immediately after her first sighting); yet the nun appears to her just as she is about to devour his first letter. Terrible warning of her cultivation of her passion? Yet how can that be sustained when Paul later sighs the nun and, much more importantly, when the nun turns out to be Ginevra's suitor, de Hamal, in disguise?

Mary Jacobus, in her essay on *Villette*, 'The buried letter: feminism and romanticism in *Villette*',³³ comes closest of the feminist accounts I have read to reflecting some of the genuine ambiguity and shiftingness of *Villette* (as opposed to a simple view of duality masking repression). She speaks of 'the perpetual de-centring activity'³⁴ of the novel and uses many metaphors of shifting ground. But Jacobus wants to have her cake and eat it too, to preserve the shiftingness of the novel and its duality, to see the undercutting of the nun yet to invoke its psychic significance too. Indeed, it is in her interpretation of the nun that we see that underlying her analysis of the shifting nature of the narrative is a Lacanian analysis. In her view, the pleasure the reader takes in

the novel is that which stems from 'an obedient, controllable, narcissistically pleasurable image of self and its relation to the world';³⁵ she places a realist reading in this (as she sees it ironically non-realist) frame, as she also places the various mirror-images of Lucy in the novel (the image Lucy sees has only an imaginary correspondence with herself, just as the novel we see has only an imaginary correspondence with ourselves and our relation with the world, because neither takes account of that which is absent from the correspondence). In her interpretation, the nun opposes this imaginary correspondence of signifier and signified because she is 'recalcitrantly other'³⁶ and can only be mirrored by the structure of language. Perhaps we are doomed to the intrusion of a Lacanian analysis wherever mirrors appear in poetry or fiction; but here, especially, the analogue seems stretched to the point of fairground distortion. Once again, a preconceived set leads the critic away from the text; the point of Lucy's glimpses of her represented self is that she does not feel happy with them, she does not recognize herself in her mirror-image;³⁷ the nun certainly is other – it is de Hamal; and, as I have tried to show, a proper realist reading of the novel, far from enforcing the reader's desire for 'an obedient, narcissistically pleasurable image of self and its relation to the world', both unsettles and strengthens the reader, through the novel's representation of the problematic nature of judgement and its equivalent release of the reader into a final act of the imagination – but one made in the real world.

It seems to me that a far more plausible explanation of the nun lies in the shifts of narrative and playfulness with form, which I have already mentioned. The spectre of the nun is raised, only to be dismissed; Robert Heilman's article, 'Charlotte Brontë's "New" Gothic',³⁸ gives a very persuasive account of this view. The point of deflation is a crucial point for the reader's shift of consciousness, because it is similarly a crux for Lucy Snowe. She *was* right; there was a nun, whom she faced, knowing that she might be an apparition from Lucy's own consciousness. And the nun was nothing more fearful than the ludicrous de Hamal. This element of absurdity is the key to Brontë's intention here. If we were to take the nun seriously, either as Gothic symbol or as psycho-analytic device, Brontë could not have included this particular – and narratively logical – explanation. Lucy's fears are shown to be 'trifles light as air', as she, with far less reason, and needing far

more courage to do so than her many interpreters and advisers, had thought. Can a psychoanalytic critical interpretation really survive on the shoulders of the absurd de Hamal? Let us credit Brontë with the intelligence a Dr John would not have admitted; she is having a joke at the expense of the reader, and on the fictional convention at the same time. And the seriousness of the joke lies in her deliberate rejection of Gothic as a vehicle for the representation of inner turmoil or repressed passion, a rejection of her own former methods, to signal her deliberate embrace of a new form of writing and a new approach to her central concerns (which must thus entail a new approach by the reader – which she ensures by first raising the spectre of the Gothic and then blowing it away). It is this most of all which signals Brontë's commitment to realism – not the realism of linear narrative or close observation of detail (though there is plenty of the latter), nor the realism which denies a heightened rhetoric, but an interior realism, which marries the struggles of Lucy to make her way through the difficulties which living throws up, with her more harrowing internal struggles with herself and her anguished attempts both to make sense of and survive the way her life fits only imperfectly with the lives of those around her. This is an extended, an expanded and expanding realism, which can accommodate the extraordinary metaphorical sweeps of the Long Vacation and the visionary, limelit scenes of *Villette's* festal night with the cool appraisals of the opening passages of the novel and the benevolent basking in the glow of the Bretton household. The shifting narrative with its intercutting of different judgements and different styles, its reverse dramatic irony (Lucy knows things we don't), and its own reflection of change and development within the central narrator, suggests the complexity of the world and the complexity of judgement upon it, even as it keeps us firmly fixed upon and engaged with the central character – the more firmly for the fact that we had initially ignored her, as characters within the novel continue to do. And as we fix on her we are allowed to glimpse the other selves in those Bretton, Mme Beck) and see that they too have rich interior lives which can only be glimpsed from the external view we have of them. But this is no nineteenth-century magic realism; the one thing which this super-realism will not embrace is the spectre which the contemporary feminist critic is so eager to insist upon.

Gilbert and Gubar's thesis demands that they find a madwoman in Lucy's attic; the nun being insufficient, they turn to Mme Walravens as the receptacle of 'Lucy's repressed anger at the injustice of men and male culture' (p. 431) and link this with the image of the nun, asserting that Mme Walravens' malevolence is likewise the other side of Justine Marie's suicidal passivity'. From here it is a quick step to a favoured conclusion: 'For Lucy's ambivalence about love and about men is now fully illuminated: she seeks emotional and erotic involvement as the only form of self-actualization in her world, yet she fears that such involvement will lead either to submission or to destruction, suicide or homicide.' Lucy – and, it is implied, Brontë ('In Mme Walravens then it is likely we see Brontë's anxiety about the effect of her creativity on herself and on others') (p. 432) – must find a middle road.

Gilbert and Gubar make this analysis the basis of their interpretation of the end of *Villette*, a troubled and difficult area for any critic and one which cannot admit of any certain identification. They merge the figures of author and narrator more closely by locating the subject of the ending as the female creative imagination; Lucy is the author of her own life, as Brontë is the author of a fiction which seeks to reject male models. As so often with Gilbert and Gubar, a promising initial analysis, which might yield much fruit about the novel, quickly turns to the rehearsal of a prior thesis; 'The ambiguous ending of *Villette* reflects Lucy's ambivalence, her love for Paul and her recognition that it is only in his absence that she can exert herself fully to exercise her own powers. It also reflects Brontë's determination to avoid the tyrannical fictions that have traditionally victimized women. Once more she deflates male romanticism' (p. 438). Gilbert and Gubar's certainty even leads these thorough and scholarly critics to make a simple error of fact in their interpretation of the ending, stating that Paul's death makes him more Lucy's 'own', whereas it is clear from the text that it is only his absence which leads to her feeling so. Gilbert and Gubar's turn from psychoanalysis to signification, to the representation of the subject, for their reading of the ambiguous ending, and their identification of Lucy with Brontë, both authors inspired by the primacy of the imagination, puts a simple gloss on it: 'Just as Brontë has become Lucy Snowe for the writing of *Villette*, just as Lucy has become all her characters, we submit to the spell of the novel, to the sepulchral

voice relating truths of the dead revived by the necromancy of the imagination. Brontë rejects not only the confining images conferred on women by patriarchal art, but the implicitly coercive nature of that art' (p. 439). Yet, again, it seems necessary to insist that precisely what Charlotte Brontë rejects in her ending is 'the necromancy of the imagination' – not the imagination, only a certain form of it.

Gilbert and Gubar, in their reading of the ending, are often true to its spirit and to its genuine ambiguity; it is only when they feel the need to fit it to their thesis that we see the shackles of preconception applied to what by its very nature cannot be shackled. Eagleton does the same, except that his preconceptions are different. He too focuses on the power of the imagination, but concludes that 'the ending, then, half suppresses tragedy while simultaneously protesting against such a manoeuvre. It confesses the emptiness of the tactic while emotionally investing in it.'³⁹ This leads him to dismiss *Villette* as a worthless compromise with 'neither the courage to be tragic nor to be comic...it is a kind of middle-ground, a half-measure'.⁴⁰

In a sense, Eagleton, and Gilbert and Gubar, approach the ending in the same way; they see the novel as dualistic, they see Brontë as a compromiser with a world of restrictive values, they see repression at its heart, and the repression is the author's rather than the heroine's; they apply different ideologies to form their analyses, but in each case it is the ideology which forms the (similar) interpretation. Both focus upon the role of the imagination in the ending – yet both want to close the ending down, seal off its difficulties and fit it into a framework. Nothing could make clearer the intangibility of that ending. Clearly, it is not the compromise Eagleton wants to perceive; the ironies of Lucy's address to the reader with a sunny imagination are all one with her earlier direct addresses to those who might doubt her perceptions. Yet, as soon as we see that, we also see that the irony might be working in the other direction. Is not the stormy demise of the beloved hero as Gothic as the nun? Should it not meet a similar fate, the debunking of the rational mind – the same rational mind that Lucy alone was able to apply to the Spectre – for she did see it. Is not the conventional ending in this context (the patriarchal ending as Gilbert and Gubar would have it) the stormy rather than the secure one? These are not questions that can be settled. Brontë keeps us guessing.

Of course, a debunking voice might enter here to remind us that, according to Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë had fixed on the tragic ending when her father begged her to allow a happier one, and in response to his request she made it a 'veiled' fate.⁴¹ It would be amusing if the effects of genuine patriarchy were our current analyses of Brontë's ambivalence. But whatever its aetiology, the ending as it stands is genuinely ambivalent. However many times we read it, in whatever frame, it eludes a final fix. One element in this is the shifting tense which Charlotte Brontë employs. Throughout the novel, by means of Lucy's first-person character presence, Brontë plays present against past tense (the present of the direct commentary on her past reportage, for example, the 'I err' in 'The Long Vacation', and the present of her direct addresses to the reader, for example, 'Well, each and all, take it your own way' of the same chapter); it is part of the complexity of her narrative mode. But in the chapter 'Finis' a new use of the present tense emerges in contrast with the past, as Lucy drops reportage of the past and enters into current reportage on the present. The chapter begins in the universal present of the authoritative generalizing statement: 'Man cannot prophesy. Love is no oracle. Fear sometimes imagines a vain thing.' But these very statements deny their authority, or rather deny the authority of the general axiom, because they are negatives. Lucy is about to tell us that what she feared did not come to pass – yet again denying the fictional convention and preparing us for the extraordinary, and extraordinarily revealing, remark that the three years of Paul's absence 'were the three happiest years of my life'. It is in this context that we move to the present tense of 'And now three years are past', and we move through time with the narrator, feeling its inexorable passing more than through the reported past: 'The sun passes the equinox; the days shorten, the leaves grow sere; but – he is coming.' That 'he is coming', in the form of the continuous present, but, as part of the peculiarly suggestive quality of some English tenses, predicting a future state, is repeated, and thus acquires an ominous tone. We move to the present of Lucy's present and direct speech: 'God, watch that sail! Oh! guard it!' The effect of these further deepening present tenses is to increase the effect of suspense, already announced by the presence and potential destructiveness of the storm; the reader's implication in this present seems to give us a role.

Of course, storms in *Villette* are not simply storms; they herald imaginative turbulence and denote death, as Lucy tells us during the Marchmont storm – and in case we were to forget that imaginative link, she now specifically mentions the deathly Banshee note. It is at this point that she reverts to the past tense, and we are dropped from the close imaginative engagement of that central passage back into the distance of reportage. The move back to the past tense in 'That storm roared frenzied for seven days' also implies the narrator's knowledge of subsequent events, so that the suspense, it seems, is about to be broken by the final outcome. It is at this point that Brontë turns on her 'Finis' with her final direct address to the reader: and here it is clear that Lucy's has become her own voice, for such an ending is authorial, though still in the spirit of Lucy's numerous backtracking remonstrances to her reader. And at this point too the address is also self-directed, as though Brontë were talking to herself: 'there is enough said.... Let them [sunny imaginations] picture union and a happy succeeding life.' Now, though this ending is often taken as a sort of sop to those who want happy endings (like Mr Brontë) the ambiguity of the tense again intervenes here: 'Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy', 'Let them picture union and a happy life' could be placing the emphasis on 'theirs' and on 'them', so that Brontë could be releasing her ending (genuinely, not ironically) to the imaginations of her reader. In such a reading the 'Let it be theirs' could imply 'not me'; 'let them picture' could imply 'rather than me'. Thus the suggestion could be that, at this point, the writer might have intervened in the projected unhappy ending to reveal a happy one; instead she wishes to leave that imagining, that sunny picturing to the reader. And if their imaginations are not so – then, not so.

Brontë's signal reminders of the Marchmont episode in this passage also move against the direct parallel in the ending. Lucy is not Miss Marchmont, nor was she meant to be. Although Brontë always intended that her lines should not fall in pleasant places, that prediction has always been amply fulfilled in the novel, and the distinction between her and Miss Marchmont has been clearly made, even as she sails away from that dead life in the craft named 'The Vivid'.

With the ending, Brontë releases us to the quick of our imaginations. Like Keats at the end of 'The Eve of St Agnes' and 'Ode to

escape of Madeleine and Porphyro with 'and they are gone', and the final one begins 'Aye ages long ago these lovers fled away', thus bathetically releasing the reader from his engagement with their escape to the reminder that he has been agitated about lovers long dead. They are indeed gone. Keats pulls the same trick in the Ode with the disappearance of the nightingale, though there it is less roughly done.

⁴³ Except death, which completes it, but makes it no neater.

'WOOMAN, LOVELY WOOMAN': FOUR DICKENS HEROINES AND THE CRITICS

Sandra Hopkins

His heroines, as in *David Copperfield*, tend to fall into two main types...the tall, composed, steadfast and sensible, and the small, fluttering, playful, and dependent...despite their loving selflessness, the names of Dickens' womenfolk fall heavily on the ear as their long procession passes by...They may be incandescent with virtue, but they do not strike a responsive spark.¹

These sentences are taken from Patricia Thomson's book, *The Victorian Heroine*, published in 1956. In this study, Dickens is given short shrift. According to Thomson, 'a composite Victorian heroine - small, gentle, large-eyed and loving' would bear a 'resemblance...to Dickens' feminine ideal...his *idée fixe* about young women never varied'.² Thomson devotes little space to Dickens' presentation of his heroines, and implies that a re-examination of the topic would be neither pleasurable nor profitable.

In the last two decades, however, a large number of books written from various feminist standpoints have examined the depiction of women in Victorian fiction, and nearly all of these have included substantial treatment of Dickens' heroines. Moreover, many of the general studies of Dickens, which have appeared during the same period, have included specific discussion of Dickens' women - perhaps partly in response to the feminists' preoccupation with 'the male image of women' in Victorian fiction. It is the purpose of the present essay to enquire whether the marked increase in the quantity of critical attention which has recently been devoted to Dickens' heroines has been

a Nightingale',⁴² she signals her awareness of her fiction, releases us from all tenses into the reality of our present (and oh! so much less heavily than any post-modernist novelist). That, of course, is where the reader always was, in the world of mortality where the imagination cannot quite o'erleap the bounds. Brontë is quite clearly saying, 'Fled is that music'; that is the point of the essential stoicism of Lucy and the essential realism of the novel. We have been shown a picture, a narrative, a story, representing someone dealing with the difficulties of the real world, and tempering those difficulties with the equally difficult exercise of the imagination. Lucy's triumph is to find some reconciliation between the two. Thus she can go on – whether with Paul or without him – though it would be better, far better, with him. Thus most of us have to go on. The real struggle of living in the real world does not centre on representations of the subject, nor on inscriptions of patriarchy, nor on psychoanalytic analyses of the unconscious, nor even on 'the tensions and alliances between two classes' (Eagleton). It centres, as it does for Lucy, on making a way forward which balances all the many tensions, and the joys, of the act of living, with one's sense of self. That business has no neat ending,⁴³ neither has *Villette*.

NOTES

- 1 C. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965, 'Finale'.
- 2 G. S. Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters*, London: Oxford University Press; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954–5, 3, p. 111.
- 3 W. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1935, p. 4.
- 4 *ibid.*, p. 5.
- 5 T. Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, London: NLB, 1976, p. 120.
- 6 M. Jacobus, 'The difference of view', in M. Jacobus (ed.), *Women Writing and Women Writing about Women*, London: Croom Helm, 1979, p. 18.
- 7 *ibid.*, pp. 17–18.
- 8 Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 121.
- 9 S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *Shakespeare's Sisters*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979, p. xvi.
- 10 Once it becomes the object of academic study it ceases to be 'just' popular fiction and becomes a cultural document.
- 11 S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979.
- 12 T. Eagleton, *Myths of Power*, London: Macmillan, 1975, p. 4.

- 13 *ibid.*, p. 8.
- 14 E. Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, revised edition, London: Princeton University Press, pp. 13, 19.
- 15 All references to E. Gaskell, *North and South*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970.
- 16 K. Millett, *Sexual Politics*, London: Virago, 1977.
- 17 R. Miles, *The Female Form*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987, p. 41.
- 18 *ibid.*, p. 41.
- 19 Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 7. Since I refer to this work extensively in the following discussion, page references will be bracketed in the text.
- 20 Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, pp. 13, 19.
- 21 Eagleton, *Myths of Power*, p. 72.
- 22 Brontë's change of her heroine's intended name from Frost to Snowe is interesting here; snow is blanner than frost, Lucy initially writes 'white', and even 'Lucy' implies translucence.
- 23 This and all future references to Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985.
- 24 Miles, *The Female Form*, p. 41.
- 25 Eagleton, *Myths of Power*, p. 63.
- 26 *idem.*
- 27 *ibid.*, p. 90.
- 28 Miles, *The Female Form*, p. 41.
- 29 Eagleton, *Myths of Power*, p. 4.
- 30 There is a further interesting parallel in *North and South* (ch. XXVI), where Mrs Thornton's discussion with her son of Margaret's refusal of his proposal is nakedly revealing of her love for him, and powerfully foreshadows Mrs Morel's appeal to Paul in *Sons and Lovers* not to give himself fully to Miriam.
- 31 Miles, *The Female Form*, p. 42.
- 32 Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, pp. 118–22.
- 33 Mary Jacobus, 'The buried letter: feminism and romanticism in *Villette*', M. Jacobus, (ed.) *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, London: Croom Helm, 1979.
- 34 *ibid.*, p. 54.
- 35 *ibid.*, p. 51.
- 36 *idem.*
- 37 See Shirley Foster, *Victorian Women's Fictions: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual*, London: Croom Helm, 1985, p. 105. Foster gives all the references for Lucy's dissatisfaction with her own mirror-image.
- 38 R. B. Hellman, 'Charlotte Brontë's "New" Gothic', in I. Gregor (ed.) *The Brontës*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970.
- 39 Eagleton, *Myths of Power*, p. 92.
- 40 *ibid.*, p. 73.
- 41 Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 2 vols, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1857, 2, p. 266.
- 42 The shifting tense in 'Eve of St Agnes' is used in a most economical and urgent way by Keats; the penultimate stanza ends with the