"A Draught of Sweet Poison": Love, Food, and Wounds in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*

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Hunger and love are the pivots on which the world turns. Mankind is entirely determined by love and hunger.

—Anatole France, letter to George Sand

When Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar analyze Brontë's much neglected third novel, *Shirley*, they emphasize “the genesis of hunger” in the text, the pattern of deprivation and self-starvation that repeats obsessively throughout the work. Discussing Caroline Helstone, one of the novel's female heroines, Gilbert and Gubar observe that Caroline is unable to eat during her illness caused by Robert Moore's rejection of her:

She received stones, instead of food. She has been deprived of maternal care and familial love so she denies herself the traditional symbol of that care and love. Of course her starvation is also a sign that she is being eaten away, consumed by sorrow.... Now it becomes clear how
that myth in which a woman is condemned for eating reflects male hatred of the female and fear of her sustaining and strengthening herself.... Yet, fasting is also an act of revolt. Since eating maintains the self, in a discredited world it is a compromise that implies acquiescence.1

For Gilbert and Gubar, the “prominence of anorexia nervosa as a female dis-ease and a theme in women’s literature” expresses the fact that food imagery should be read as a sign of women’s conflict and guilt about their bodies, their desires, and all of their suppressed appetites, intellectual and sexual (390). Rather than focusing on anorexia as an actual medical condition, however, I would like to examine the trope of self-starvation as an outcome of love offered and rejected throughout all of Brontë’s novels. Further, I would claim that such a motif is motivated less by Brontë’s “feminism,” which Gilbert and Gubar are at pains to claim, than it is caused by Brontë’s persistent use of food imagery throughout all her novels can best be understood by placing her work within the growing field of trauma studies, those theories derived from the writings of Freud, Kristeva, and Nicolas Abraham and applied to literary texts. If love, wounds, and food intermingle as one of the most dominant imagistic patterns in her novels, it is because Brontë was working and reworking in all of her narratives a series of personal and familial traumas that left her a guilty survivor in the shipwreck she recognized as her family.

Brontë began her adult writing career in heavy drag. That is, she assumed the ponderous and humorless persona of William Crimsworth and relived in all its masochistic misery her teaching apprenticeship in Brussels under the alternatingly attentive and stern tutelage of M. Constantin Heger and his wife. When Brontë recast that frustrating pedagogical experience in her first adult novel, The Professor, she chose to position herself as a male tutor infatuated with “his” employer, Mlle. Zoë Rueter, characterized by Crimsworth as a bright shiny apple, the apple that tempted Eve to eat in the garden of Eden: in other words, the very embodiment of sexual temptation. The “apple” as in the “apple of one’s eye” will recur as an expression in both Jane Eyre and Villette, but at this early stage of her career the use of the apple suggests that food and forbidden sexuality are intertwined in Brontë’s manner. Later, of course, we let the pain through food) are attempts to concoct to reshape Mlle. Reuter is Brontë’s first nemesis Madame Heger, although metamorphosed into the persecuted spying Madame Beck in Villette Crimsworth every evening in her While secretly engaged to the now one M. Pelet, a spiteful portrait of a foreigner, willing to condone or to recognize is first displayed in the woman’s mourning the loss of Pelet, substitute lovers, Brontë established haunted both her life and her work; the emotional withdrawal of the future, harsh in his judgments and

Charlotte Brontë hungered for hunger as a form of insatiable over and over again in her four compulsively repetitive and neurotic ‘until she was thirty years old, to embody her characters’ emotion in The Professor, and she continued to embody her characters’ emotion in The Professor. Through narratives of abuse and sagas of Brontë’s less unrealistically triumphant or begin to elide the agony that haunted these texts.

But let me begin with Freud in an attempt to explain the con
sexuality are intertwined in Brontë's imagination in a particularly potent manner. Later, of course, we learn that wounds (as in attempting to soothe pain through food) are also an integral part of the recipe she was attempting to concoct to reshape and thereby conquer her pain.

Mlle. Reuter is Brontë's first unflattering portrait of her rival and nemesis Madame Heger, although the good Madame will appear later metamorphosed into the persecutory Miss Scatcherd in Jane Eyre and the spying Madame Beck in Villette. While flirting outrageously with Crimsworth every evening in her enclosed garden, Ruefer was all the while secretly engaged to the male director of the neighboring school, one M. Pelet, a spiteful portrait of M. Heger himself as a womanizing foreigner, willing to condone even adultery as part of his marriage of convenience to a corrupt (read: Catholic and foreign) woman. All this appears as just so much literary wish-fulfillment on Brontë's part, pathetic and desperate if it were not also so sad. But the wound that we begin to recognize is first displayed in The Professor as the gaping hole of loss, desertion, betrayal and abandonment by not one parent, but two. In mourning the loss of Pelet and Reuter as idealized parent-substitute/lovers, Brontë establishes the leitmotif that will continue to haunt both her life and her novels: the death of the mother followed by the emotional withdrawal of the father into a shadowy authoritarian figure, harsh in his judgments and parsimonious in his bestowal of love.

Charlotte Brontë hungered all her life for love, and we can see this hunger as a form of insatiable longing and frustrated desire displayed over and over again in her four major novels, not to mention the obsessively compulsive and neurotic "juvenilia" that consumed her writing life until she was thirty years old. Brontë began using food imagery to embody her characters' emotional needs and to catarize their wounds in The Professor, and she continued the device through the end of her writing career. In fact, her final novel Villette is a much more sophisticated, self-conscious, and self-critical rewrite of her earlier take on the same story in The Professor. Throughout all her novels Brontë told and retold narratives of abuse and sagas of pain, all ending in a stylized and more or less unrealistically triumphal conclusions, endings that in fact do not begin to elide the agony that has been on display throughout each of these texts.

But let me begin with Freud's essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" in an attempt to explain the compulsive quality of the texts, the obsessive
need to tell yet one more time the same story: I have been expelled from the childhood garden of food and love that I once inhabited and forced to suffer the loss of my parents; therefore, all food, all love have been forever denied to me, in fact, are forever poisonous to my lips.

When Freud chose to relate the story of Tancred and Clorinda, derived from Tasso’s epic, he did so in order to to illustrate the peculiar tendency of some people to wound and be wounded over and over again by the same agents, through a sort of fate that appears to be entirely beyond their own control. Freud writes that Tasso’s hero Tancred unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders’ army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. (SE 18: 3)

By using this narrative to illustrate his theory of trauma, Freud highlights the paradoxical nature of psychic wounding, that the experience of trauma repeats itself over and over again through the unconsciously motivated acts of the survivor. In other words, if a psychic trauma is experienced too suddenly or unexpectedly, it cannot be fully known or available to the consciousness until it imposes itself yet again, in fact, repeatedly in the nightmares and compulsively repetitive actions of the traumatized and traumatizer. Cathy Caruth summarizes Freud on this point, noting that it is the second wounding that finally allows the trauma to be located on the body of the victim: “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on.”

One might ask, however, why is it important to recognize in Brontë’s novels the enactment of personal as well as social or historical trauma? Does such a reading change our interpretation of Brontë or her works? Gilbert and Gubar, as well as most recent critics of Brontë, have tended to privilege her supposedly liberal feminist agenda, asserting that her works can be read as social, political, cultural, or religious analyses of middle-class women’s position in mid-nineteenth-century British society.

But I would assert that Brontë engaging the cognitive value of trauma novels Brontë opened and dissolved early adulthood. She used her fiction in order to understand and then externalize their particularity in their works.

All of this, of course, in Interpretations of Dreams, Freud’s text, but a text to be deciphered. The nature of sexuality to have a topic justifies the connection between Freud, fantasies are the conscious and unconscious plenitude we experienced in dreams the ego dominates and sequences so that the lack is determined by scenarios of self-aggrandizement, which the ego regains a protector of objects suitable for affection. A struggle toward establishing an identity extravagantly succeeding where...
But I would assert that Brontë’s fictions provide one test case for revealing the cognitive value of trauma as a source for literary creativity. In her novels Brontë opened and dissected the wounds of her childhood and early adulthood. She used her fiction as a form of therapy, reshaping and replaying her life and its major crises almost as if she were turning an object around in her hand, looking at her wounds from different angles in order to understand and thereby control them. All of this is to say that literature is written by individuals in the grip of fantasies and pain who then externalize their particular complex of fantasies onto the characters in their works.

All of this, of course, leads us once more to Freud. In his *Interpretations of Dreams*, Freud claims that a dream is not a fantasмагoria, but a text to be deciphered, and he observes that it is in the very nature of sexuality to have a traumatic effect on the ego; therefore, he justifies the connection between sexuality, trauma, and defense. For Freud, fantasies are the conscious articulations of a lack, a loss of the psychic plenitude we experienced in childhood, while in both fantasies and dreams the ego dominates and determines all the actions and consequences so that the lack is denied. Most fantasies, therefore, center on scenarios of self-aggrandizement and are structured around a narrative in which the ego regains a protective home, loving parents, and autoerotic objects suitable for affection. As we will see, Brontë’s heroines do struggle toward establishing an idealized family of their own, with Jane extravagantly succeeding where Lucy only partly does.

Freud would later resort to an explanation that he called “primal fantasies of phylogenetic endowment,” claiming that all fantasies are not individual, but traces of a racial or primeval experience. For Freud the primal fantasies that recur in all individuals—and by extension, the human race—are all narratives of origin: the primal scene and voyeuristic fantasies, the upsurge of sexuality with its concomitant fantasies of seduction, the origin of the difference between the sexes and its manifestation in the fantasies of beating and castration. Clearly we can chart these fantasies within the narrative of *Jane Eyre*, a novel that takes us from the primal scene (the Red Room), through seduction scenarios (the Rochester and St. John proposals), to finally a variety of female and male beating and castration fantasies (Jane’s public humiliation as a liar, the aborted wedding and Rochester’s maiming by fire). *Jane Eyre’s* popularity and longevity as a novel, I would claim, have been based precisely on the
very intense psychic power of these explicit fantasy-formation, while
Villette's more compromised status results from its failure to conform to
and use these same fantasies.

With Freud's theories in mind I would suggest that the original
childhood traumas for Bronté were the death of her mother, the emo-
tional withdrawal of her father, and the sudden deaths of her two older
sisters. But the second wounding, the "adult" version of the same tra-
ma—the sexual rejection by M. Heger and the emotional distancing that
both Heger and his wife imposed on her—was even more psychologically
devastating, a trauma so severe that she was compelled to reenact it
over and over again in her fiction, mingling and transmuting her pain
with the imagery of food rejected and consumed, food sought and
expelled. Like someone in the grip of an alternately compulsive need to
binge and purge, Bronté depicts over and over again heroines who can
never experience satiation and who hunger endlessly for a food that is
actually love and a love that has been displaced and represented as food.

There are clear patterns throughout Jane Eyre of eating and starva-
tion, seeking for and fleeing from love, both of which are tied to the
heroine's concomitant displays of alternating self-aggrandizement and
self-denigration. We can begin our reading of Jane Eyre with the realiza-
tion that the child Jane has learned the techniques of self-starvation and
self-abuse effectively by the time she is ten years old." If status is based on
material possessions and inheritance, then Jane is worthless. She has no
right, that is, to eat, to consume when she produces nothing ("you have
no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not live here
with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do" [8; ch.
1]). In such a situation Jane is forced to abuse her body in self-hatred.
The first paragraph of the novel makes this clear: this is a child perpetu-
ally gnawed by hunger. As an orphan, unconnected to any nurturing
familial structure, Jane can be aware only of her "physical inferiority to
Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed" (5; ch. 1). The novel will reverse the
physical advantages of these three pseudo-aristocrats, so that they either
implode (as does the anal-retentive Eliza) or explode (as do the orally
greedy John and the blowzy Georgiana), while Jane, through her suffer-
ings and trials, earns the perfect "feminine" hegemonic bourgeois body, as
symbolized by both her inheritance and the marriage that "rehumanises"
Rochester (384; ch. 37). Both the money and the man allow Jane
to overcome the class indeterminacy that has plagued her throughout
the novel. The final bodies of je-
lished bourgeoisie, and Rochester
each other in a fantasied image
embodied in their son and their
marriage.'

The earliest extended oppor-
hood psyche occurs when she
uncle's bedroom preserved as a
al labors. Here we can see demo-
aggression as evidenced in her
how to endure the blow which
is succeeded quickly by her re-
John: "You are like a murder-
ment from her continually trav-
ive in an abusive household—
and later when she "[r]esolve[s]
ing more" (12; ch. 2). The and
not very subtly presented here,
favorite tart served to her on a 'tub
orated with a "bird of paradise"
Jane's fluctuating psychic state
here of appetizing food and love
hatred, her inability to consider
she even projects herself onto the
4). Short of dying, however, Jane
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body in compliance with restric-
demands conformity to discipline
that enable Jane and other lower-
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Jane locates her first discipline
at Lowood, the school where
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the novel. The final bodies of Jane, the newly emerged and firmly estab-
lished bourgeoisie, and Rochester, the chastened aristocrat, complement
each other in a fantasized image of perfection, a sort of erotic apocalypse
embodied in their son and their Miltonically ideal companionate
marriage.

The earliest extended opportunity we have to examine Jane's child-
hood psyche occurs when she is shut up in the Red Room, her dead
uncle's bedroom preserved as a sort of mausoleum to the site of his sexual
labors. Here we can see demonstrated Jane's learned strategy of passive
aggression as evidenced in her matter-of-fact comment: "[my] care was
how to endure the blow which would certainly follow the insult," which
is succeeded quickly by her rebellious and class-conscious outburst at
John: "You are like a murderer" (8; ch. 1). The dissociation of Jane's
mind from her continually traumatized body—which allows her to sur-
vive in an abusive household—is first developed in the mirror episode,
and later when she "[resolve[s]" to kill herself by "never eating or drink-
ing more" (12; ch. 2). The anorexic desire to stave off menstruation is
not very subtly presented here, and significantly, Jane is unable to eat a
favorite tart served to her on a "certain brightly painted china plate" de-
corated with a "bird of paradise" (17; ch. 3). Bird imagery will reinforce
Jane's fluctuating psychic state throughout the novel, while the rejection
here of appetizing food and lovely plate forcefully illustrates Jane's self-
hatred, her inability to consider herself worthy of any nourishment at all;
she even projects herself onto the "little hungry robin" on the sill (25; ch.
4). Short of dying, however, Jane desires to become a "stone" (13; ch. 2),
a metaphor for her attempt to deaden her emotions and the needs of her
body in compliance with restrictive bourgeois norms. Self-preservation
demands conformity to disciplinary practices, those learned behaviors
that enable Jane and other lower- and middle-class women to function in
a society that is structured as a panopticon—that is, as a prison presided
over by the omniscient eye of power.

Jane locates her first disciplinary structure during her apprenticeship
at Lowood, the school where fatherless girls are sent to die. If life at
Gateshead was at least sweetened occasionally by "a bun or a cheese-
cake" brought by Bessie (24; ch. 4), life at Lowood is experienced as
institutionalized starvation; "a thin oaten cake, shared into fragments"
and "burnt porridge" are all the students receive (38-39; ch. 5). But the
purpose of the routines at Lowood is not to feed the body; it is to sub-
due it in order to create appropriately submissive middle-class females who will serve the emerging industrialized culture—the body as an extension of culture as a machine. But even more ominously I would suggest that the purpose of Lowood is to extinguish excess numbers of the female population, specifically, those girls who do not find themselves safely ensconced in and protected by membership in a bourgeois family presided over a loving and devoted paterfamilias.

In fact, one is tempted to wonder if Charlotte Brontë on some level did not blame her father for the deaths of her two elder beloved sisters at Cowan Bridge School, the prototype for Lowood. Much is always made of the Reverend Patrick Brontë’s swift removal of Charlotte and Emily from the school, but his action and paternal concern were just too little and too late for poor Elizabeth and Maria Brontë. The deaths of her two elder sisters in the typhus epidemic that swept through the school could only have reactivated the wound of desertion and abandonment that Charlotte suffered initially when her mother died and left Charlotte motherless when she was five years old. And later, when she understood her mother’s reproductive history, did she not blame her father for her mother’s death at such an early age? The critic and biographer, of course, can never know the answers to these questions, but what strikes one as odd is that no one has even dared to pose the questions in relation to the anger that surges throughout Brontë’s novels. Surely the amount of rage and hatred that is displaced onto the Reverend Brocklehurst and the self-absorbed curates in Shirley has to arouse our suspicions about Brontë’s attitude toward her own father. Surely her obsession with slashing and burning men in clerical collars cannot fool us into believing that Charlotte, like her sister Anne, was a totally devout catechist. And finally her decision to marry the Reverend Arthur Nicholls can be seen less as an act of affirmation than an attempt to deny, consciously and unconsciously, her rage against her own father and the legacy he had left her as an absent signer.

Maria Brontë, the angelic older sister and Charlotte’s early mother-substitute, is transformed in the novel into Helen Burns, a vulnerable girl who has been deserted by her distant father, a man too involved with his second wife to bother with the child whom he views as little more than a redundant residue from his first marriage. Helen, as numerous critics have noted, stands as the exact opposite of Bertha, and in the depiction of these two women, Brontë practices what Roland Barthes has called “neither-norism.” The narrative Bertha while also repudiating Helen (the female and male roles). Helen represents the woman who is eradicated signifier, but she also embodies passivity, Christian forbearance to an extreme degree. Society would not exist without a disciplinary code as well as Helen does. Jane, as she is later brought up, upholds the same values and has her Lowood years, however, Jane and Helen body: Miss Temple (the body), humanely disciplined Miss Temple, the secreted sweet cakes, is hopeful to the existence of Helen Burns, and. The hatred, are still too strong. The role of Helen (and later, by implication of Jane) could have taken. She could have taken. She knew into accepting her body and its

The heterosexual romance is characterized by a decrease in the numbers of marriage, and starvation and a concomitant proliferation of visual and oracular imagery. The romance at the infantile level of concern is what we would recognize as the pairing of others as either “same” or “different.” It could seem “different” from her, which her sisters as the “same.” In the dualistic novel, Jane attempts to mediate between the two of experiencing life and gaining knowledge.

The writings of Norbert Elias’ theoretical framework for understanding population in this novel.19 Elias’ work on bourgeois revolution, of what will professionalize his gender and himself a private matter. Such an imposed “standards of shame, of self moral threshold of shame and embar
ommissive middle-class females of a miseducated culture—the body as an object, even more ominously I would say, as the product that extinguishes excess numbers of girls who do not find themselves by membership in a bourgeois paterfamilias.

Charlotte Brontë on some level knew her two elder beloved sisters at Lowwood. Much is always made of the radicalism of Charlotte and Emily Brontë’s social concern were just too little known. In Brontë. The deaths of her two younger sisters swept through the school could not be avoided and abandonment that followed left Charlotte and later, when she understood she could not blame her father for her negative history, of course, we suspend judgment, but what strikes one as unnatural are the questions in relation to the Brontë family. Surely the amount of rage endured at Lowwood and the self-hatred that motivated our suspicions about Brontë’s father obsession with slashing and cutting were enough to fool us into believing that she was a deeply devout and self-disciplined writer's young sister. And finally, the Nicholls can be seen less as a personal affront and more as a denial, consciously and unconsciously, the legacy he had left her as Charlotte’s early motherless youth. Helen Burns, a vulnerable creature, a man too involved with himself, a woman to whom he views as little more than a servant. Helen, as numerous critics of the novel have pointed out, is in sharp contrast to Bertha, and in the analysis of her characteristics what Roland Barthes has called “neither-norism.” The novelist rejects the sexuality and anarchy of Bertha while also repudiating the Christianity of Helen and St. John Rivers (the female and male versions of the disembodied Christian). Helen represents the woman who accepts her status as a completely self-erased signifier, but she also embodies bourgeois values of self-denial, passivity, Christian forbearance, and masochism wrought to a dangerous degree. Society would not exist long if all women internalized the disciplinary code as well as Helen does. And yet she is strangely attractive to Jane, as she is later brought under the spell of St. John (a man who upholds the same values and hyperasceticism to a deadly degree). During her Lowood years, however, Jane does come to recognize the ideal female body: Miss Temple (the body as temple of the Holy Spirit). But the humanely disciplined Miss Temple, complete with gold watch and secreted sweet cakes, is hopelessly out of Jane’s reach—or, rather, the existence of Helen Burns, and Jane’s tendency to masochism and self-hatred, are still too strong. The death, by metaphorical starvation, of Helen (and later, by implication, of St. John) stands as one route that Jane could have taken. She chooses another path, however, a journey into accepting her body and its needs. She meets Rochester.

The heterosexual romance that forms the bulk of the text is characterized by a decrease in the number of bland references to food, eating, and starvation and a concomitant increase in the number of references to visual and oracular imagery. The body, that is, no longer remains fixated at the infantile level of concern for nourishment; it has progressed to what we would recognize as the object-relations stage, to reaching out to others as either “same” or “different.” To Jane, Rochester and Bertha seem “different” from her, while she initially perceives St. John and his sisters as the “same.” In the dual courtship narrative that concludes the novel, Jane attempts to mediate the attraction that both “bodies”—ways of experiencing life and gaining power—have for her.

The writings of Norbert Elias and M. M. Bakhtin provide the theoretical framework for understanding Brontë’s depiction of the bodies that populate this novel. Elias’ work traces the creation, during the early bourgeois revolution, of what he calls homo clausus, an individual who will professionalize his gender and make total biological control of himself a private matter. Such an individual experiences the culturally imposed “standards of shame, delicacy, and self-control” and the “rising threshold of shame and embarrassment” about bodily functions as an
endorsement of increasing personal restraint, as the institution of “a wall, of something ‘inside’ man separating him from the outside world” (258-59). And it was, according to Elias, the newly created and controlled “public body” (249) that society validated. This “public body” distinguished itself from the lower classes by its aping of the courtly value of self-control, along with its acceptance of shame as the secret sin at its (bourgeois) heart. What Elias calls “manners”—highly gendered customs, behaviors, and fashions—now were diffused from the court to the upper class, and then to the next class down the social ladder until all classes were ultimately affected by the codes of conduct that were being advocated in the books of courtly behavior now saturating the newly literate population. According to Elias, it was through the imposition of such “manners” and the use of shame as a disciplinary tool that the modern state could come into existence. “Civilizing” the urban space meant that education and recreational activities were now controlled by “moral censorship,” while the “new sensibilities” made physical violence, duelling, hunting, and public displays of bodily functions all abhorrent and grossly unacceptable behaviors (126-29).

Bakhtin, in contrast, privileges the “carnivalesque” body of the early modern period: it enacts its essentially feminine values through intense release of emotion, it destroys authoritarian strictures, and it challenges and inverts imposed political and religious systems. Jane’s attraction to these two bodies—homo clausus (St. John Rivers, Helen Burns, and the Rivers sisters) and the “carnivalesque” (Rochester, Bertha)—can be seen as one locus of meaning in Jane Eyre. Jane is tempted, on the one hand, to conform, to conceal, to privatize, to repress; on the other hand, she is presented with the bacchanalian possibilities of Rochester and Bertha, the dream of becoming either an adulteress and a sexually illicit woman or an anti-bourgeois maenad.

Elias concludes that the middle class founded its status—its economic and political power—on the model of homo clausus, the retentive, controlled, concealed, and professionally gendered body. Such a body was usually coded as male and gained its power through the ability to distance others, to refuse engagement, and to mimic the scientific values of objectivity and rationality. The female body was associated in this formula with diffuse energy, subjectivity, passion, and emotionality. As Gary Kelly has observed, the construction of both the sentimental and the reasonable “woman” during the early bourgeois period was part of a larger ideological project, the creation of a system that would supplant the control over the lower classes. Jane’s final role as a pawn in the issues of her time and finally she constituted a certain number of people as “virtue” and “reason.”

Jane becomes the heroine Rochester’s considerably reduced attic (with its “giant propensity to suffer”). It is important that Bertha’s self-destruction. Jane is motivated by her desire to ride the rapids, in a decidedly different psyche, the target of the fire. The female homo clausus body of Jane rejects responsibility of Bertha. In killing off the self, the surviving as a chastened shade, the process of self-definition she begins. In an analogous manner, Rochester is forced to live on in the shadow of his body and mirrors Jane’s body, the carnivalesque. That is, before the ideal Miltonic companionate maiming of the flesh of sexuality, potentially anarchic and be excised (and so Bertha dies) the autonomy, has to be tamed (so as to be indiscretions and disabled).

But this novel subscribes to stable signifiers that Brontë’s early bodies are associated with stone, consistently negative and life-depleting, diffuse, amorphous, and transient “woman,” Jane as “elf,” “sprite,” affirming. Brontë seems to be submitting to bourgeois definition, not simply one’s mental and physical appearance as well. And what
int, as the institution of “a wall, from the outside world” (258-59), newly created and controlled. This “public body” distinguishes aping of the courtly value of shame as the secret sin at its innards—highly gendered customs diffused from the court to the down the social ladder until all rules of conduct that were being or now saturating the newly lit was through the imposition of disciplinary tool that the mod-“moralizing” the urban space meant were now controlled by “moral bodies” made physical violence, bodily functions all abhorrent (99).

The carnivalesque” body of the early feminine values through intense within strictures, and it challenges systems. Jane’s attraction to Rivers, Helen Burns, and the Rochesther, Bertha)—can be seen is tempted, on the one hand, such as the natures of Rochester and Bertha, ness and a sexually illicit woman

...grounded its status—its econom-ous clausus, the retentive, con sidered body. Such a body was power through the ability to mimic the scientific values of body was associated in this formulation, and emotionality. As Gary with the sentimental and the rea nos period was part of a larger ideological project, the creation of a professional middle-class discourse system that would supplant the aristocracy at the same time it gained control over the lower classes. “Woman” in this cultural enterprise was crucial as a pawn in the issues of property, children, and inheritance; and finally she constituted a certain technology of the self that we now recognize as “virtue” and “reason.”

Jane becomes the heroine of the text and deserves to inherit Rochester’s considerably reduced estate when she rejects the body in the attic (with its “giant props” [269; ch. 27]) and indirectly precipitates Bertha’s self-destruction. Bertha’s last mad rampage appears to be motivated by her desire to rid herself of Jane as a rival. Although we know that Jane has been gone from Thornfield for some time, Bertha lives in a decidedly different psychic world. Jane rather than Rochester is the target of the fire. The female bodies turn on each other here, the homo clausus body of Jane rejecting and abjuring the carnivalesque possibility of Bertha. In killing off the hysterical female body of Bertha and surviving as a chastened shadow of herself, Jane has completed the process of self-definition she began when she “killed off” Helen Burns. In an analogous manner, Rochester’s maiming in the fire, often interpreted as a symbolic “castration,” actually represents a sort of ritual taming of his body and mirrors Jane’s physical diminution, her renunciation of the carnivalesque. That is, before Jane and Rochester can be united in an ideal Miltonic companionate marriage, there has to be a good deal of ritualized maiming of the flesh of both the male and the female. Female sexuality, potentially anarchic and threatening to the social order, must be excised (and so Bertha dies); male sexuality, so disabling to women’s autonomy, has to be tamed (so Rochester is punished for his sexual indiscretions and disabled).

But this novel subscribes to the same rigidly binary organization with stable signifiers that Brontë’s earlier juvenilia did. Those characters whose bodies are associated with stone (Brooklehurst, Eliza Reed, St. John) are consistently negative and life-denying, while characters whose bodies are diffuse, amorphous, and transformational (Rochester as the Gypsy “woman,” Jane as “elf,” “sprite,” and “changeling”) are positive and life-affirming. Brontë seems to be suggesting through such imagery that conformity to bourgeois definitions of health requires the ability to adjust not simply one’s mental and psychological makeup but one’s physical appearance as well. And what are we to make of the bodies (real and
dreamed) of children, juxtaposed as they are to the bodies of "big, brown, and buxom" aristocratic women (193; ch. 20). Adele, of course, embodies Jane's suppressed fear of all things French and blatantly sexual ("there was something ludicrous as well as painful in the little [Parisienne]" 150; ch. 17). Jane obviously identifies with children, but not with the adult, aristocratic women who populate the text. One might claim that Jane's (and, by extension, Brontë's) xenophobia and sexual and class anxiety manifest themselves in the continual references to large, "robust," "dark" aristocratic women (Mrs. Reed, Blanche, Bertha, and Rochester's foreign mistresses), in contrast to Jane's repeated description of herself as "pale" and "little" (30, 86; chs. 4, 11). Her fondness for silent and defenseless children may further indicate that her sexual needs are appropriately bourgeois—small, harmless, easily accommodated by Rochester (as Bertha's were not, as Blanche's might not be).

Why does Jane dream of children, some living and some dead? I would claim that what is evidenced in all of Jane's dreams is the guilt of the survivor. As Freud has noted, "Dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright" (SE 18:13). What is suggested in this phenomenon, according to Caruth, is "the trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in having survived, precisely, without knowing it. What one returns to in the flashback is not the in comprehensibility of one's near death, but the very in comprehensibility of one's own survival. Repetition is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt to claim one's own survival" (64). Jane relives not simply the trauma of losing her parents and her uncle Reed, but she is wounded more deeply the second time when she loses Helen Burns. Her guilt as a survivor would have been intense, and it is no wonder that she begins dreaming of dead children. As Caruth points out,

The return of the traumatic experience in the dream is not the signal of the direct experience but, rather, of the attempt to overcome the fact that it was not direct, to attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place. Not having truly known the threat of death in the past, the survivor is forced, continually to confront it over and over again. For consciousness, then, the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated possibility of grappling the threat.

But Jane does not simply forget her mother as she runs away from Thornfield. As we examine the connection between starvation and Rochester, progressively starved and reduced to eating pig slop, Jane begins to exert her sexual needs and power. Her models, as she seeks her sisters, Diana ("Physically, she was vigorous. In her animal spirituality of flow" [308; ch. 30]) and Adrienne Rich and several other powerful virgins in the pagan and triangular courtship, attract her indeed—away from a beautiful and Rosamund Oliver. The need to be all too vividly of the fantasy of structure that explains the conventional romantic compulsion.

But there is yet another courtship: incest. Foucault has made the eighteenth century, as a metaphor, the "machinery of sexuality."" The associations of extended family period by the institutionalization of childhood primarily by its rigid denunciation. She not reject St. John Rivers because as hers; she rejects his denial of the fact. She needs a body that will be "different from the bone of [her] own; flesh of [her] own"—somewhat paradoxically (a family) Rochester. She "rehumanizes" so are you, I daresay" [384; ch. 30]—inheritance: a son.
of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one's own life. (62)

But Jane does not simply dream of children, she virtually becomes one as she runs away from Thornfield and is reduced to desperation and begging. As we examine the concluding section of the novel we notice the connection between starvation and sexual abstinence as Jane flees Rochester, progressively starving as she journeys away from him. Reduced to eating pig slop, Jane learns that she cannot deny her body; her efforts to suppress her sexual desires for Rochester are unavailing. Her models, as she seeks her final identity, are the bourgeois Rivers sisters, Diana ("Physically, she far excelled me; she was handsome; she was vigorous. In her animal spirits there was an affluence of life and certainty of flow" [308; ch. 30]) and Mary, women whose names suggest, as Adrienne Rich and several other critics have pointed out, the two most powerful virgins in the pagan and the Christian traditions. Jane reenacts a triangular courtship, attracting another man—this one handsome indeed—away from a beautiful and rich ("aristocratic") woman, Rosamund Oliver. The need to reenact triangular love affairs reminds us all too vividly of the fantasy of oedipal origins (mommy/daddy/me), a structure that explains the continued power and attraction of this particular Romantic compulsion.

But there is yet another compulsion at work in the Jane/St. John courtship: incest. Foucault has labeled this shift, occurring in the late eighteenth century, as a move from a "machinery of alliance" to a "machinery of sexuality." The primacy of kinship, or the incestuous associations of extended family members, was supplanted during this period by the institutionalization of the modern family, characterized primarily by its rigid denunciation of incestuous desires. But Jane does not reject St. John Rivers because she experiences his body as the "same" as hers; she rejects his denial of her body (not to mention his own). Jane needs a body that will be "different" from hers at the same time it can be "bone of [her] bone, flesh of [her] flesh" (397; ch. 38), and this she finds—somewhat paradoxically—in the blind and maimed (read: exogamous) Rochester. She "rehumanise[s]" him, eats with him ("I am hungry; so are you, I daresay" [384; ch. 37]), and thereby claims her bodily inheritance: a son.
Being aware of Charlotte’s intense sibling rivalry toward and jealousy of her brother Branwell, should not, I think, cause us to be surprised that Jane speaks at the conclusion of her autobiography only about bearing a male child. As her father appeared to ask throughout Branwell’s life, are there any other kind of children? If Jane positions herself as the “apple” of Rochester’s blind eyes, the son and heir is the apple of Jane’s eyes. The psychic and socioeconomic dynamics have come full circle here: the body of the starved and frozen (read: poor, female, and class-indeterminate) Jane has acquired what she lacked; because her ideal companionate marriage has produced an “aristocratic” son who will sire more bodies, death holds no sting for her. The final words of St. John actually bespeak Jane’s own confidence, her rewriting of Helen Burns’ message of salvation through that ultimate disciplinary practice—Christianity. Immortality for Jane has been achieved not through spiritual apocalypse or physical extinction but through an erotic and bodily reclamation of the perfectly tamed flesh. Jane as representative of the newly triumphant bourgeoisie has survived the disciplinary practices that had the potential to either “castrate” or kill her. Having seized the ultimate machinery of power for herself, she claims the life force, eats, reproduces, and thereby consumes death.

*Villette* is generally recognized as Brontë’s most sophisticated and well-written novel, even if readers have since its publication found its melancholy tone more than a bit morbid. Brontë’s friend Harriet Martineau turned from the novel in despair, claiming that the “book is almost intolerably painful. We are wont to say, when we read narratives which are made up of the external woes of life, such as may and do happen every day, but are never congregated into one experience—that the author had no right to make readers so miserable.” But if the novel’s heroine Lucy Snowe spends most of her time in postures of misery or confusion, her creator was perhaps even more miserable during the years directly preceding the composition of *Villette*. The years 1848 and 1849 saw the deaths of Charlotte’s scandal-prone and drug-addicted brother Branwell, followed quickly by the horror of watching her beloved younger sisters Emily and Anne die. The deaths of her two surviving sisters, mimicking as they did the earlier deaths of Elizabeth and Maria, could only have reactivated Charlotte’s childhood trauma and her continued guilt as a survivor, indeed, the only survivor of the massive shipwreck she now recognized as her own life.

When Lucy Snowe narrates and fissures with gaps and silence both great grief and immeasurable what happened to her for a period almost teases her reader with hints

On quitting Bretton…I pictured that I was of course glad. Well! The amiable conjecture safely left uncontradicted. For the reader to picture me, for example, through halcyon weather, in women and girls are supposed in fashion; why not I with the rest?

Picture me, then, idle, bare-footed, on a cushioned deck, warmed with sun and indolently soft. However, it cannot have been a wreck at last. I too was in the grip of contention. To this hour, the rush and saltiness of briny water on my lungs. I even know the date or one day. For many days as we cast with our own hands the dearest life lay on us; all hope that fine, the ship was lost, the crew

If Jane concluded her narrative and maternity vindicated a more muted and hungry note. Instead, M. Paul Emanuel. Instead, she was his three-year absence, and his letters were real food that could study from a distance, to take for view in an objectified and also categorized her loss of Heges for present it to her readers in a war
When Lucy Snowe narrates for us a version of her history, interpolated and fissured with gaps and silences, we know we are in the presence of both great grief and immeasurable guilt. She simply refuses to tell us what happened to her for a period of eight years of her early life, and almost teases her reader with hints of unmitigated disaster and abuse:

On quitting Bretton... I betook myself home.... It will be conjectured that I was of course glad to return to the bosom of my kindred. Well! The amiable conjecture does no harm, and may therefore be safely left uncontradicted. Far from saying nay, indeed, I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a dark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass.... A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest?

Picture me, then, idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft. However, it cannot be concealed that there must have been a wreck at last. I too well remember a time—of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltiness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour or one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished. (94; ch. 4)

If Jane concluded her narrative in a triumphant gesture of food consumed and maternity vindicated, Lucy ends her saga on a somewhat more muted and hungry note. Lucy does not marry her great father-love M. Paul Emanuel. Instead, she feeds parasitically off his letters, sent during his three-year absence, and thrown like manna to a starving fanatic: “his letters were real food that nourished, living water that refreshed” (616; ch. 42). When words are food and food is love, then words are love. That is to say, by the time Brontë wrote Villette she had successfully transmuted the great adult trauma of her life into a piece of art that she could study from a distance, turning it this way and that, putting it up for view in an objectified and studied manner. She had scrutinized and categorized her loss of Heger for such a long time that she was able to present it to her readers in a way that analogously paralleled the manner...
in which Lucy viewed portraits of women in the art museum. Art—
whether words or pictures—allows the mourner to reshape the traumatic
event in such a way that the wound no longer simply aches or leeches;
rather, it has become an object of beauty and sustenance that feeds,
rather than feeds on, the survivor.

We can also, however, read the melancholy of both the young Jane
and Lucy in light of Kristeva’s work *Black Sun*. For Kristeva, the melanc-
cholic mourns not a lost object, but the failure to find an acceptable
object for her sadness because she has not been able to separate fully
from her mother. The psychic loss cannot be appropriately symbolized
because it has never actually taken place. The melancholic, however, has
one positive response to this psychic impasse; she possesses the capacity
to turn the loss into a gain, as it were, through the manipulations of lan-
guage and art in which absence and presence interact so that the control
of linguistic signs in the pursuit of an ideal form—some type of art—
substitutes for melancholic loss. Art and language heal melancholia
through their endless capacity to put signifiers into interplay in a sort of
infinite fort-da game.16 The reeling back of the body of the dead mother
and controlling the loss through another telling of the tale—modified
and slightly revised over and over again—constitutes the core of the
Brontë ur-text. Recall that in *The Professor*, William Crimsworth is able
to establish his own family only after he comes into the possession of
the portrait of his long-dead mother. Or consider how Jane gains two sur-
rogate mothers when she recovers her Rivers cousins, Diana and Mary.
And finally, the heroine of *Shirley*, Caroline Helstone, achieves her mar-
tial happiness only after discovering her long-lost mother Mrs. Pryor, the
governor of Shirley. Mothers keep being resurrected in Brontë’s first
three novels, but the powerful fantasy of death denied is very noticeably
absent in *Villette*. The closest Lucy comes to finding a mother occurs
when Madame Walraves approaches like some wraith from hell, some
phallic and perverse mother intent on eliminating Lucy’s existence, not
saving her for marital bliss with Paul.

But note the irony in Lucy’s clinging to M. Paul’s letters, when
Charlotte herself begged for more than a year for a few scraps of corre-
spondence from Heger. Madame Heger put a quick close to that suppos-
edly innocent epistolary relationship, but later she went so far as to re-
trieve Charlotte’s letters to her husband from the garbage, sewing them
together again and preserving them as evidence against the persistently
demanding and potentially threatening children that when Brontë left
“I will be revenged.”17 Publishing that promise.

Food suffuses *Villette*, but not in the same way as it did in *Jane Eyre*.
Periodically go on hunger strikes (as for tenants); but finally food is used in *Vil-
lette* to purging attitude toward love, perhaps to Lucy, “You look...like one
poison, and spurn wholesome bitters,” as he sees in her a self-destructive
the fruits of sensuality even though her “heartbreak at best” (291; ch. 21)
of loving Dr. John Graham. British beauty, while initially shamed by Paul offers: a steady diet of self-
"feminine" humility and a "wholesome" bitters.” M. Paul suggests, are the
ity of this society, while those who find themselves soon desti-
ory of "Wholesome bitters” also suggest in *Jane Eyre*. The educational
panopticon-like prison with even the resident warden, Madame
share of spying here, suggesting not a simple or naive victim of the
agent struggling in her own bes-

These introductory observations end description of the Rubens paint-
and hard at the museum. The scene of Lucien is provoked by the sight of a can-
other Bertha on the rampa-
vas: “this huge, dark-complexio
entire description bears repeating,
hysterical nausea it evidences for
women:
demanding and potentially threatening British tutor. Madame told her children that when Brontë left Brussels her final words to Madame were, “I will be revenged.” Publishing Villette was as close as she came to fulfilling that promise.

Food suffuses Villette, but in a different, perhaps more convoluted manner than it did in Jane Eyre. Characters like Paulina and Lucy periodically go on hunger strikes (as do all of the major characters in Shirley), but finally food is used in Villette to suggest an alternately binging and purging attitude toward love, passion, and sexuality. When M. Paul says to Lucy, “‘You look...like one who would snatch at a draught of sweet poison, and spurn wholesome bitters with disgust,’” he is suggesting that he sees in her a self-destructive, wanton tendency, a penchant to pursue the fruits of sensuality even though they can only result in nausea and heartbreak at best (291; ch. 21). Lucy does choose to pursue the “sweet poison” of loving Dr. John Graham Bretton, that paragon of masculine British beauty, while initially she spurns the “wholesome bitters” that M. Paul offers: a steady diet of self-scrutiny, constant testing, and appropriately “feminine” humility and acceptance of her lot in life. “Wholesome bitters,” M. Paul suggests, are the lot of every sensible bourgeois woman in this society, while those who freely indulge their sexuality and sensuality find themselves soon destroyed, poisoned by their own excesses. “Wholesome bitters” also suggests the disciplinary code we saw operating in Jane Eyre. The educational institution once again functions as a panopticon-like prison with every inhabitant spying on and reporting to the resident warden, Madame Beck. But Lucy also does her own fair share of spying here, suggesting that the female heroine by this time is not a simple or naive victim of the system of social tyranny, but an active agent struggling in her own best interests to survive in a hostile environment.

These introductory observations bring us to that particularly intense description of the Rubens painting of Cleopatra that Lucy views so long and hard at the museum. The scene reads like a set piece of sexual nausea provoked by the sight of a carnivalesque female body run rampant, another Bertha on the rampage so to speak, within the confines of a canvas: “this huge, dark-complexioned gipsy-queen” (251; ch. 19). Lucy’s entire description bears repeating, however, for the disgusted and virtually hysterical nausea it evidences toward physically large and powerful women:
I calculated that this lady, put into a scale of magnitude suitable for the reception of a commodity of bulk, would infallibly turn from fourteen to sixteen stone. She was, indeed, extremely well-fed: very much butcher’s meat—to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids—that wealth of muscle, that affluence of flesh. She lay half reclined on a couch; why, it would be difficult to say; broad daylight blazed round her; she appeared in hearty health, strong enough to do the work of two plain cooks; she could not plead a weak spine; she ought to have been standing, or at least sitting bolt upright. (250; ch. 19)

We need not probe very far to detect the association between overeating and a suspected tendency toward rampant sexuality. A more than fair student of ancient history, Brontë surely knew that Cleopatra did most of her “work” from the couch, and yes, even in broad daylight. In opposition to the carnivalesque body of Cleopatra, however, Lucy is instructed by her tutor in the more appropriate and repressive bourgeois sensibilities, M. Paul, to view the four pious scenes from the life of a woman: the girl-hypocrite, the virgin bride, the doting mother of a bloated baby, and the grieving widow: “grim and gray as burglars, and cold and rapid as ghosts. What women to live with! insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless non-entities” (253; ch. 19). The bodies of these women stand as homo clausus versions of feminine acceptability (“wholesome bitters”) and provide for Lucy a tableaux vivant that opposes and corrects the sexuality of the portrait of Cleopatra or later the actress Vashni, another carnivalesque parody of theatrical passion and suffering in a woman.

Lucy—like Jane, Caroline, and Shirley before her—ends up starving herself when she is put in charge of the retin during the long school vacation, and Brontë thereby suggests that it is the unfortunate but necessary lot of a powerless woman to abstain from food, just as poor and plain women are also forced to relinquish their desires for love and passion and marriage to handsome Adonis. Paulina and Genevra may marry well and even happily because they are the sort of attractive and wealthy women whom society chooses to pamper, feed, and coddle their entire lives. Ginevra, as Lucy observes, fed only “on creams and ices like a humming-bird on honey-paste: sweet wine was her element and sweet cake her daily bread” (175; ch. 14). Lucy, however, is not among the chosen ones, and yet lovely food and drinks are frequently and teasingly put before her, only to be consistently snatched away by the hand of an inexplicable fate that has determined some bitters.” As the priest in the nature can only expect sorrow here for meat and drink—bread, their recompense comes hereafter.

When Lucy attends the misinfectual sleeping potion, she and views for the first time the portrait throughout her stay in Labassee. To Paul Emanuel’s illegitimate that Adele had played in Jane. But note that in this letter text that it is the nun not Lucy (583; ch. 39). Apples have appeared, and, interestingly, they seem to be the opposites of “scorpions” and the women in Shirley in lieu of

You expected bread, and you it, and don’t shriek because that your mental stomach—I ostrich’s—the stone will dig and fate put it into a scorpion’s firmly upon the gift; let in time your hand and arm liqui, the squeezed scorpion a great lesson how to endure within your life, if you survive the y will be stronger, wiser, less sen

Lucy Snowe is one of those who apples in life, and she appears and less sensitive to the manifestation. But the tragedy that she experienced what she has lost in the death of passion and forbidden knowledge.

During her severely repressed one of his Romantic quirks was with comfits” on her desk. She mu
scale of magnitude suitable for

In fact, would infallibly turn from

indeed, extremely well-fed: very

of bread, vegetables, and liq-

influence of flesh. She lay half
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atched away by the hand of an

inexplicable fate that has determined that she shall feed only on "whol-

some bitters." As the priest in the confessional tells Lucy, people with her

ature can only expect sorrow as their daily gruel: "Tears are given them

ere for meat and drink—bread of affliction and waters of affliction—

their recompense comes hereafter" (200; ch. 15).

When Lucy attends the midnight fête, drugged by Madame Beck's

ffectual sleeping potion, she stumbles upon the Emanuel entourage and

views for the first time the woman she believes has been her rival

throughout her stay in Labassecour. This young nun, the ward and possi-

Paul Emanuel's illegitimate daughter, assumes exactly the position

that Adele had played in Jane Eyre, a sibling-rival for the father's love.

But note that in this later text Lucy misreads the nun's status, believing

that it is the nun and not Lucy who is the "apple of [M. Paul's eye]

(583; ch. 39). Apples have appeared throughout all of Brontë's novels,

and, interestingly, they seem to be constructed in her imagination as

the opposites of "scorpions" and "stones," those stones that are offered to

the women in Shirley in lieu of "bread" or "eggs":

You expected bread, and you have got a stone; break your teeth on

it, and don't shriek because the nerves are martyrized; do not doubt

hat your mental stomach—if you have such a thing—is strong as an

 ostrich's—the stone will digest. You held out your hand for an egg,

and fate put into it a scorpion. Show no consternation: close your fin-

ers firmly upon the gift; let it sting through your palm. Never mind: in

time your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with tor-

ture, the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learned the

great lesson how to endure without a sob. For the whole remnant of

your life, if you survive the test—some, it is said, die under it—you

will be stronger, wiser, less sensitive. (105; ch. 7)

Lucy Snowe is one of those women who is handed scorpions rather than

apples in life, and she appears to conclude her narrative stronger, wiser,

and less sensitive to the manifold varieties of pain that she has survived.

But the tragedy that she experiences is caused by the fact that she knows

what she has lost in the death of M. Paul. She has tasted the apple of

passion and forbidden knowledge only to have it dashed from her lips.

During her severely repressed courtship by M. Paul, Lucy tells us that

one of his Romantic quirks was to leave "many a paper of chocolate

comfits" on her desk. She muses, "[h]is tastes in these matters were
southern, and what we think infantile” (435; ch. 29). Later she engages in a food offering of her own, remarking that she “inhal[ed] the fragrance of baked apples afar from the refectory, I ventured to inquire whether he did not also perceive that agreeable odour.... I would fetch him a plateful” (446; ch. 30). But the erotic highpoint of Lucy’s relationship with M. Paul comes during their tour of the little school he has had remodelled for her just prior to his final departure. We do not dwell on a bedroom, but we do linger in the doll-like kitchen:

I was shown a little kitchen with a little stove and oven, with few but bright brasses, two chairs and a table. A small cupboard held a diminutive but commodious set of earthenware.... I looked at the six green and white dinner plates; the four dishes, the cups and jugs to match. (605; ch. 41)

The irony inherent in this scene can be found in its series of qualifiers: few but bright, diminutive but commodious. And notice that there is no sign of food in the kitchen, just the capacity for two people to eat in what appears to be a doll-house. The empty kitchen with no food is paralleled by the spinster’s bed with the costume of the phantom nun left on it. This is a heroine who is haunted by her unmarried and hungry state, and yet is powerless to alter her destiny as a Protestant nun writing out this “heretic narrative” in the heart of a Catholic city. Brontë does, however, expand further on her imagistic use of apples in Villette when Lucy remarks that “To study the human heart thus, is to banquet secretly and sacriligioufully on Eve’s apples” (459; ch. 31). Being a novelist, that is, allows one the privilege of spying on the good and evil that lurks in every character one encounters. Or so the author of this statement would like us to believe. But the good and evil that is surveyed in every character and every family at the fête is a fiction, a massive projection, an elaborate defense strategy. What Brontë as creator of a series of fantasy-formations that we recognize as novels is actually doing is excavating her own psychic underworld, her own unresolved traumas and wounds.

Lucy’s overdetermined reaction to the identity of Justine-Marie on the night of the fête and her later hysteria when she attacks the lifeless costume of a nun left on her spinster’s bed as a sort of sick joke suggest all too clearly Freud’s definition of hysteria: the hysteric suffers from a psychic trauma whose origin she does not know or has repressed, yet which has remained as a memory. Memories “pathogenic,” and when from incompletely abreacted, it is conscious knowledge between as causes what Freud calls the “hysterical symptoms are not brought into view through ‘convulsions’ of excitement (tears, fits, hallucinations (melancholy, paralysis, stupor). I know knowledge about the very origin. The theories of Nicolas Abraham, particularly his notion of the “phantom of the living” designed to object some part of a loved one’s life may have a also a metapsychological fact. He is dead, but the gaps left within us appear throughout her novels to haunt her after novel by a living her very living father’s conscious wife replayed in the fiction as the wife or the secret that M. Paul hide. Abraham of Abraham have identified this uncanny resemblance to the female characters and their fiction.

Because the phantom is not, cannot be considered the effect of melancholia or of all itself. It is the children’s or one’s tombs through diverse species are the tombs of others. The paralysi and metaphor active within the unconscious fact within the loved one. 19

For Abraham, the essence of trauma...
which has remained as a memory trace in her psyche. Freud labels these memories “parthogenic,” and he notes that hysterical patients suffer from incompletely abreacted psychical traumas. Secondly, the gap in conscious knowledge between the trauma and the partial memory of it causes what Freud calls the “hysterical conversion,” that is, the somatization of conflictual unconscious representations. According to Freud, “hysterical symptoms are nothing other than unconscious fantasies brought into view through ‘conversion,’” all of which is another way of saying that the body is compelled to act out its psychical overload either through excitation (tears, fits, hallucinations) or various forms of inhibitions (melancholy, paralysis, catatonic depressions). The gap, then, between knowledge about the trauma and the ability to process it consciously, constitutes the very origin of hysteria. 38

The theories of Nicolas Abraham are also, however, relevant here, particularly his notion of the “phantom,” which he labels an “invention of the living” designed to objectify “the gap that the concealment of some part of a loved one’s life produced in us. The phantom is, therefore, also a metapsychological fact. Consequently, what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others.” Brontë would appear throughout her novels to be haunted by the death of her mother, but it is also possible to suggest that she is actually haunted by the gap in her very living father’s consciousness, his secret guilt over the fate of his wife replayed in the fiction as the secret that Rochester hides in the attic or the secret that M. Paul hides in the Walraves’ den. The case studies of Abraham have identified this syndrome and his description bears an uncanny resemblance to the metapsychological dynamics of Brontë’s female characters and their fictional father-figures:

Because the phantom is not related to the loss of a loved one, it cannot be considered the effect of unsuccessful mourning, as is the case of melancholics or of all those who carry a tomb within themselves. It is the children’s or descendants’ lot to objectify these buried tombs through diverse species of ghosts. What comes back to haunt are the tombs of others. The phantoms of folklore merely objectify a metaphor active within the unconscious: the burial of an unspeakable fact within the loved one. 39

For Abraham, the essence of trauma is the fact that children are haunted
by the unresolved and secret sexual and psychic histories of their parents in such a way that the children themselves come to embody the tombs that are enclosed within the psyches of their parents, whether living or dead:

The phantom is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious—for good reason. It passes—in a way yet to be determined—from the parent’s unconscious into the child’s... The phantom which returns to haunt bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other. A surprising fact gradually emerges: the work of the phantom coincides in every respect with Freud’s description of the death instinct.... the phantom is sustained by secreted words, invisible gnomes whose aim is to wreak havoc, from within the unconscious, in the coherence of logical progression. Finally, it gives rise to endless repetition and, more often than not, eludes rationalization.²⁰

Brontë’s endless repetition of the essentially same story in all of her adult novels, not to mention the monotony of the juvenilia, suggests what Freud would recognize as a displacement and recapitulation of the death instinct. I would claim that the persistently self-haunted quality of Brontë’s novels reveals less about the political and cultural climate of nineteenth-century Britain than it does about her own personal and familial saga of pain.

Virtually every character in Villette has been wounded, emotionally traumatized, or has suffered some severe loss in his or her life, and yet those people all limp on through life, and sometimes those lives are very long indeed. Again we can recall Freud’s query about trauma: is trauma to be understood as the direct and immediate brush with death or is trauma the experience of surviving that near-fatal disaster and yet to be forced to relive it repeatedly in dreams and painful memories? As Caruth has noted, “in the oscillation between the crisis of death and the crisis of life” we get “a kind of double-telling,” a narrative that exists “between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (7).

In Brontë’s case, she conceals the initial wound—her mother’s death, her father’s guilt, and her own survival—only to have the original lack, the primordial trauma, reactivated when Heger decisively rejects her and closes her out of his familial circle. Brontë was able to triumph in Jane Eyre through the conscious manipulations of fantasy-formations that

Notes

1. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Feminism and遏制 Yale U P, 1979), 390. In addition to Gilbert’s protest in Brontë’s novels, Deirdre Lathbury, “part of a much larger picture, in which the feminine and metaphorically, and women internalize the body,” in The Body is anorexia nervosa as a theme in women’s perspective,” in The Interpreting Anorexia Nervosa, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Unbearable Weights: Feminism, Western Culture, Medford, Mass: SAGE P, 1993); and Patricia Fallon et al., eds. Gender and Anorexia, York: Guilford Press, 1994). This latter time period is a similar to nineteenth and twentieth centuries as “suffered anorexia nervosa”.

2. For an extended analysis of Brontë and her life, see the chapter “The World of Brontë” in Diane Long Hoeveler and Lisa Jadow, wheel of Fortune (London: Hodder, 1993–74). All other references are to the first edition.

and psychic histories of their parents themselves come to embody the tombs of their parents, whether living or not, in the unconscious that has never resolved—but becomes—in a way yet to be determined into the child's... The phantoms to the existence of the dead fact gradually emerges: the work is sustained by secreted words, which can be summoned from within the unconsciousness. Finally, it gives rise to a rationalization.

The parallel story of her adult life, suggests what went on at the same time and recapitulation of the death of her father, and the persistently self-haunted quality of this neurological climate of fear and anxiety about her own personal and private needs. When, however, has been wounded, emotionally seared by loss in his or her life, and yet sometimes, the immediate brush with death or is a near-fatal disaster and yet to be processed into trauma and painful memories? As Caruth says, "In the crisis of death and the crisis of life," a narrative that exists "between the initial wound and the story of the wound." The initial wound—her mother's death, then Heger decisively rejects her and Brontë was able to triumph in Jane Eyre, a liberation of fantasy-formations that provided the orphan heroine as the victor over her own and her father-lover's castration and mutilation. But by the time she wrote Villette, Brontë stood virtually alone within the shattered shell of her family circle, propping up her craggy, guilty, and increasingly delusional father. Fantasy-formations were no longer adequate, even as fictional refuge. There could be no marriage and children for Lucy and M. Paul because there could be no escape from the series of traumatic losses that Lucy (as well as Brontë) had suffered throughout her life. The tomb and the phantoms of lost loved ones that had haunted Brontë throughout her life, finally closed in on her. The tragic irony, of course, is that Charlotte was determined to deny her past and marry yet another small-time curate. She was destined, one is tempted to say compelled, to relive her mother's fate and she died in a seemingly short order.

Notes


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20. Abraham, *ibid.*, 291. I have also applied Abraham's theories of the phantom to Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* in my recent *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1998), 158-83.