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## Victorian Perspectives on the Supernatural: The Imaginary Versus the Real in Two Brontë Novels

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Victorian Perspectives on the Supernatural:  
The Imaginary Versus the Real in Two Brontë Novels

by

Crystal Sidell

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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ABSTRACT

The Victorians obsessed over the supernatural and this fascination with the otherworldly emerges in the literature of the day. With this thesis, I look at two nineteenth century novels that exhibit supernatural phenomena: Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Both novels, I propose, utilize this aspect of the gothic tradition to enhance their characters' psychological realism.

With *Villette*, I examine the supernatural as a fabricated experience. First, I study the protagonist's psyche and show how her emotional state directly contributes to the appearance of fantastic material. Specifically, I examine Lucy Snowe's childhood experiences in Bretton and then look at her continuing emotional isolation at the boarding school in Villette. I then illustrate how Lucy compensates for this loneliness by transforming the identities of her acquaintances and by often embellishing her own experiences. Following this, I examine her response to an external phenomenon, the ghostly nun. I argue that as Lucy discovers emotional fulfillment via her relationship with Paul Emanuel, she grows increasingly skeptical of the nun. This skepticism climaxes in a scene of violence, after which Lucy successfully denies the existence of the otherworldly.

With *Wuthering Heights*, I examine the supernatural as a genuine phenomenon. To begin, I analyze two significant scenes which frame the main narrative: Lockwood's dream and Heathcliff's death. Both events, I subsequently demonstrate, are instances of supernatural interaction with the real world. Finally, I examine the spiritual and occult beliefs of the lovers, Catherine and Heathcliff. I then show how their ideology influences their decisions and, ultimately, brings about their reunion in the afterlife.

## Introduction

What do Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) have in common? At first, glaring dissimilarities appear. Take, for instance, the setting. The civilized city of *Villette* clashes with the isolated and uncultivated (i.e. uncivilized) landscape of *Wuthering Heights*. Religion also divides these works. While Lucy Snowe subscribes to the Christian faith, the inhabitants of Emily's novel remain saturated in paganism. And what about the question of history? Charlotte's protagonist remains a mystery. She provides no concrete information about her family background; all the reader knows is that she is an orphan. Yet lineage remains a looming issue in *Wuthering Heights*: just when *will* the Earnshaws regain their estate from Heathcliff, the outsider who usurped their rightful property? Finally, though both novels utilize the first person point of view, the narrative voice differs drastically. With *Villette*, the reader experiences the protagonist's mental turmoil firsthand. In *Wuthering Heights*, the central characters' thoughts and actions spring upon the page through a double filter: Lockwood's rendering of Nelly's tale. In spite of these differences, however, *Villette* and *Wuthering Heights* exhibit a striking similarity: both rely on the gothic tradition (more specifically, on one of its elements, the supernatural) to evoke psychological realism.

What constitutes gothic literature? Jerrold Hogle recognizes setting and "unresolved crimes or conflicts" as the staples of this genre (2). Stories that fall into this

category, Hogle asserts, usually boast of scenes which occur “in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated place” such as a “castle” or “graveyard” (2). Lucy Snowe, of *Villette*, works and resides in a building that once housed nuns. In *Wuthering Heights*, the central characters inhabit a medieval structure filled with “narrow lobbies” and trapdoors (WH 23). The conflict of the gothic novel, Hogle continues, emerges in the form of a haunting executed via “ghosts” or “monsters” (Hogle 2). The spectral nun roams the school grounds of *Villette*, while Catherine’s apparition haunts *Wuthering Heights* and the adjacent lands. In her discussion of the gothic tradition, Elizabeth MacAndrew suggests the “pathetic fallacy” as another essential element: “The heavens rent by terrible storms contrive to express human torment and rage; sunshine and singing birds convey spiritual peace. And at the most intense moment of moral danger, there still appears in this landscape the terrible abyss of damnation” (49). Key scenes in both novels reveal a parallel between the elements and the central characters. Lucy collapses with fever—exposed to extreme weather—after her confession to Père Silas. Heavy rain falls when Heathcliff leaves *Wuthering Heights*, an action that prompts Catherine’s initial illness. Also, “there is a downpour on the night of Heathcliff’s death, and when Nelly finds his corpse, it is drenched with water” (Thormählen 194).

However, I intend to focus primarily on one aspect of the gothic mode: the supernatural. The supernatural captivated the Victorians’ imagination:

They delighted in ghost stories and fairy tales, and in legends of strange gods, demons and spirits; in pantomimes and extravaganzas full of supernatural machinery; in gothic yarns of reanimated corpses and

vampires. Even avowedly realist novels were full of dreams, premonitions and second sight. (Bown 1)

Part of the Victorians' fascination with the paranormal stemmed from its enigmatic origins. Did phenomena such as apparitions, dreams, and clairvoyance spring from some mysterious, higher power? Or did a rational explanation—backed with scientific evidence—lurk in the shadows of ignorance, awaiting discovery? Hogle remarks that the conflicts, or “hauntings,” that occur within the gothic novel cause the story itself to “play with and oscillate between the earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural” (2). With *Villette* and *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte and Emily advocate opposing views of “reality.” In Charlotte’s novel, the paranormal occurs as an invention of the mind. Emily, on the other hand, presents it as a genuine and independent force, divorced from human influence.

*Villette* presents the reader with a myriad of references to supernatural phenomena. Ordinary characters, for instance, assume qualities of folkloric creatures. In particular, we shall encounter four otherworldly personas: The ghost and the witch (negative forces) offset by the fairy and the brownie (positive forces). Places and events, furthermore, transform into arenas of enchantment. In this manner, a rundown house quickly metamorphoses into a magical castle and a nocturnal fête turns into a night of revelry for fairies and witches. Yet just as Lucy “places herself deliberately in Gothic locales: a forbidden alley said to be haunted by a dead nun, the school attic, and even a Roman Catholic confessional box,” so she also willfully conjures this paranormal phenomena to satisfy her imaginative impulses (and thereby suppress her emotions as well) (Milbank 154). In addition to these allusions, Charlotte Brontë also includes a



physical haunting in the form of a restless nun. This subplot, however, merely serves to reinforce the novel's non-supernatural foundation. The unveiling of the nun suggests that paranormal activity exists only in the imagination. Ginevra Fanshawe's flippant reaction, in which she calls Lucy and Paul "capital ghost-seers," reinforces this notion (*Villette* 524).

*Wuthering Heights* also exhibits its fair share of the occult. Supernatural allusions, for example, haunt Heathcliff throughout the novel. More specifically, various characters perceive him as a monstrous tyrant of satanic origins: "Is Mr. Heathcliff a man?" Isabella wonders. "If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?" (*WH* 120). Other folkloric imagery surfaces courtesy of Nelly who leaves food out at night to feed "the fairies" and also tags the sickly Linton with the appellation "pitiful changeling" (49, 240). Unlike *Villette*, however, the paranormal transcends the imaginary. Alison Milbank remarks: "Here the Gothic house and the supernatural it unleashes act vampirishly to drain the real of any vitality and make resistance impossible" (162). In this novel, the supernatural assumes an authentic form. Dreams contain prophetic power, characters experience moments of genuine clairvoyance, and the barrier between the living and the dead collapses. The "other" world of *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë declares, does indeed exist. Moreover, Catherine and Heathcliff's behavior (as I will later discuss) reflects their acceptance of this relative reality.

The gothic novel originated with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764. With this work, Walpole intended to blend "the probable and the improbable" (Clery 25). E. J. Clery asserts that the eighteenth century author achieved this melding through the realistic depiction of his subjects. In other words, the "credible

emotions of the characters connect us to the incredible phenomena and events” of the text (25). As we shall soon discover, Heathcliff and the “Brontë heroines share an inner life of extraordinary drama, color, and intensity” (Milbank 153). The physical reality within which these characters exist, however, differs from one novel to the other. As I will attempt to show in the forthcoming chapters, how these characters ultimately “connect [their] inner and outer worlds,” depends upon the status of their respective reality (153). For this analysis, I should like to borrow Clery’s statement on the blending of “the probable and the improbable,” but apply it in reverse: The fantastic elements that emerge in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* serve to *reveal* the “credible” psychology of the central characters: Lucy Snowe, Catherine, and Heathcliff.

‘I scarcely know any one, Miss Lucy, who needs a friend more absolutely than you’: Loneliness and the Imagination in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*

Copious references to occult phenomena permeate the narrative of Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*. These supernatural intrusions issue primarily from the novel’s protagonist, Lucy Snowe. Unlike many other memorable heroines of the nineteenth century (e.g. Elizabeth Bennet, Catherine Earnshaw, Sue Bridehead), Lucy appears passive and reserved—a “colourless shadow” (*Villette* 171). Only Paul Emanuel makes the effort to discover the substance behind the figure. Based on his observations, he concludes that beneath Lucy’s tame demeanor exists “rather a fiery and rash nature—adventurous, indocile, and audacious” (334). Initially, this declaration sounds contrary to the truth. However, a detailed analysis of Lucy’s thoughts and actions reveals that despite her outwardly subdued mien, she does indeed possess such a lively soul. This vivaciousness appears most readily through the fantastical creatures and images that compose her fantasy life.

Overwhelmed with loneliness and fearful of rejection, Lucy relies on her vivid imagination to animate her otherwise barren existence. As a result, various individuals assume supernatural qualities and ordinary events sometimes take a gothic, almost paranormal turn. Through Lucy’s eyes we see the fairy, the ghost, the brownie, and the witch. Guided by her imagination, we experience a world both cruel and kind—yet also magical. Though easily overlooked, these surreal components play a significant role in the reading of this text. A close study of *Villette* reveals a direct parallel between these

supernatural allusions and Lucy's emotional state. As Lucy discovers happiness, therefore, these elements slowly fade from the text.

## I

Unspecified tragedies strike Lucy at a young age. Emotionally scarred from her experiences, she expects nothing in the way of fortune (of either the purse or heart). "This frozen woman has no hope, no tomorrow, no life other than what she experiences through others" (Forsythe 21). In her feminist reading of *Villette*, Beverly Forsythe argues that Lucy's repression is evidence of masochistic behavior. Without question, Lucy suppresses her desires throughout most of the novel. Her burial of Dr. John's letters provides a classic example of this self-denial. However, I disagree with the assertion that Lucy "receives pleasure from inflicting as well as receiving mental anguish" (18). On the contrary, Lucy represses her emotions in an effort to *prevent* the psychological pain that accompanies rejection or disappointment. As she tells the reader, "it seemed to me a great thing to be without heavy anxiety, and relieved from intimate trial; the negation of severe suffering was the nearest approach to happiness I expected to know" (*Villette* 85).

Bereft of friends and family, Lucy relies on her vivid imagination as a surrogate companion. One consequence of this penchant for fantasy materializes in the preternatural portrayal of certain characters. During the course of the novel, Lucy associates a number of acquaintances with fantastical beings. This technique allows her to rationalize her own isolation (How can I connect with someone who is made of different "stuff" than I am?) while simultaneously distracting her from the banality of reality. Furthermore, the quality of Lucy's relationship with each character influences the nature of his / her alternate identity. (We see this occur, to an extent, in *Wuthering*

*Heights* as well. Those who suffer from the machinations of Heathcliff—primarily Hindley and Isabella—view him as the offspring of the devil.) Characters with whom Lucy maintains a positive association exhibit traits of fun and whimsical creatures. On the other hand, individuals who impose themselves upon her in a negative manner represent creatures of darker origins. Polly Home (as fairy) and Paul Emanuel (as brownie) constitute examples of the first group. Madame Beck and Madame Walravens, however, clearly belong to the latter group. Consumed with self-interest, these women assume the eerie roles of ghost and witch respectively.

Contrary to the other characters in the text, the supernatural imagery associated with Polly Home changes as the novel progresses. Perceived in childhood as a changeling,<sup>1</sup> she metamorphoses into a fairy with the onset of adulthood. This remarkable re-visioning reveals a great deal about how Lucy perceives those about her. As their relationship evolves from one of aloofness to friendship (i.e. from negative association to positive), the fantastical elements that Lucy associates with Polly likewise alter. Polly's initial appearance as a changeling reflects the state of estrangement that exists between herself and Lucy. In the opening chapter of the novel, Lucy eagerly looks forward to meeting a possible playmate. With the ringing of the bell, she runs into the hall to see Mrs. Bretton's newcomer: "I would have opened the shawl, and tried to get a peep at the face, but it was hastily turned from me" (*Villette* 10). In the scenes that follow, Lucy copes with the disappointment of rejection by pretending that her companion is not a child at all, but a supernatural creature in disguise. Captivated by this fantasy, she

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<sup>1</sup> Carole Silver notes that "changelings—that is, children perceived as abnormal surreptitiously substituted for normal ones—were very much part of the Victorian world" (59).

perceives Polly as “a mere doll” or “little person” who, in distress, places “her elfish hand on her elfish breast” (10,12, 38). Accordingly, the child’s demeanor appears anything but childlike. She haunts, rather than occupies, physical space and her face “seem[s] growing old and unearthly” (15).

These uncanny descriptions of Polly suggest that Lucy equates her with a changeling.<sup>2</sup> As Carole Silver notes, the changeling “child had an old, distorted face, a small or wizened body, and dark or sallow skin, and was often backward in learning to walk or speak” (60). Unlike the changeling, Polly does not suffer from a learning disability. Her adult style in speaking, however, produces an eerie effect. When serving her father coffee, for instance, she remarks: “I always did it for you at home, papa: nobody could do it as well, not even your own self” (*Villette* 18). Her manner in this scene, as well as in others,<sup>3</sup> evokes the image of an aged soul in a child’s body.<sup>4</sup>

This changeling motif strengthens when Polly attaches herself to Graham (Dr. John). Seeing the young child accept the company of another after refusing her own offer

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<sup>2</sup> “For Victorians... the changeling phenomenon was a mysterious and frightening occurrence that could... provide explanations for sudden death or disappearance, mysterious illness, and eccentric and bizarre behavior” (Silver 60).

<sup>3</sup> Consider Polly’s equally mature response to Graham when he lifts her into the air. “‘For shame, Mr Graham!’ was her indignant cry, ‘put me down!’—and when again on her feet, ‘I wonder what you would think of me if I were to treat you in that way, lifting you with my hand’ (raising that mighty member) ‘as Warren lifts the little cat?’” (*Villette* 21). Lucy also observes the child’s independent nature. The morning after her arrival, for instance, she attempts to dress herself: “It was curious to watch her as she washed and dressed, so small, busy, and noiseless. Evidently she was little accustomed to perform her own toilet; and the buttons, strings, hooks and eyes, offered difficulties which she encountered with a perseverance good to witness” (12). Though Lucy associates Polly with the characteristics of a changeling, she never labels her as one. Graham, however, does. In speaking to his mother, he says: “Mama, I believe that creature is a changeling: she is a perfect cabinet of oddities; but I should be dull without her: she amuses me a great deal more than you or Lucy Snowe”(31).

<sup>4</sup> Some Victorians “believed in the occult thought that changelings might be the souls of the dead returned to inhabit the bodies of mortal children. Their old faces and wizened frames were indications of the fact that they were reincarnations, that such changed children were really ‘old souls,’ a premise still accepted by occultists today” (Silver 74).

of companionship increases Lucy's sense of rejection. To console herself, she imagines that this new friendship has an unnatural foundation. She notes, for instance, that Polly appears incredibly dull except when in Graham's presence: "One would have thought the child had no mind or life of her own, but must necessarily live, move, and have her being in another" (*Villette* 29). Thus, Polly appears "like a bit of marble" when she senses a weakness in her bond with Graham (30). Again, this imagery suggests Polly's unnatural origins: "Some changed children were active though monstrous little beings; others were immobile, doll-like wooden creatures who soon lost all semblance of life, becoming 'stocks'" (Silver 60). In short, Lucy rationalizes her exclusion by the playmates through pretending that Polly and, hence, any relationship in which she is involved, represents the "other." This technique—her defense mechanism throughout most of the novel—allows Lucy to suppress the pain she perpetually strives to avoid.

Lucy's close observation of Polly during this time also hints at her continuing desire for friendship. In the following passage, Lucy reveals a fondness for Polly cloaked in preternatural imagery.

I saw the *little thing* shiver. "Come to me," I said, wishing, yet scarcely hoping, that she would comply: for she was a most strange, capricious, *little creature*, and especially whimsical with me. She came, however, instantly, *like a small ghost gliding over the carpet*. I took her in. She was chill; I warmed her in my arms. She trembled nervously; I soothed her. Thus tranquilized and cherished she at last slumbered. (*Villette* 38; my emphasis)

In this scene, fear of rejection materializes in the continued perception of Polly as a “creature” rather than a child. When Polly accepts Lucy’s goodwill, however, the scene loses its supernatural flavor. The “small ghost” vanishes. In its place appears a humanized depiction of Polly, whom Lucy now describes as simply a “very unique child” (38).

Lucy’s struggle against loneliness continues into her adult years. As a foreigner in Villette, for instance, the “shadow-world” of her thoughts appears her only companion (*Villette* 130). The extent of her emotional isolation—and its impact on her psychological state—becomes apparent in the poignant scene that follows her reunion with the Brettons:

“Do not let me think of them too often, too much, too fondly,” I implored; “let me be content with a temperate draught of this living stream: let me not run athirst, and apply passionately to its welcome waters: let me not imagine in them a sweeter taste than earth’s fountains know. Oh! Would to God! I may be enabled to feel enough sustained by an occasional, amicable intercourse, rare, brief, unengrossing and tranquil: quite tranquil!”

Still repeating this word, I turned to my pillow; and, *still* repeating it, I steeped that pillow with tears. (199)

When Polly appears in *Villette*, her previous reserve toward Lucy immediately melts into frank affection. Now on friendly terms, Lucy imagines Polly as a benevolent quasi-human creature. Carol Rose notes: “where the poor, deprived, or unfortunate are concerned, Fairies seem to offer genuine, though often partially successful, supernatural intervention” (107). Previously “deprived” of affection, Lucy does not expect good things



to happen for her. Her reaction to positive encouragement, therefore, mirrors her psychological response to the negative. By imagining Polly's reappearance as a form of "supernatural intervention," Lucy protects herself from becoming too attached to the young woman. In other words, she cannot take this new relationship for granted because, as it seems too good to be true, it certainly cannot last.

To distance herself emotionally from her newfound friend, Lucy consistently identifies Polly with fairylike qualities. This fairy motif first appears in the text when Lucy encounters Polly at the Bretton residence. Momentarily surprised at discovering the young woman in a room she presumed empty, Lucy automatically thinks of "spectral illusions" (*Villette* 304). Here, her initial observations clearly ally Polly with the otherworldly. Seated at a vanity, "between the candles, and before the glass, appeared something dressing itself—an airy, fairy thing,—small, slight, white—a winter spirit" (304).<sup>5</sup> The description of Polly's attire reinforces this fairylike image. The "little wreath with an evergreen gloss" entwined in her hair suggests a natural connection to the earth (305). The "drops of scarlet" on her white dress calls to mind wild fruit—like berries (305). The coloration of her girdle, also red, further implies occult significance.<sup>6</sup> With all of her "tender charm," Polly appears a product of the otherworld—a supernatural being, distinct from humans (306). Expectant that Polly will one day vanish from her life as swiftly and unexpectedly as she entered it, Lucy prepares herself for the loss by imagining it as inevitable. As a visitor from fairyland, Polly must one day leave Lucy in order to return to her "people."

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<sup>5</sup> The phrase "winter spirit" calls to mind the nature fairies / spirits. These "represent trees, specific localities, streams, wells, vegetation or the weather and other natural forces" (Franklin 186).

<sup>6</sup> Green and red were both associated with fairies during the nineteenth century (Davies 186-87).

When Heathcliff returns to Wuthering Heights after a three-year absence, Nelly suspects that he has used diabolical methods to achieve his financial success: “Honest people don’t hide their deeds,” she tells Isabella (*WH* 91). Lucy exhibits a similar mentality when contrasting her own past and present hardships with Polly’s incredible good fortune. “Providence,” Lucy remarks, “has protected and cultured you” under a fortunate “star” (*Villette* 417). Here, Lucy endures the painful dissimilarities in their life experiences by contriving the fantasy that Polly’s happiness and wealth are the product of supernatural origins. Lucy acknowledges this system of thought when she comments on the disparate manner of treatment that she and Polly receive under Fraulein Anna Braun’s instruction. According to Lucy, the German tutor “half-feared, half-worshipped Paulina, as a sort of dainty nymph—an Undine—[whereas] she took refuge with me, as a being all mortal, and of easier mood” (336).<sup>7</sup> Traditionally, the Undine represents a fairy bride “who gain[s] a soul and a husband but sacrifice[s] her life to do so” (Silver 91). This comparison of Polly to a fairy bride seems particularly appropriate given that Lucy (who narrates the novel in retrospect) imagines that magical forces aid in the successful courtship of her fortunate friend and Dr. John.

This is not the first time that Charlotte Brontë utilizes this supernatural theme in one of her novels. In her discussion on fairy brides in Victorian literature, Carole Silver declares that Brontë bestows *Jane Eyre* with characteristics corresponding to a swan maiden: “In Jane’s otherness and force—as well as the name that links her to the sylphs or spirits of the air—in her strong sexual and spiritual passions, she manifests the nature

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<sup>7</sup> “The Undines were spirits of water described as looking like humans but could assume the shape of a fish or a snake” (Rose 322). One of the more popular (Victorian) versions of the Undine appeared in Hans Christian Anderson’s *The Little Mermaid*, translated into English in 1846 (Silver 91).

of a formidable fairy bride not yet become a wife” (Silver 107). With *Villette*, the author uses this theme in a different, but equally effective, way. Here, Brontë hints at Lucy’s fiery soul by applying this fairy imagery to a character whom Lucy admires and observes. Though equally as passionate as her predecessor Jane Eyre—and as hungry for love as Polly—Lucy represses her emotions for fear of heartache. Whereas Polly enthusiastically professes her feelings to Dr. John, therefore, Lucy pretends that romantic love does not touch her. Unable to act out her own desires, she subsequently perceives the “Undine” in one who can.

Visualized as an Undine in Lucy’s fantasy world, Polly harbors powers of enchantment. This enables her to charm Dr. John when Lucy merely elicits a doctor’s sympathy. Thus, throughout the couple’s romance, Lucy attaches elfin imagery with her young friend. In this light, Polly appears as both “a dancing fairy and delicate dame” (*Villette* 314).<sup>8</sup> When she dances, she resembles a “little sprite” (310).<sup>9</sup> Even when still, she exhibits “a most exquisite and fairy charm” (333). While participating in conversation, her presence creates “a kind of gossamer happiness hanging in the air” (333). The Victorians in general, not Lucy alone, feasted on fairy folklore: “Antiquarians of the romantic era had begun the quest for fairies, and throughout Victoria’s reign advocates of fairy existence and investigators of elf origins included numerous scientists, social scientists, historians, theologians, artists, and writers” (Silver 33). This common interest in the elfin people materializes in *Wuthering Heights* through the younger Cathy.

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<sup>8</sup> Fairies are particularly fond of “music and dancing and... often ‘invite’ human musicians and dancers to join them” (Rose 108).

<sup>9</sup> A sprite is a “lesser spirit, such as an elf, fairy, or pixy, which usually indicates their unpredictable and mischievous characters” (Rose 299). Put simply, this term is “A general name for FAIRIES and other spirits” (Briggs 381).

She wishes to see Peninstone Crag (also referred to as “Fairy Cave”) and, upon first meeting Hareton, asks him to show her the fairies (*WH* 175). “I want to see where the goblin hunter rises in the marsh, and to hear about the *fairishes*, as you call them” (172). We see this in *Villette* as well. Mr. Home casually refers to his child as “daughterling” and “Highland fairy” and claims that Polly will leave “a green ring” where she has danced (*Villette* 311-12). Unlike Cathy and Mr. Home, however, Lucy refuses to express these “common” thoughts through the spoken word. Her observations of Polly in fairylike terms remain unacknowledged and, thus, unobserved by others.

This unnecessary silence (no one would ridicule her for speaking in such terms) reinforces the importance of Lucy’s inner world. To recognize her thoughts verbally and to share her vision with others suggests that, no longer her own, the power of that vision would fade. And, as we later see, this *is* a significant vision as Polly’s union with Dr. John represents the culmination of Lucy’s own secret fantasy. When she espies Polly during *Villette*’s fête, the young girl—as the Undine of Lucy’s imagination—appears most visually striking: “Within reach of my hand – had I chosen to extend it – sat a figure like a fairy-queen, whose array, lilies and their leaves seemed to have suggested; whatever was not spotless white, being forest-green” (*Villette* 503). Finally, Polly’s elfin powers enable her to secure her marital happiness forevermore. With her father and fiancé at hand, she constructs an “amulet” which contains the hair of both (482).<sup>10</sup> Again, Lucy rationalizes Polly’s incredible fortune in life and love by fantasizing that the latter has the magic powers of an immortal. Observing this idyllic scene from afar, she surmises that Polly’s necklace casts a spell “which render[s] enmity impossible” (482).

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<sup>10</sup> An amulet is a device used to ward off “injury or evil.” Amulets are usually worn as necklaces, though “[t]hey may also appear on homes, tombs, and buildings” (Lewis 8).

Madame Beck represents yet another individual who plays a distinctive role in Lucy's imaginary world. Her part, however, appears an unfavorable one. Though the schoolmistress supplies Lucy with food and shelter at a time when the latter appears most vulnerable, Lucy never mistakes this deed as an act of charity. From the beginning, Lucy recognizes her employer's manipulative and self-serving character. Of this she remarks, "interest was the master-key of madame's nature—the mainspring of her motives—the alpha and omega of her life" (*Villette* 81). Lucy also acknowledges Madame Beck's unsympathetic disposition, for "to attempt to touch her heart was the surest way to rouse her antipathy, and to make of her a secret foe" (82). Ruled by such adverse traits, Madame Beck hovers about Lucy as an unpleasant, even threatening, figure. In this light, she assumes the double role of scheming employer and residential ghost.

In describing Madame Beck, Lucy places emphasis on her shoes of silence. This peculiar detail suggests that the matriarch possesses the uncanny ability to navigate through space like a weightless spirit. Lucy introduces this theme during their first meeting. When Madame Beck suddenly materializes without creating a sound, Lucy turns, surprised to discover that "[n]o ghost stood beside me, nor anything of spectral aspect; merely a motherly, dumpy little woman" (*Villette* 71-72). This motif continues after Lucy begins her employment at the school. For instance, rather than boldly wander about the premises in the early morning hours, Lucy avers that schoolmistress creeps about, "haunt[ing] the house in her wrapping-gown, shawl and soundless slippers" (79). In short, Madame Beck plays the part of a wraith-like figure who can penetrate walls and discover—unseen and unheard—the smallest of secrets. Thus she "glide[s] ghost-like

through the house, watching and spying everywhere, peering through every key-hole, listening behind every door” (81).

Lucy enlivens her routine existence by reinventing figures around her. With respect to Madame Beck, however, she also resorts to the ghostly motif as a means of coping with the personal intrusions she must endure. Like everyone else at the pensionnat, Lucy falls prey to her employer’s espionage. Her conversations with students travel to invisible ears. Foreign fingers handle her personal effects. Even her solitary hours spent in the old garden yield to hidden eyes. Lucy tolerates this meddlesomeness willingly, fully aware that an attempt at obstruction would leave her jobless. She remarks upon this circumstance when she accidentally discovers Madame Beck sifting through her items one night: “I stood, in short, fascinated; but it was necessary to make an effort to break this spell: a retreat must be beaten. The searcher might have turned and caught me.... *I* should have looked into her eyes, and *she* into mine—we should have known that we could work together no more, and parted in this life forever” (*Villette* 131). Unable to avoid the distasteful, Lucy envisions her spy as an omnipresent figure who has the ability to materialize at will: “Madame’s shoes of silence brought her continually to my back, as quick, noiseless, and unexpected, as some wandering zephyr” (93). Rather than give way to vexation, Lucy makes light of the situation by pretending that she is in the presence of an apparitional force.

This spectral role, in fact, appears so ingrained in Lucy’s imagination that it literally comes out to haunt her. In a scene that occurs just before Lucy prepares to see Vashti, an ordinary occurrence turns into a spine-tingling encounter. Alone in a darkened hallway, Lucy suddenly senses another presence on the stairwell behind her: “I own my

heart quaked, my pulse leaped, when I suddenly heard breathing and rustling, and turning, saw in the deep shadow of the steps a deeper shadow still—a shape that moved and descended” (*Villette* 283). Encouraged by the setting, Lucy’s imagination takes a romantic turn. She focuses on the intruder as a “shadow” rather than a solid, corporeal form. Perceived as a nonentity, the mysterious intruder consequently exhibits unnatural movement: “It paused a while at the classe door, and then it *glided* before me” (283; my emphasis). Only after the sound of the doorbell grounds Lucy in reality once more does she realize that the shadow possesses a form “too round and low” for the ghostly nun of the garden (283).

Madame Beck often executes her snooping and spying in a manner that strikes Lucy as both discreet and unobtrusive. Though unpleasant, “her system, it did me no harm; she might work me with it to her heart’s content: nothing would come of the operation. Loverless and inexpectant of love, I was as safe from spies in my heart-poverty, as the beggar from thieves in his destitution of purse” (*Villette* 131). As Lucy’s affection for Paul deepens, however, the matriarch’s harmless meddling metamorphoses into a physical attempt to separate the lovers. When Madame Beck actively tries to thwart a meeting between Lucy and Paul, Lucy undergoes a startling epiphany: “She was *my* rival, heart and soul” (494). To her employer she declares, “Oh, Madame! in your hand there is both chill and poison. You envenom and you paralyze” (494). Appalled at the schoolmistress’ cruel manipulations, Lucy verbally likens her to a mischievous spirit that plays with the mind and freezes the body.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Lucy’s experience with the ghostly nun mirrors this sentiment. The encounter thrills her, i.e. “paralyze[s]” her. Yet it also leaves her wondering if its appearance is a “poison[ing]” of the mind, i.e. “only the child of malady” (*Villette* 280).

As with both Polly and Madame Beck, Lucy associates Paul Emanuel with a distinct fantastical character—the brownie. Though Brontë does not focus much attention on their relationship until the latter half of the novel, Lucy’s fondness for the instructor soon becomes apparent through the language that she uses to describe him. Whether he amuses or irritates her, Lucy’s reaction to Paul assumes a similar tone. When Paul instructs her to look away from the Cleopatra painting on display in the art museum, Lucy refers to him as a “despotic little man” (*Villette* 226). As a spectator at a concert, she observes Paul directing about the choir and, delighted with “his love of display and authority,” fondly considers him “a little hawk of a man” (237). When Paul unjustly criticizes Lucy’s decision to spend time with Polly and to attend German lessons, she responds in the same vein: “Never was a better little man, in some points, than M. Paul: never, in others, a more waspish little despot” (336). In a later chapter, Paul lambasts her native home until she shouts out in vexation. When Paul then expresses amusement at her anger, Lucy’s reaction—though fiery—exhibits the same playful character of before: “The professor put up his handkerchief, and fiendishly smiled into its folds. Little monster of malice!” (379). The repeated use of the term “little” in each of these scenes suggests a mark of affection on the narrator’s part. With regard to the Cleopatra incident, for example, Lucy remarks, “It would have been easy to show anger at the teasing, hostile tone of the little man. I had never been angry with him yet, however, and had no present disposition to begin” (228).<sup>12</sup> At the same time, however, the word “little” also contains occult significance.

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<sup>12</sup> The pleasure that Lucy derives from seeing Paul riled up also suggests her affection for him: “I liked, for instance, to see M. Emanuel jealous; it lit up his nature, and woke his spirit; it threw all sorts of queer lights and shadows over his dun face, and into his violet-azure eyes” (*Villette* 171). As Lucy begins



Considering Lucy's penchant for flavoring the everyday with the fantastic, this term also suggests a diminutive creature. Indeed, some aspects of Paul's physical appearance and behavioral traits resemble the folkloric brownie. Generally, this (usually male) creature appears small in stature and brown in complexion (Briggs, *Encyclopedia* 45). Of its facial characteristics, the nose seems its most arresting feature. Sometimes the brownie has "only holes for nostrils" while at other times its nose may appear unnaturally large (47, 48). When Lucy first meets Paul, she reveals that he exhibits two of these attributes: "He entered: a small, dark and spare man, in spectacles" (*Villette* 73). In a subsequent description of his person, Lucy emphasizes these characteristics and more: "A dark little man he certainly was; pungent and austere. Even to me he seemed a harsh apparition, with his thin cheek, his wide and quivering nostril, his thorough glance and hurried bearing" (142).<sup>13</sup> Later, she draws attention specifically to his nose stating that "though far from small, [it] was of no particular shape" (375).<sup>14</sup> Paul's actions, furthermore, also ally him with this fairy figure.<sup>15</sup>

Though often unattractive in appearance, the brownie features an admirable character—as long as those benefiting from his services do not offend him. Just as spirits haunt specific locales, these supernatural creatures often "attach themselves to a human

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to share her growing feelings for Paul with the reader, this fondness appears more explicit. After her visit to Madame Walravens' she says, "they [Madame Beck and Père Silas] made of my dear little man a stainless little hero" (440).

<sup>13</sup> By "dark," Lucy means brown. See her description of Paul's "dun face" on page 171.

<sup>14</sup> Other characteristics of the brownie include ragged "brown clothes" and "shaggy" hair (Briggs 45). Also, sometimes "Brownies had all the fingers attached with web, or joined completely together apart from the thumb" (Rose 51).

<sup>15</sup> Katharine Briggs classes the brownie with the "solitary fairies." With the exception of brownies, "solitary fairies are chiefly malignant or ominous creatures, though there may be a few nature spirits or dwindled gods among them" (*Encyclopedia* 375). As their name suggests, they "are solitary, self-supporting creatures" (Briggs, "English" 271).

family, either as omen-bearers or as helpers” (Briggs, “English” 271). Always a dedicated worker, the brownie holds himself duty-bound to performing the chores associated with his establishment. (As an inhabitant of a farm, for instance, he might “reap, mow, thresh, herd the sheep, prevent the hens from laying away, run errands and give good counsel at need” [Briggs, *Encyclopedia* 45]). Also, it is not unusual for the brownie to develop a personal attachment to a particular individual for whom he might perform favors (45, 47). Active at night, he tends to retire during the day. His quarters consist of “dark corners of the house, or in some cases nearby hollow trees or ruins” and, capable of invisibility, he may appear or vanish “at will” (Franklin 37).

As I have noted previously in my analysis of both Polly and Madame Beck, Lucy often resorts to fantasy as a defense mechanism. This also remains true with regard to her relationship with Paul. Having suffered previous afflictions too harrowing to name, Lucy feels skeptical that she will ever experience an enduring, reciprocated love. In other words, her “fiery heart lies imprisoned beneath years of frozen pain,” and so she represses any hope for happiness (Forsythe 18). Paul, with his capricious nature, certainly attracts Lucy. However, at this point in the novel Lucy retains her passivity. Suppressing her emotions appears safer and, therefore preferable, to exposing herself to rejection. (I will discuss, shortly, how the intrusions of harsh reality into her fantasy world eventually force Lucy to acknowledge her feelings for Paul. This occurs as she learns of his former ties to the deceased Justine Marie and later when she fears his engagement to the nun’s namesake, his godchild. Lucy’s confrontation with Madame Beck occurs after these two events.) To establish the emotional barrier that her psyche requires, Lucy makes light of

their relationship by likening Paul to the supernatural creature that may disappear from her life—without warning—at any time.

Paul's similarities to the brownie on a symbolic level make this comparison an obvious choice for Lucy. Like the brownie, Paul resides at his place of employment. (As Lucy later discovers, he actually owns property in town rendering his stay at the pensionnat unnecessary.) A "school-autocrat," he strives to undertake as many of the necessary duties as he can (*Villette* 170). This appears most notably in his attempts to monopolize the administration of final exams. As Lucy observes, he "gathered all and sundry reins into the hollow of his one hand; he irefully rejected any colleague; he would not have help" (170). Furthermore, he takes the liberties of an attentive household spirit by traversing through the facility as he pleases. According to Lucy, "M. Emanuel took no account of hours nor of claims" (258). This self-appointed freedom from authority, coupled "with his unwarrantably interfering habits" (266), provides him with the means of divining information that otherwise might remain secret. Paul's mercurial nature, however, appears the most obvious connection. The brownie, when offended, may leave his establishment permanently. By imagining Paul as the unpredictable brownie, Lucy anticipates the fact that he may "vanish immediately" on a whim (Rose 51).

In addition to using the suggestive term "little," Lucy makes numerous observations which directly link Paul to the studious brownie. When he reacts in a jealous and irrational manner after Dr. John's first letter arrives, she calls him "a mere sprite of caprice and ubiquity: one never knew either his whim or his whereabouts" (*Villette* 270). Paul, especially fond of Lucy, bestows gifts upon her. These presents appear both overtly (through math lessons) and discretely (through books that mysteriously appear in her

desk over night). Whereas the tutoring sessions take place with a mere whimsical professor, however, the surprise tomes assume the air of “brownie’s work” or “brownie’s gifts” (380, 384). Indeed, when Lucy finally catches Paul, the “cigar-loving phantom,” in the midst of rearranging her desk, she watches his crafty work with pleasure (381).

But now at last I had him: there he was—the very brownie himself.... he was smoking into my desk: it might well betray him. Provoked at this particular, and yet pleased to surprise him—pleased, that is, with the mixed feeling of the housewife who discovers at last her strange elfin ally busy in the dairy at the untimely churn—I stole softly forward, stood behind him, bent with precaution over his shoulder. (381)

In this scene, Lucy fancies Paul as a creature of the otherworld. She treads lightly, unwilling to suspend the work of her “strange elfin ally.” The sound of her breathing, too natural for the unnatural moment, ultimately breaks the spell.

By relying on folkloric terminology, Lucy demonstrates her unwillingness to identify the growing love that she feels for her co-worker. Paul, as an immortal being, exists on a separate plane of existence. Though visible, he remains virtually untouchable. In this vein, Lucy compares herself to a “housewife.” Thus, instead of fantasizing herself as a young maiden—an image more compatible to her romantic imagination—she chooses the older, married (socially and emotionally unavailable) woman. In short, this heightened sense of the magical provides yet another example of Lucy’s psychological need to create an emotional distance between herself and those with whom she interacts on a regular basis. Just as the sweet and fortunate Polly transforms into the fairy and the

threatening Madame Beck materializes as the resident ghost, therefore, Paul—capricious and meddlesome, but attentive—appears to Lucy as the beneficent brownie.

## II

Despite her proclamation that she does not possess “an overheated and discursive imagination,” Lucy often indulges in fantasy (*Villette* 15): “I seemed to hold two lives—the life of thought, and that of reality; and, provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter” (85). Her vivid imagination often enriches her experiences so that the mundane seems exciting, dangerous, or even a bit romantic. For instance, the old garden at the boarding school—Lucy’s favorite place to relax—becomes a sinister entity once her peace there is broken. When she discovers an anonymous letter amidst its bushes in which the writer describes her as a “dragon,” the garden loses its charm (123): “The eyes of the flowers had gained vision, and the knots in the tree-boles listened like secret ears” (128). Likewise, Lucy transforms her experience at a concert hall into a magical event. She appears enchanted with the “magic” which makes the doors open and imagines that the glittering light from a chandelier is “the work of eastern genii: I looked to see if a huge, dark cloudy hand – that of the Slave of the Lamp - were not hovering in the lustrous and perfumed atmosphere of the cupola, guarding its wondrous treasure” (234). Here, her rich descriptions, coupled with the reference to genii, create an image of an enchanted realm. Combined, these scenes provide a small glimpse into Lucy’s fantasy world. Two events in the novel that *best* demonstrate Lucy’s fertile imagination include her sojourn in Madame Walravens’ dwelling and her experiences at Villette’s nocturnal fête.

Dilapidated buildings, elderly people, a witch, and a castle permeate “Malevola,” creating one of the most vivid chapters in the novel. It begins in a routine manner, with an ordinary request: Madame Beck asks Lucy to deliver a gift to one of her acquaintances and the latter complies. However, this simple errand quickly metamorphoses into a fantastical adventure. Inclement weather hovering over the city inspires Lucy with thoughts of “eastern enchantment” (*Villette* 429). This sense of the magical intensifies when she reaches Madame Walravens’ address. Here, Lucy perceives the square as a place haunted rather than alive. The neighboring structures, for instance, appear “ancient nests” to mystical figures “of a dead and dark art” rather than regular houses (430, 431). As the chapter progresses, Lucy readily admits that everything she sees and hears seems “parts of a fairy tale” (431). In the midst of these enchanted ruins, however, Madame Walravens materializes as a figure of singular interest. Portrayed as a witch, she appears the most sinister of all the characters that Lucy meets in *Villette*.

Self-serving and avaricious by nature, Madame Walravens represents a destroyer of hope and happiness. As such, she emerges in the text under the guise of a fierce hag. While Lucy awaits her presence, for example, the old woman’s ominous introduction simulates an act of magic. Sound precedes a physical manifestation. Only after Lucy hears an eerie tapping does she espy the indiscriminate form of a “shadow” which gradually transforms into “substance” (*Villette* 431). Afterwards, Lucy’s repeated use of the term “it” emphasizes her unwillingness to recognize the old woman as a human being (431). On the contrary, she perceives her host as a mere “obstruction, partially darkening the arch” (431). This observation also doubles as a metaphorical statement regarding Madame Walravens’ role in thwarting the happiness of young lovers. When Lucy learns

of Paul's ill-fated relationship with Justine Marie, she inwardly lashes out at their malefactor: "[T]hat old witch of a grand-dame I had seen, Madame Walravens, opposed the match with all the violence of a temper which deformity made sometimes demoniac" (435). As an individual who yearns for this kind of love in her own life, Lucy perceives the willful despoiler of such bliss as a "sorceress" and "evil fairy" (431).

Lucy's commentary on the physical correlations between Madame Walravens and the witch, however, transcend the symbolic. Upon her debut, Lucy immediately notes the peculiar traits which suggest Madame Walravens' inhuman origins. Her body, dwarfish and hunchbacked, seems unnatural with its abnormally large head. Lucy also hints at her preternatural age, remarking that she has "a hundred years in her features, and more perhaps in her eyes" (*Villette* 431). These "malign, unfriendly eyes," moreover, gaze at Lucy "severely... with a sort of dull displeasure!" (431). In short, she appears elderly, exhibits an obvious physical deformity, and possesses an uncanny, "evil eye"—all common characteristics of the nineteenth century archetypal witch (Davies 174-75).

Madame Walravens' accessories further endorse this supernatural image. The staff that she carries resembles a witch's scepter. Its ivory composition (one of the main elements recognized in wands) supports this view (Lewis 299). Though skeletal in frame, she also weighs herself down with expensive clothing and jewelry. Lustrous diamonds dangle from her ears<sup>16</sup> while equally brilliant jewels bedizen the fingers of her "skeleton hands" (*Villette* 432). Like the staff, these rings also contain possible occult significance. According to James Lewis, "[r]ings made of precious metals inlaid with a precious stone

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<sup>16</sup> "According to some occult authors, so great is this stone's power to heal that it is able to counteract poisons and cure a plethora of diseases and conditions, including infertility, sexual dysfunction, insomnia, physical weakness, and mental illness" (Dunwich 160).

take on the characteristics of the stone. These rings can protect against death and evil doings and promote good health” (245). Indeed, the final words in the novel emphasize the old woman’s longevity. Finally, Madame Walravens’ departing words coincide with the elements, suggesting that her unnatural voice wields unnatural power: “Just as she turned, a peal of thunder broke, and a flash of lightning blazed broad over salon and boudoir” (*Villette* 432). Then, just as mysteriously as she appears, she “vanish[es]” (432).

On a figurative level, this chapter illustrates Lucy’s approach to life in general. Emotionally isolated from others, or “an incongruous figure,” she entertains herself through her lively imagination (*Villette* 430). Naturally, therefore, as a stimulant to her fancy, the strange and unusual appeals to (rather than repels) her. The ancient priest and dour faced servant fascinate Lucy. The castle-like house, with its stained glass windows, gloomy air, and secret compartments, transport her: “Hoar enchantment here prevailed; a spell had opened for me elf-land” (431).<sup>17</sup> The arched passageway through which Madame Walravens appears seems otherworldly with its “mystic winding stair” of bare “cold stone” (431). Even Justine Marie’s portrait appears a magical portal. It “moved, fell away with the wall and let in phantoms” (433). Overall, Lucy seems content to continue this motif of magical adventure, perceiving herself as a “wanderer, decoyed into the enchanted castle” and forced to remain within by “the spell-wakened tempest” (432).

Only after Père Silas speaks of Paul’s lost love does reality expel the fantastical. Forced to hear of Paul’s ‘constancy’ to a ghost, Lucy must face the truth of her barren

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<sup>17</sup> “Fairyland is most commonly placed underground, though it is occasionally under water or on an invisible island.... The first appearance of fairyland is beautiful and pleasant, but this is often the effect of glamour, and a magic ointment which enables one to see things as they are will show it to be a desolate region, with an accumulation of rubbish as its treasure, and its delicious banquets withered toadstools and poisonous food” (Briggs, “English” 273).



existence once more (*Villette* 438). Consequently, this intrusion of reality also compels her to consider Paul sans his supernatural persona. In doing so, Lucy begins the process of deconstructing the barrier that she has relied upon to protect herself from unnecessary pain.

I had known him jealous, suspicious; I had seen about him certain tenderesses, fitfulnesses—a softness which came like a warm air, and a ruth which passed like early dew, dried in the heat of his irritabilities: *this* was all I had seen. And they, Père Silas and Madame Beck... opened up the adytum of his heart—shewed me one grand love, the child of this southern nature’s youth, born so strong and perfect, that it had laughed at Death himself ... and, in victory and faith, had watched beside a tomb twenty years. (440)

This revelation of Paul’s past offers Lucy a glimmer of hope. For the first time, she entertains the notion that the instructor might prove a stable figure in her life—someone who will remain a companion and possibly even offer her long-lasting affection. After all, he has already proven the “constancy” of his character through dedicating half of his life to a “tomb.” The following observation implies this nascent optimism: “What means had I, before this day, of being certain whether he could love at all or not?” (440). With Lucy now rooted in earthly matters, this phantasmagoric episode concludes in a style as conventional as its beginning: “And now the sun broke out pallid and waterish; the rain yet fell, but there was no more tempest; that hot firmament had cloven and poured out its lightnings” (438).

The scene of Vilette's nocturnal fête shows us that, at this point in the narrative, Lucy still relies (and thrives) on the imaginary. As the scene progresses, however, disagreeable events lure Lucy from this mesmerizing fantasy. At the start of this episode the protagonist swallows an opiate dosage which, ineffectively administered, lowers her reserve and amplifies her cognitive powers: "Imagination was roused from her rest, and she came forth impetuous and venturous" (*Vilette* 497). In this drugged state of excitability, Lucy wanders into the city. She imagines herself a participant in a dream, moving effortlessly toward her destination. Consequently, when she reaches the city park, "a land of enchantment," she finds herself thrust "with the suddenness of magic" into the festivities (500, 499). The fantasy excites her and she moves anonymously through the crowd, refusing to reveal her identity to those she encounters.

Here, a number of Lucy's acquaintances emerge as their supernatural counterpart, or other. Polly makes a cameo appearance as a "fairy-queen" in elegant aerial dress (*Vilette* 503). Later in the scene, Désirée Beck manifests beside her mother on a knoll. As befitting the daughter of a spectral figure, Lucy playfully surmises that the child might not be a child at all but actually "an imp in her likeness" (506).<sup>18</sup> On this hill she also encounters the formidable Madame Walravens. Macabre imagery saturates the description that ensues. Ugly and misshapen, the old woman's "face and features... were so cadaverous and so strangely placed, you could almost have fancied a head severed from its trunk, and flung at random on a pile of rich merchandize" (508). The vividness of detail here indicates Lucy's heightened state of mind. It also, however, stresses Lucy's propensity to associate those whom she strongly likes or dislikes with emblematic

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<sup>18</sup> Imps are "mischievous little devil[s] ... that [are] often described as being the childlike offspring of the Devils" (Rose 161).

imagery. Thus, with the movement of her witch's staff, Madame Walravens confirms "that she [is] indeed no corpse or ghost, but a harsh and hardy old woman" (508).

During this festive episode, Lucy herself embraces the role of ghost:

Her role of spectator is emphasized by the theatrical atmosphere of ... the background music, the lighting effects, the pervasive sense that each grouping is composed of actors playing their assigned parts in a shadowy drama, all oblivious of the solitary onlooker in the wings. (Johnson 334)

Under this cloak of obscurity, she eavesdrops on Madame Beck, Madame Walravens, and Père Silas. The scene that follows demonstrates the extent to which Lucy has become psychologically invested in this "shadowy drama." With the opiate in full effect, her active imagination temporarily overrides her reasoning abilities. During a moment of excruciating suspense, the sorceress of her fantasy seems capable of resurrecting the dead. When Madame Walravens speaks of Justine Marie, therefore, Lucy genuinely believes that "the strange, the dead-disturbing, the Witch-of-Endor query of the hunchback" refers to the dead nun (*Villette* 511). The subsequent unveiling of Justine Marie as Paul's goddaughter—not the ghost of her fancy—effectively deflates Lucy. With disappointment she notes, "this girl is not my nun" (513).

As the scene proceeds, Lucy's fevered imagination continues to misinterpret the goings on about her. The appearance of Paul fills her with joy. Yet she squelches this emotion with the erroneous conjecture that he intends to marry his charge. "I saw whom he folded carefully from the night air, whom he tended, watched, and cherished as the apple of his eye" (*Villette* 515). This false realization forces Lucy to confront, once again, the truth about her own lonely existence. At the same time, it also confirms her fears that

to expose her emotions, to allow herself to feel, will cause heartache. For, as soon as she allows herself to entertain the thought that Paul might one day reciprocate her love, the discovery of a rival shatters her hope. “This was an outrage” (517). The conclusion to this fantastical episode mirrors that which occurs at Madame Walravens’. Lucy abandons the “strange adventure” when external events suggest the improbability of a future relationship with Paul (518).

### III

So far, the supernatural beings and romantic adventures that emerge in *Villette* spring entirely from the protagonist’s fertile imagination. The ghostly nun of the pensionnat, however, functions outside this context. Its manifestations occur entirely independent of Lucy. For the first time, Lucy forgoes the role of the originator and becomes the spectator. Her bearing in these episodes, therefore, offers valuable insight into her psyche. How does she react to the local legend and, later, to sightings of the ghost itself? Why does fascination give way to uncertainty? Why does uncertainty then translate into skepticism and, ultimately, total doubt? I propose that Lucy’s interactions with the ghostly nun record a significant transformation within her character.

E. D. H. Johnson points out the importance of the spectral nun in his article, “‘Daring the Dread Glance’: Charlotte Brontë’s Treatment of the Supernatural in *Villette*.” He argues that the physical manifestations of this apparition serve as “a device for marking the successive stages by which Lucy Snowe moves toward self-realization and the eventual reconciliation of conflicting elements in her being” (325-26). I heartily agree. I do, however, have some complaints. First, though Johnson discusses Lucy’s battle between “reason and emotion” he does not offer a detailed analysis of how her

early encounters with the nun impact her psychologically (329). On the contrary, he provides a mere catalogue of these confrontations.

Second, Johnson perceives a correlation between the time that each manifestation occurs and the man currently at the forefront in Lucy's life. He suggests that the identity of her current love interest affects how she perceives the nun. I see the inclusion of Dr. John as a flawed part of this argument. Though Lucy may harbor a slight infatuation for the doctor after she arrives in Villette, he does not touch her as deeply as other characters in the text clearly do. She perceives him at face value, never once resorting to the fantastical imagery that she typically uses to distance herself from emotion:

A god could not have the cruel vanity of Dr. John, nor his sometime levity. No immortal could have resembled him in his occasional temporary oblivion of all but the present; shown not coarsely, by devoting it to material indulgence, but selfishly, by extracting from it whatever it could yield of nutriment to his masculine self-love: his delight was to feed that ravenous sentiment, without thought of the price of provender, or care for the cost of keeping it sleek and high-pampered. (*Villette* 220-21)

Furthermore, Dr. John exhibits skepticism more steadfast in nature than even that of Lockwood from *Wuthering Heights*. His presence does indeed cause Lucy to consider the possibility of "spectral illusions," but that remains the extent of his influence (304). As I will soon demonstrate, her interest in the paranormal does not wane until later.

Despite these shortcomings, Johnson's thesis proves invaluable in this analysis of Lucy. One cannot properly trace Lucy's journey toward "self-realization" without considering the ghostly nun and how its inclusion in the novel fits into the larger picture.

I intend to strengthen Johnson's argument by focusing primarily on how Lucy's perception of the nun changes as her feelings for Paul intensify. This, in turn, reflects her battle between fantasy and reality. (In this respect, I suggest the *opposite* of Johnson. In my analysis, Lucy relies on fantasy to suppress her feelings; Johnson argues that this suppression occurs via her reliance on "reason." To achieve "self-realization," I propose that Lucy must expel fantasy in favor of reality. Johnson perceives this as "reason" giving way to "emotion.") In other words, I will show that as her affection for the instructor progresses from one of cordiality to love, Lucy no longer requires the vividness of her imagination as a source of comfort. As the subplot of the ghostly nun concludes, Lucy makes the conscious choice to lower her defenses. She expels her life of fantasy in a courageous attempt to share her heart with another.

While she and Paul maintain a mere working acquaintanceship, the notion of a haunting spirit enlivens Lucy's imaginary world. Her inherent loneliness attracts her to this "romantic rubbish" (*Villette* 118). At this point in the novel, her thoughts often wander to this legendary figure—whether she is strolling through the garden, memorizing acting lines in the attic, or walking through the pensionnat's darkened halls. Subsequently, Lucy's first encounter with the nun resonates a heightened level of excitement. Having escaped to the attic to peruse a letter in privacy, Lucy suddenly marks the intrusion of another presence. Casting aside the rational, she automatically wonders "what"—rather than "who"—has disrupted her "sweet bubble" of happiness (272). "Are there wicked things, not human, which envy human bliss? Are there evil influences haunting the air, and poisoning it for man? *What* was near me?" (273; my emphasis).

Expectations of the otherworldly amplify Lucy's reaction in this scene. When the nun finally appears in the light, she flees the room in fear.

As her friendship with Paul develops, however, Lucy's attitude towards the nun begins to fluctuate. This ambiguousness appears most readily in a conversation that occurs between these two characters in chapter 31. Here, Paul questions Lucy on whether or not she believes in the supernatural. Lucy, without hesitation, responds in the negative. When the dialogue shifts over to the nun, however, she contradicts her previous statement. Thrilled by the topic she inquires, "Monsieur, what if [the nun] comes and goes here still?" (*Villette* 407). With the passage of time, Lucy's emotional investment in Paul deepens. Amorous affections replace her genial sentiments. Thus, she expresses a willingness to adopt the role of "sister" to Paul "on condition" that he marries no one else (453). Though she still represses the full extent of her emotional attachment (she hints at her feelings instead of explicitly identifying them), Lucy begins to reject the imaginary as an essential component to her well-being. At this point, she strips away the romantic and considers the ghostly sightings with the detached rationale of a skeptic. "I believe," she asserts, "a perfectly natural solution of this seeming mystery will one day be arrived at" (452).

Lucy's propensity for fantasy flares up once again at Villette's nocturnal fête. At the height of this "strange adventure" Lucy ultimately discovers the strength within herself to overcome her fear of rejection (i.e. abandonment) (*Villette* 518). Her true feelings for Paul—previously implied through her jealous tone—erupt in a passionate confession. The possibility that her beloved will marry Justine Marie forces Lucy to

acknowledge the emotions that she has experienced but left unnamed. After suffering from isolation for so long, she declares:

love venturing diffidently into life after long acquaintance, furnace-tried by pain, stamped by constancy, consolidated by affection's pure and durable alloy, submitted by intellect to intellect's own tests, and finally wrought up, by his own process, to his own unflawed completeness, this Love that laughed at Passion, his fast frenzies and his hot and hurried extinction, in *this* Love I had a vested interest; and whatever tended either to its culture or its destruction, I could not view impassibly. (517)

This declaration indicates the moment when Lucy consciously steps out of her dreamlike world. By embracing her love for Paul, she rejects the romantic umbrella which previously sheltered her from her loneliness.

In the scene that follows, Lucy confronts the nun for the last time. This moment reveals our protagonist in her most vitalized state. No longer subdued by self-imposed barriers, she exhibits the fiery soul that she has always possessed but kept safely locked within. This final encounter, therefore, represents a direct attack against the fantasy world that she has just forfeited. Furious with her (misconceived) disappointment in love, she charges violently at the ghostly figure.

In a moment, without exclamation, I had rushed on the haunted couch; nothing leaped out, or sprung, or stirred; all the movement was mine, so was all the life, the reality, the substance ... I tore her up—the incubus! I held her on high—the goblin! I shook her loose—the mystery! And down



she fell—down all round me—down in shreds and fragments—and I trode  
upon her. (519)

Here, Lucy's fixation on the nun as a symbolic figure manifests in the various terms she associates with it: "incubus,"<sup>19</sup> "goblin,"<sup>20</sup> and "mystery." By contrasting these references to the immaterial with "substance," she also emphasizes the significance of the concrete (i.e. tangible). The act of stamping out these fanciful qualities, therefore, effectually cements Lucy in the world of "reality."<sup>21</sup>

From this point onward, Lucy tackles her ordeals without retreating into the imaginary. Passive acceptance transforms into positive action. Unwilling to "tamely [submit] to Madame Beck's tyranny" any longer (Johnson 327), she exposes her true sentiments to Paul when the schoolmistress attempts to thwart their farewell meeting:

I thought he receded; I thought he would go. Pierced deeper than I  
could endure, made now to feel what defied suppression, I cried—

"My heart will break!"

What I felt seemed literal heart-break; but the seal of another  
fountain yielded under the strain: one breath from M. Paul, the whisper,  
"Trust me!" lifted a load, opened an outlet. With many a deep sob, with

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<sup>19</sup> "Technically, an 'Incubus' was a devil which assumed the appearance of a man and lay with a woman, as a succubus... assumed the appearance of a woman... to corrupt a man" (Briggs *Encyclopedia* 232).

<sup>20</sup> The Goblin "is a grotesque, diminutive, and generally malicious earth spirit or sprite" (Rose 128).

<sup>21</sup> In the words of E. D. H. Johnson, "she is rending the whole fabric of make-believe that has swathed her private world of fantasy" (335).

thrilling, with icy shiver, with strong trembling, and yet with relief—I wept. (*Villette* 530)

Lucy proves that she has indeed “defied suppression.” The transformation is complete.

#### IV

Lucy’s perception of individuals, and of the world in which she operates, suggests that she suffers from repression. Wary of disappointment, she buries her emotions through fantasy. In this manner, a genteel girl becomes a fairy, while a kindly teacher dons the qualities of a brownie. A spying schoolmistress assumes the identity of a troublesome spirit, and a self-indulgent old woman appears an evil sorceress. Even mundane events sport a touch of the surreal. A rundown old house transforms into an enchanted castle as Lucy steps over the threshold. The annual celebration of Villette’s struggle for freedom metamorphoses into a night of revelry for fairies and witches. These intrusions of the imaginary provide a fairytale-like element to an otherwise realistic novel. At the same time, however, this supernatural undertone also adds to its realism.

A close examination of the work reveals a correlation between Lucy’s emotional state and the occult phenomena that appear in the text. Perpetually isolated from those around her, Lucy seeks happiness through escapism. This allows her to function in the emotionally unfulfilling life that she suspects that she is destined to live. However, as Lucy spends more time with Paul—both as student and friend—her ability to conceal her emotions weakens. This gradual breakdown of self-imposed dispassion gains notice following her outing in “Malevola.” Its destruction appears nearly complete at the nocturnal fête. Yet these lapses of psychological restraint do not occur as suddenly as

they at first appear. A study of Lucy's attitude towards the resident ghost reveals a steady decline of her investment in the imaginary.

Lucy's interactions with the mysterious apparition reflect her struggle to relinquish "romantic rubbish" in exchange for something substantial (*Villette* 118). Her changing attitude towards the nun illustrates this gradual disengagement "from all sense of the spectral and unearthly" (520). As Lucy unveils the spectral figure, she also discards the fantastical. Paul's declaration of love after this event ultimately provides her with the "deep spell of peace" she has longed for since the novel's opening chapter (541). Finally content, Lucy recognizes that in the years to come, memories of her time with Paul—not fantasies about chimerical creatures and romantic quests—will "be comfort [to her] in the last strait of loneliness" (530). By releasing her grip on the fantastical, therefore, Lucy extricates herself from the safe realm of non-feeling that she has hidden behind since childhood.

Heaven on Earth:  
The “Other” World of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*

The supernatural does not exist in the world of *Villette*. Preternatural elements materialize only through the eyes of the protagonist, and the one spectacle that does manifest on a physical level—the ghostly nun—turns out to be a hoax. The existence of the supernatural, in other words, remains contingent on the imagination’s desire to resurrect and sustain its presence. Lucy Snowe’s decision to surrender her fantasy life for hard reality ultimately expels all vestiges of the paranormal from the text. (This erasure, in other words, signifies the nonexistence of the otherworldly.) In Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, however, the supernatural emerges as a formidable force independent of human thought and action. As the characters of these novels inhabit two distinct realities, therefore, the method required to achieve their similar objective (emotional fulfillment) likewise differs. Lucy Snowe must reject the fantastical to acquire the love and companionship she craves. Catherine<sup>22</sup> and Heathcliff face the opposite task. They must embrace the otherworldly, effectively rejecting the rational, in order to effectuate their togetherness.

Catherine and Heathcliff’s struggle to unite (in spectral form) underlines the central conflict of *Wuthering Heights*. To achieve their goal, they must repudiate the material in favor of the invisible, intangible realm of the otherworldly. The author emphasizes this aim by placing the characters in a world where the supernatural co-exists

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<sup>22</sup> When referring to the elder Catherine, I will use to this form; I will use the shortened version, “Cathy”, to designate her daughter.

with the natural. Ghosts, “devils, witchcraft, wraiths, omens, dreams and fairy-lore” comprise an essential part of the characters’ ideology at Wuthering Heights (Simpson 51). Instances of the paranormal, furthermore, occur as “a constant and accepted element of life” (Smith 499). I intend to do two things with this chapter. First, I will discuss how the novel’s central love story is actually contained within a ghostly framework. To do this, I will analyze two key scenes: Lockwood’s nightmare and Heathcliff’s death. Following this, I will turn to Catherine and Heathcliff themselves and, by analyzing their supernatural beliefs, demonstrate how their apparently extreme decisions (hers to die; his to abuse, murder, and manipulate) actually reflect their inherent need to reunite in spirit form.

## I

From its opening pages, Emily Brontë intimates that reality within the walls of Wuthering Heights (and, hence, the novel itself) does not adhere to the rational world of science. Engravings of “crumbling griffins and shameless little boys” that decorate the structure’s main entrance suggest this pagan view (*WH* 2). Subsequently, two events that occur in the story (Lockwood’s nightmare and Heathcliff’s death) reinforce this notion. The unnatural qualities that characterize both of these episodes reveal that the realm of the seen and the unseen co-exist. In order to fully appreciate the nature of its love story, therefore, *Wuthering Heights* requires a suspension of disbelief. The reader must exhibit the willingness to believe that anything is possible and also accept that the novel’s two heroes trust in this same doctrine. To achieve this effect, the author both begins and concludes Catherine and Heathcliff’s story with supernatural events. If Emily Brontë merely *suggests* otherworldly possibilities through her characters’ vocabulary and

behavior (I will discuss this at a later point), therefore, she *insists* upon its existence through the method in which she structures the lovers' tale. Lockwood's dream, the first paranormal incident in the novel, holds much significance in the text. Not only does this scene introduce Catherine Earnshaw (in her present ghostly form), but it also provides the impetus for Nelly's narrative.

Critics offer various theories regarding the nightmare scene in chapter three. Jacqueline Simpson suggests that Lockwood experiences an actual ghostly encounter, "no mere dream, for it contains elements that cannot come from Lockwood's subconscious" (54). According to Peter Grudin, Lockwood does in fact dream this event. However, he interprets the dream as a distinct entity that invades, rather than springs from, Lockwood's mind: "The dream is not the product of Lockwood's subconscious, but a quality of the room in which he dreams. The cynical, rational, unimaginative visitor from the city has intercepted a dream intended for Heathcliff" (393). Lockwood's nocturnal incident—whether it occurs while he lies awake or dozing—retains its supernatural qualities. Does Catherine really appear in spirit form? Or does Lockwood merely envision the encounter during a troubled sleep? Emily Brontë, writing during a time in which the nature of dreams inspired fervent debate, chooses an apt method for introducing Catherine and Heathcliff's story.

Nicola Bown discusses the opposing Victorian views on dreams in her article, "What is the stuff that dreams are made of?" To summarize briefly, dreams "became an important issue in debates over the nature of consciousness and the relationship between the mind and the external world" (159). The question, in short, was this: Were dreams physiological in nature or supernatural? Those who adopted the scientific theory argued

that dreams resulted from external, or physical, causes. Those who sided with the occult explanation believed “that dreams are messages from the immaterial spirit which travels outside the body, meeting with other spirits in supernatural communication” (161). Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) provides a famous example of an instance in nineteenth century literature where the dream occurs as a product of external stimuli.

Alice, directly upon awakening from her afternoon nap, elaborates on her wonderful adventures. Her sister—the older, “rational” figure who attends to Alice—ponders the fabulous tale from a practical, though envious, perspective:

So she sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again, and all would change to dull reality—the grass would be only rustling in the wind, and the pool rippling to the waving of the reeds—the rattling teacups would change to tinkling sheep-bells, and the Queen’s shrill cries to the voice of the shepherd boy—and the sneeze of the baby, the shriek of the Gryphon, and all the other queer noises, would change (she knew) to the confused clamour of the busy farmyard—while the lowing of the cattle in the distance would take the place of the Mock Turtle’s heavy sobs.

(Carroll 112-13)

Here, the author concludes his amazing story by—quite deliberately—asserting to his audience that, though incredible and vividly detailed, Alice’s dream contains nothing of the unnatural. The goings on about her sleeping frame, not any paranormal intervention,

influence the content of her dream. In *Wuthering Heights*, however, Emily Brontë constructs a dream sequence that defies rational explanation.

Lockwood's nightmare stands out for several reasons. Of the most obvious, Brontë exploits a popular concept to its fullest advantage. The reader, having once encountered Catherine's desperate spirit, cannot set the story aside. Beyond that, however, this episode deserves recognition for its clever construction. From the onset, Brontë exhibits a keen understanding of the Victorian dream debate. Even more, she plays with it and molds it to suit her purpose. The nightmare itself, for instance, does not surprise the reader. Lockwood foreshadows the event to come with the declaration that his sour mood provokes it: "Alas, for the effects of bad tea and bad temper! what else could it be that made me pass such a terrible night?" (*WH* 18). Not only does Brontë choose a skeptic for the victim of this encounter, but also she also prefaces this incident with the skeptic's argument and then methodically breaks down his rationalization by inserting details that oppose explanation. In the analysis that follows, I will show that what Lockwood attempts to write off as a "ridiculous nightmare" actually reflects a genuine paranormal encounter (24).

Snowed in at *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood finds refuge in Catherine's room where he does (contrary to Simpson's opinion) actually dream. Towards the end of his ordeal with Catherine's ghost, for instance, he remarks: "I tried to jump up, but could not stir a limb" (*WH* 21). This statement suggests that Lockwood is suffering from sleep paralysis, a "frightening form of paralysis that occurs when a person suddenly finds himself or herself unable to move for a few minutes, most often upon falling asleep or waking up.... The symptoms of sleep paralysis include sensations of noises, smells,



levitation, paralysis, terror, and images of frightening intruders” (“Definition”). His dream-like state, however, contains an uncanny level of reality. For example, Lockwood appears oddly conscious of his surroundings as he sleeps: “I remembered I was lying in the oak closet, and I heard distinctly the gusty wind, and the driving of the snow; I heard, also, the fir-bough repeat its teasing sound, and ascribed it to the right cause” (*WH* 20). Although the reader knows that Lockwood dreams, these details emphasize the authenticity of his unconscious experience. This quality, Sheila Smith asserts, applies most significantly to Catherine’s spirit, which appears “entirely credible largely because Lockwood’s terror is dramatized by mundane, physical details, objectively described” (501).

Ironically, Catherine’s spectral presence proves the very evidence needed to validate this nocturnal encounter. Grudin correctly identifies Catherine as a force external to Lockwood’s subconscious. However, his suggestion—that she functions as Heathcliff’s “dream”—detracts from her individuality and saps her of power. In actuality, the nightmare scene of chapter three shows us something quite different. Catherine, first of all, exhibits autonomous control. She chooses to materialize before a perfect stranger, an outsider who scoffs at superstitious “folly” (*WH* 24). Moreover, she penetrates his unconscious, *skeptical* mind to do so. Yet she refuses to manifest for Heathcliff, who passionately tries to invoke her presence throughout the text. (Patsy Stoneman interprets this noncompliance as Heathcliff’s doing. His “obsession with revenge,” she states, “effectively shuts her out of his consciousness, even though she seems to be its motivation” (532). I propose that Catherine’s invisibility occurs because she *chooses* to remain unseen, not because Heathcliff’s material preoccupation induces a mental block.

As I will discuss later in the chapter, Catherine willingly—and regularly—appears to Heathcliff after he looks into her coffin the second time. Heathcliff abandons his revenge once he begins to see her apparition—not the other way around.)

Second, Catherine emphasizes her existence through her potent words and actions. The depth of character that she exhibits during this dramatic confrontation appears incongruous with an imagined fiend. Put differently, the child ghost insists on the validity of her presence; her words suggest genuine sorrow and, hence, an actual past. Thus she bewails her plight, the details of which Lockwood remains presently ignorant: “‘It’s twenty years,’ mourned the voice, ‘twenty years, I’ve been a waif for twenty years!’” (*WH* 21). The repetition of the phrase “twenty years” emphasizes her plight. Catherine cannot rest; her need to connect with Heathcliff, her soul mate, plagues her spirit years after her physical death. As Jacqueline Simpson astutely observes, twenty years marks the amount of time that has elapsed since Catherine agreed to marry Edgar and thus “made herself ‘an exile, an outcast’ from her true world” (54). Finally, Catherine’s actions reinforce that she exists as a genuine entity, independent of Lockwood’s imagination. She shivers with cold like an “exile” banished out into the snow. The blood that pours from her body (and why would Lockwood imagine a ghost bleeding?), symbolizes the passion that keeps her soul alive on the grounds surrounding Wuthering Heights.

The emotions that Lockwood undergoes during this episode heighten the sense of the real. Even in sleep, for instance, Lockwood maintains his “man of science” persona. When he realizes that the window (the source of the vexatious tapping) remains soldered shut, he determines to solve the annoyance in the most efficient way possible. Taking

charge of the situation, he breaks his “knuckles through the glass, and stretch[es] an arm out to seize the importunate branch” (*WH* 20). The “horror of nightmare” strikes the sleeper so profoundly, however, that it quickly spurs the meek visitor to cruelty (20). Lockwood’s barbaric reaction to the mournful spirit indicates the extent of his fear: “I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes” (21). Throughout this scene, Lockwood maintains the stance that the encounter occurs in real time. He even plugs his ears to block out the wailing and “seemed to keep them closed above a quarter of an hour” (21). Similarly, the transition from unconsciousness to consciousness occurs so subtly that, without a careful reading of the passage, one might misconstrue the dream as no dream at all. (Lockwood rouses somewhere between the onset of sleep paralysis and his scream “of fright” (21). Brontë does not indicate the exact moment of awakening.) This (conceivable) confusion elevates the dream’s power. For the reader who mistakes this encounter as an occurrence in the material realm, Lockwood’s spectral visitation appears undeniable. Either way, the author achieves the same effect: Catherine’s ghost is real.

Lockwood’s ambivalent response in the aftermath of this nightmare reinforces its significance in the text. The “rational” mind of Lockwood suffers from this supernatural encounter. As time passes, he attempts to disguise his unease with sarcasm. When Catherine fails to materialize for Heathcliff, he remarks: “The spectre showed a spectre’s ordinary caprice; it gave no sign of being” (*WH* 24). Yet his initial response belies this mocking stance. While hurrying to dress, with the shock of seeing Catherine’s spirit still fresh in his memory, Lockwood declares to Heathcliff: “I’m not going to endure the persecutions of your hospitable ancestors again.... And that minx, Catherine Linton, or

Earnshaw, or however she was called—she must have been a changeling—wicked little soul. She told me she had been walking the earth these twenty years” (22). Soon afterwards, Lockwood dubs a cat “Grimalkin” (24) which, as Jacqueline Simpson points out, represents “a stock name for a witch’s cat” (54). In short, though Lockwood tries to suppress this paranormal encounter, we see that the foundation of his “conventional and orthodox attitude towards the supernatural” has, however temporarily, been shaken (Grudin 403).

The remarkable manner in which Heathcliff responds to Lockwood’s experience further stresses the dream’s authenticity. Heathcliff seems more surprised, for instance, to discover a guest in the room than to hear about the supernatural encounter. His whispered words (“Is anyone here?”) are surely meant for Catherine (*WH* 21). Thus, he expresses “rage” (excited, perhaps, by disappointment?) after his tenant reveals himself (23). Heathcliff’s attitude towards Lockwood provides more compelling evidence that the incident holds deeper significance. From the beginning of the story, Heathcliff shows nothing but contempt for his unwelcome guest. For example, after suffering an encounter with Heathcliff’s “four-footed fiends,” Lockwood observes: “I felt loath to yield the fellow further amusement, at my expense; since [Heathcliff’s] humour took that turn” (4, 5). This incident provides Heathcliff with ample opportunity to further deride his despised guest. Yet he does not ridicule Lockwood’s “frightful nightmare” as the ranting of a madman (22). On the contrary, he accepts Lockwood’s experience as genuine. The “violent emotion” that he suffers from this account appears through “his irregular and intercepted breathing” (23). Wholeheartedly convinced that Catherine has actually appeared, he implores her to materialize yet again.

Lockwood's nightmare serves a significant function in the novel. For one thing, it reveals Heathcliff as a man in agony. His misanthropic demeanor arises, not from devilish origins, but from pain and loss. (We also see this, to a much lesser extent, in Lucy Snowe. However, she affects an air of indifference—as opposed to Heathcliff's active cruelty—to *avoid* experiencing *additional* suffering.) The extent of Heathcliff's anguish surfaces in his passionate supplication to the departed ghost:

He got onto the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears.

“Come in! Come in!” he sobbed. “Cathy, do come. Oh do—*once* more! Oh! my heart's darling, hear me *this* time—Catherine, at last!”

(WH 24)

More significantly, this event also establishes that *Wuthering Heights* operates in a fluid world where the natural and the supernatural co-exist. Because we see Catherine's ghost emerge in the early stages of the novel, we understand right away that this love story defies the laws of time and space. Lockwood's nightmare, therefore, in all its brevity, reveals the novel's central conflict. Catherine and Heathcliff, though divided by the boundaries that separate the living from the dead, desire togetherness. The story cannot end until the main characters achieve this union.

Heathcliff's death at the end of the novel demands as much critical attention as does Lockwood's nightmare at the beginning. Its unifying purpose is obvious: The lovers' story commences with Catherine's ghostly intrusion upon the material realm, and it concludes with Heathcliff's departure for the spirit world. This event, however, transcends its function as a seemingly convenient narrative device. It also, via the

paranormal qualities that it exhibits, reinforces Catherine and Heathcliff's unnatural (and therefore unbreakable) connection. Unlike Lockwood's dream sequence, nobody witnesses Heathcliff's passing firsthand. Nonetheless, the aftermath of his death exudes an intensity on par with the nocturnal visitation scene in chapter three. Several factors contribute to its supernatural undertones. Nelly's demeanor, Heathcliff's physical state, and evidence of a ghostly encounter all point to a paranormal occurrence.

As with Lockwood's dream sequence, Brontë emphasizes the supernatural significance of this event by utilizing a skeptical witness whose logical perspective breaks down in the face of the irrational. Nelly, like Lockwood, strives to reject the paranormal. Throughout the text, however, she remains inconsistent in her beliefs: "by nature she is superstitious, and even has a capacity for psychic experiences which she resolutely rationalizes away, but the whole conscious effort of her mind is towards conventional morality and religion" (Simpson 52). Evidence of her clairvoyance manifests when she witnesses "Hindley's wraith" at the crossroads between Thrushcross Grange, Wuthering Heights, and Gimmerton (56). Jacqueline Simpson observes the "genuine psychic experience" of this event: "The apparition does forebode Hindley's doom; it comes at a time when Heathcliff has set him irrevocably on the road to ruin and death, even if death itself only occurs a year later" (56). Nelly exhibits her prophetic powers once again when she dreams of Heathcliff's funeral shortly before his untimely demise. As a character who desires to convey "conventional morality and religion," however, Nelly does not embrace her second sight (52).

During a conversation with Lockwood, Nelly expresses her admiration of the rational, learned mind when she describes herself as a "reasonable kind of body": "I have

undergone sharp discipline which has taught me wisdom; and then, I have read more than you would fancy, Mr. Lockwood. You could not open a book in this library that I have not looked into, and got something out of also” (WH 55). Acknowledgement of paranormal activity, she understands, clashes with the “wisdom” of the skeptic. Nonetheless, Nelly cannot quell her inherent ability to see into the “other” world. As a psychic in denial, therefore, her response to Heathcliff’s death proves as strikingly effective as does Lockwood’s reaction to his dream. When she first discovers the cadaver, Nelly mistakes the appearance of death for life. Only the logical part of her mind forces her to consider otherwise: “I could not think him dead—*but* his face and throat were washed with rain; the bed-clothes dripped, and he was perfectly still” (298; my emphasis). The servant’s extrasensory instincts refute what common sense dictates. Thus, she touches his skin for confirmation: “I could doubt no more—he was dead and stark!” (298). Still, however, Nelly remains unconvinced. Her actions contradict her words. Despite the physical facts, she *does* “doubt” Heathcliff’s death. Though she wants to believe that “the dead are at peace,” her attitude towards the cadaver suggests otherwise (300). Stirred by the intuitive impulse that Heathcliff somehow exists beyond the physical form placed before her, she experiences a “fit of cowardice” and does not want to remain alone with the body (298).

The state of Heathcliff’s remains, and the uncanny factors surrounding his death, further indicates otherworldly intervention. When Nelly espies his corpse, she relates its unnatural appearance: “His eyes met mine so keen and fierce...; and then, he seemed to smile” (WH 298). This macabre image, enhanced by the “life-like gaze of exultation” stamped upon his features, questions (rather than affirms) Heathcliff’s extermination

(298). This episode lacks the sense of finality so readily evident in many other nineteenth century death scenes. (Consider, for instance, Jude’s miserable and lonely end or Giles Winterborne’s last incoherent moments with the woman he loves—seen in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* and *The Woodlanders*, respectively). To provide a better understanding of how this affects our reading of Heathcliff’s demise, perhaps we should consider the death of another “villainous” character from Victorian literature: Quilp, the evil dwarf.

Quilp, of Charles Dickens’ *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), equals (perhaps even surpasses) Heathcliff in malevolence. He subjects his wife to psychological abuse, physically accosts whomever he chooses, and expresses the ominous desire to make Nell his ‘number two’ (*OCS* 48). His manipulative tactics—“cunning, trickery, and evasion”—serve to satiate his greedy nature (370). In other words, he enacts cruelty for cruelty’s sake. The violent manner in which he dies evokes a sense of poetic justice:

The strong tide filled his throat, and bore him on, upon its rapid current.

Another mortal struggle, and he was up again, beating the water with his hands, and looking out, with wild and glaring eyes that showed him some black object, he was drifting close upon. The hull of a ship! He could touch its smooth and slippery surface with his hand. One loud cry, now—but the resistless water bore him down before he could give it utterance, and, driving him under it, carried away a corpse. (525)

Here, Dickens reveals the “mortal struggle” between life and death. These vivid details allow the reader to experience the vitality ebbing from the victim. The reader does not



have that luxury in *Wuthering Heights*. By orchestrating Heathcliff's demise offstage, Brontë robs the event of closure. Since, we do not see the transition from life to death occur, we cannot say with authority that Heathcliff ceases "to be." Furthermore, Quilp degenerates into an object the instant he expires. Dickens emphasizes his state of nothingness by describing the "deserted carcass" as the "ugly plaything" of its environment; no longer of the living, the villain becomes an "it" (525). Heathcliff, however, maintains his identity even in death. Thus, his body refuses to adopt a peaceful countenance despite Nelly's well-intentioned effort. His eyes "would not shut—they seemed to sneer at my attempts, and his parted lips and sharp, white teeth sneered too!" (WH 298). Finally, Quilp's drowning reflects the callous and emotionally isolated life he chose to live. The aftermath of Heathcliff's mysterious passing, however, suggests the opposite.

Recalling Heathcliff's heartfelt appeal in chapter three, his "gaze of exultation" also suggests the ultimate triumph—reunion with Catherine. Several circumstances in this scene echo that of Lockwood's nightmare. These similarities intimate that Catherine has finally acquiesced to Heathcliff's plea and materialized in spirit form once more. The setting, for instance, remains the same. Both Heathcliff's death and Lockwood's nocturnal meeting occur in Catherine's room. The state of Heathcliff's body, furthermore, recalls Lockwood's brutal treatment of Catherine's spirit. The window, opened by Lockwood in dream, is found "flapping to and fro" by Heathcliff's body (WH 298). Furthermore, his hand rests—lacerated—on the very windowsill where the ghostly

Catherine bleeds on the bed sheets and begs for admittance.<sup>23</sup> The implication is clear: “Heathcliff’s spirit has fled, with its companion, out of the window to freedom” (Grudin 401).<sup>24</sup>

Lockwood’s nightmare and Heathcliff’s death frame the novel’s central conflict. Their significance, however, transcends this simple narrative function. They also establish the supernatural foundation of *Wuthering Heights*. Both scenes, with their paranormal imagery, insist on the endurance of life beyond death (or the coexistence of the spiritual and material realms). Catherine, who enters the text through Lockwood’s dream world, truly does exist. Heathcliff dies only to be reborn on another level of reality. Nelly’s announcement that some of the locals, including Joseph, have seen Catherine and Heathcliff wandering the area reinforces this notion: “[T]hat old man by the kitchen fire affirms he has seen two on ’em, looking out of his chamber window, on every rainy night since his death” (*WH* 299). Finally, the author brilliantly reasserts *Wuthering Heights*’ otherworldly foundation through the novel’s concluding paragraph.

Emily Brontë, subtly exercising her knowledge of folklore, forms Lockwood’s “final denial” of the supernatural in a way that actually encourages contradiction (Grudin 404):

Moths, especially when they appear in the early evening, have a strong folkloric association with the souls of the dead. Harebells are fairy

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<sup>23</sup> Jacqueline Simpson, who acknowledges this similarity as well, also notes parallels between Catherine’s death and Heathcliff’s: “His restlessness becomes acute towards the end of March, the season of Catherine’s death; he refuses food for four days, as she did at the onset of her illness; he dies in the bed he had shared with her in childhood, by the window where her ghost had appeared, and with his hand grazed by the flapping lattice, just as her wrist had been gashed by the pane in Lockwood’s vision” (59-60).

<sup>24</sup> According to Grudin, the window “represents the boundary between this world and the next” (398).

flowers, and, since the fairies themselves are often indistinguishable from the dead, suggest another connection with the very beliefs Lockwood is attempting to discredit. (404)

This authorial insistence that reality encompasses both the seen and the unseen ties directly into Catherine and Heathcliff's pagan beliefs, as they "show themselves in the crises of their lives to be passionate and wholehearted believers in ghosts and omens" (Simpson 51). The two events discussed above reveal two things: First, the world in which Catherine and Heathcliff live also incorporates the world of "ghosts and goblins" (*WH* 22). Second, the heart of this novel revolves on these lovers striving for reunion in this spiritual realm. In the following section, therefore, I will show how Catherine and Heathcliff's belief in this other world influences their actions throughout the text.

## II

Why do Catherine and Heathcliff behave the way they do? Monica Germanà, in her article entitled "The Ghost and the Brownie: Scottish Influences on Emily Brontë," outlines the Brontë family's knowledge of Scottish folklore and literature. She provides compelling evidence to support her thesis, supplemented with examples of Scottish influences apparent in Emily's work. Given that this culture impacted Emily's writing, Germanà's observation regarding the portrayal of the paranormal in Scottish literature deserves some consideration. Common preternatural beings include brownies, "ghosts, fairies and changelings" (Germanà 96). She continues:

The frequency and copiousness of such supernatural manifestations—typically associated with the haunted glens and castles of Scotland—suggests the lack of definitive boundaries between supernatural and 'real'

worlds. The realm of the unseen, possibly derived from the notion of a Celtic immanent Otherworld—in place of a transcendent Christian Heaven—bears a seamless continuity with the ordinary, palpable world of the seen. (96)

Emily Brontë's fictional world (as I have illustrated through my analysis of Lockwood's dream and Heathcliff's death) reflects this sense of fluidity. With *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë portrays the supernatural as a fictional construct of the protagonist's mind. In both cases, however, the author relies on her conception of "reality" to emphasize that her characters relate to the world in a psychologically consistent way.

Lucy Snowe trusts in the traditional concept of heaven. The soul does not continue to exist on earth after the body expires. Thus, when she realizes that she cannot live without love, she discards the fantastical (which perpetuates her loneliness) in an effort to discover happiness in the material world. Emily Brontë provides a different scenario. She creates two characters who, like Lucy, lead discontented lives. In a world where two realms co-exist, however, the road to happiness leads in a dissimilar direction. Catherine and Heathcliff wholeheartedly believe in the "realm of the unseen." Upon death, they expect to enter this "immanent Otherworld" where they may exist freely for all eternity—with no "Christian" judgments cast upon them—on the moors they dearly love. Catherine and Heathcliff's actions may baffle the reader. However, if we understand the characters' central philosophy and apply it to their behavior in various scenes, we uncover consistencies where inconsistencies first appear. In short, Emily Brontë "use[s] the supernatural, as Charlotte Brontë does, to sustain the narrative's psychological insights" (Smith 499).

As a teenager, Catherine forsakes heaven in favor of the supernatural, unseen realm of Wuthering Heights. In the following passage, she details a dream to Nelly in which she ascends to the Christian hereafter following her death: “[H]eaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy” (*WH* 71). (As we have already witnessed her ghost in chapter three, this episode suggests that she willfully chooses to haunt Wuthering Heights and its grounds.) During the same scene, she also articulates her belief in the power of soul mates. She and Heathcliff share “a dark, occult communion between kindred spirits” which neither marriage nor death may shatter (MacAndrew 184):

[S]urely you and every body have a notion that there is, or should be, an existence of yours beyond you.... Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff—he’s always, always in my mind—not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself—but, as my own being—so, don’t talk of our separation again—it is impracticable. (*WH* 72-73)

Catherine’s feelings for Heathcliff transcend love and, as she implies, time and space. Thus, though she would prefer to wed him, she recognizes that this is not essential—and certainly not practical since Hindley has “brought Heathcliff so low” (71). Viewed from this perspective, her marriage to Edgar has “nothing to do with her natural, permanent, and unbreakable attachment to Heathcliff” (MacAndrew 184). This event represents an ephemeral affair, whereas reunion with Heathcliff in the afterlife—as ghosts haunting Wuthering Heights together—represents an eternal utopia.

Catherine's inveterate belief in the otherworldly appears at its most potent during the delirium scene in chapter twelve. Here, her "feverish bewilderment" escalates to the point of "madness" as she perceives herself to be a child once again at Wuthering Heights (*WH* 108). In this altered state of mind, she divulges the full extent of her beliefs in "omens, folk-beliefs and ghost-lore" (Simpson 57). She seems convinced that "the room is haunted," declares that her dreams disturb her, and believes that a spirit has taken the place of her reflection in the mirror (*WH* 109). Indeed, Catherine's fearful reaction to her own image suggests that "[s]he thinks that she has seen her 'fetch,' a kind of double whose appearance at midnight predicts the death of the beholder" (Grudin 390). Her peculiar behavior also reveals her familiarity with witchcraft. Thus,

she watches Nelly picking up feathers, and her subconscious distrust of her expresses itself by imagining her an old woman "gathering elf-bolts to hurt our heifers" near "the fairy cave under Peninstone Crag." Later, discovering that Nelly has indeed "played traitor" and been her "hidden enemy," she tries to attack her physically, crying "You witch! So you do seek elf-bolts to hurt us!" ... Clearly Catherine shares the belief that to assault a witch will force her to take off her spell. (Simpson 57-58)<sup>25</sup>

During this episode Catherine also foresees her own haunting. In addressing the absent Heathcliff, she implores him to join her in the grave: "Heathcliff, if I dare you now, will you venture?... I'll not lie there by myself; they may bury me twelve feet deep... but I won't rest till you are with me" (*WH* 111-12). Prophetic as these words are, they also

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<sup>25</sup> Elf Bolts are arrowheads supposedly "manufactured by fairies and WITCHES for use in causing harm, shot at humans or livestock" (Franklin 76). According to Carole Silver, the aftereffects were severe: "The wound inflicted by an elf arrow could result in excruciating pain or put one in a deathlike trance or cause apparent death" (169).

emphasize the novel's central conflict. Neither Catherine nor Heathcliff will "rest" until their spirits reunite on the moors. The following excerpt touches on this theme: "She paused, and resumed with a strange smile, 'He's considering... he'd rather I'd come to him! Find a way then! not through that Kirkyard... You are slow! Be content, you always followed me!'" (112). According to Peter Grudin, "[t]his passage contains ... a prophecy of Heachliff's 'slow' and agonizing quest for reunion with his lost love.... the Kirk stands for a condition prior to this reunion: Heathcliff's death" (395).

Even during her final moments, Catherine's otherworldly perspective does not waiver: She perceives mortality as a mere rest stop on the way to her destination—the afterlife. True happiness awaits her on the moors in the spirit dimension. With this eternal paradise to look forward to, she accepts the "prison" which comprises her physical existence only as long as it gives her pleasure (*WH* 141). In childhood, this happiness amounts to outdoor excursions with Heathcliff: "But it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and the after punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at" (40). As an adult, Catherine finds material contentment in her marriage to Edgar and experiences joy in the time she spends with Heathcliff at Thrushcross Grange. The desire to quit her material body arises only when Edgar forces her to choose between himself and Heathcliff. Unwilling to "live divided," she chooses death (MacAndrew 184).

Catherine's seemingly incomprehensible decisions—first to marry Edgar and then to die—relate directly to her faith in spirits and the afterlife. When the physical world loses its worth, Brontë's heroine looks to regain the happiness of her youth by reconnecting with nature, her ultimate "home" with Heathcliff. 'Oh, I'm burning!' she

tells Nelly. ‘I wish I were out of doors—I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free... and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! ... I’m sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills’ (*WH* 111). To achieve the profound happiness of her childhood, however, Catherine recognizes that she must sever her present social and material bonds. Only death will provide her with the absolute freedom she requires. Her declaration to Edgar, therefore, boasts a victorious tone: ‘What you touch at present, you may have; but my soul will be on that hill-top before you lay hands on me again’ (113).

For Catherine, the “Otherworld” promises the kind of rapturous liberation that she and Heathcliff experienced as children “among the heather on those hills.” Her demeanor at this time reflects that of an individual who has thought long and deeply on a subject and feels no doubts or regrets. Consequently, her longing for death persists even as her health fails. During her final hours, for instance, she speaks to Nelly and Heathcliff of her imminent demise as a celebratory event:

I’m wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; but really with it, and in it. Nelly, you think you are better and more fortunate than I; in full health and strength—you are sorry for me—very soon that will be altered. I shall be sorry for *you*. I shall be incomparably beyond and above you all. (*WH* 141)

The evidence in the text suggests that Catherine does indeed approach her heaven as her physical body loses its vitality. Nelly, with her psychic intuition, unwittingly acknowledges the palpable presence of this “glorious world” as her patient’s health



declines. For Catherine's eyes, she explains, "appeared always to gaze beyond, and far beyond—you would have said out of this world" (137-38). Thus, we see the heroine's "unearthly beauty" shine through as she quickly approaches her conversion to ethereal form (137).

### III

Heathcliff, at first, seems a walking contradiction. If he loves Catherine as strongly as he professes, then why does he consciously strive to destroy those whom she cares for after her death? Why, when he then has the power to enact the most damage, does he suddenly forfeit his revenge? What appears incongruous on the surface, however, actually reflects the consistent—though complex—rationale of a man in grief. As we see throughout the novel, Heathcliff shares Catherine's faith in ghosts and the afterlife. He also, in a sense, shares her "soul." Yet *Wuthering Heights*' "villain" does not discard the material realm as easily as Catherine. He remains rooted in earthly pleasures such as physical love and revenge. When his lover dies, therefore, Heathcliff focuses on the tangibles. His retaliatory tactics against Hindley and Edgar reflect his desire for personal gratification. There remains, however, a greater underlying cause for these actions (and this very cause paradoxically serves to reconcile his actions to his love): His desire to rouse Catherine's ghost. In short, Heathcliff's callous and vengeful behavior against Catherine's loved ones springs primarily from two sources—his passion for Catherine and his belief in the supernatural.

Heathcliff's entire existence centers on Catherine. As Elizabeth MacAndrew observes: "When Cathy says she is Heathcliff, she states that she is his very soul, the force that *orients* him" (184; my emphasis). We therefore see "two sides of the same

ambivalent character”—the lover (of Catherine) and the hater (of his opposition) (Germanà 111). Crude manners and repeated acts of violence alienate Heathcliff from the other characters in the text. His appearance alone evokes references to the devil from Hindley; his barbaric nature leads Isabella to view him as a monster. Even the mild tempered Edgar feels compelled to call his rival “a most diabolical man” (WH 196). Fiendish as he appears, however, Heathcliff loves as strongly (and arguably more than) those who condemn him. One of the most poignant scenes in the novel, for instance, involves “the black villain” himself (99).

You loved me—then what *right* had you to leave me? What right—answer me—for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery, and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, *you*, of your own will, did it. I have not broken your heart—*you* have broken it—and in breaking it, you have broken mine. So much the worse for me, that I am strong. Do I want to live? What kind of living will it be when you—oh God! would *you* like to live with your soul in the grave? (142)

This passage, which occurs shortly before Catherine’s death, indicates the extent of the central characters’ spiritual and emotional interdependence. It also reveals that Heathcliff shares Catherine’s view of the afterlife. By declaring that “God” and “Satan” wield no power over their union, he effectively cements himself in the pagan world which Brontë has created. This quotation, however, also unearths a striking difference between the lovers with regard to their emphasis on the material (present) versus the hereafter (future).

Whereas Catherine looks fondly on her eventual happiness with Heathcliff, Heathcliff focuses only on the here and now. His obsession with the immediate moment (i.e. the earthly experience) explains why, as a boy, he tolerates Hindley's abuse without flinching, yet vows revenge the instant that he perceives the elder Earnshaw obstructing his chance to wed Catherine: "I'm trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back," he tells Nelly. "I don't care how long I wait, if I can only do it, at last. I hope he will not die before I do!" (*WH* 53). Consequently, Catherine's marriage to Edgar evokes the same wrathful feelings. Heathcliff's regard for Catherine, however, curbs him from acting on his vindictive impulses. Indeed, Catherine appears aware of the influence she exercises over her childhood companion. When Nelly expresses concern upon learning that Heathcliff resides with Hindley at Wuthering Heights, therefore, Catherine seems almost indifferent. Her brother, she declares, "can't be made morally worse than he is; and I stand between him and bodily harm" (88). In a later scene Heathcliff, notorious for his indulgence in violence, exhibits an impressive (and rare) stroke of self-command when he speaks to Nelly of Edgar: "I wish you had sincerity enough to tell me whether Catherine would suffer greatly from his loss. The fear that she would *restrains* me" (131; my emphasis).

Even after Catherine's body expires, her spirit continues to influence Heathcliff. Consumed with his passion for her, "his entire life [becomes] a search for reunion with her, a tormented wait for her to call him" (MacAndrew 184). The early stages of this "search" reveal the straightforward approach. When Nelly states that her mistress's spirit rests quietly in heaven, Heathcliff staunchly asserts the contrary. "Where is she? Not *there*—not in heaven—not perished—where?" (*WH* 147). Heathcliff's conviction that she

continues to exist despite her physical death manifests in his animated plea for her to appear in spectral form: “Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living! You said I killed you—haunt me, then! The murdered *do* haunt their murderers. I believe—I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad!” (147-48). Initially, his request meets with success. On the night of her burial, as Heathcliff unearths her grave, Catherine reassures him with her invisible presence.

I was on the point of attaining my object, when it seemed that I heard a sigh from some one above, close at the edge of the grave.... There was another sigh, close at my ear. I appeared to feel the warm breath of it displacing the sleet-laden wind. I knew no living thing in flesh and blood was by—but as certainly as you perceive the approach to some substantial body in the dark, though it cannot be discerned, so certainly I felt that Cathy was there, not under me, but on the earth. (256)

Catherine’s presence at this moment *should* soothe Heathcliff’s torment. However, Heathcliff obsesses over the corporeal. His insatiable need to have Catherine by his side leaves him dissatisfied with this transitory slippage between these two worlds. Thus he spends the remainder of his life attempting to break down the barrier between the living and the dead. When he cannot find Catherine in Wuthering Heights or on the moors, therefore, he attempts to provoke her spirit into materialization by lashing out at those closest to her heart.

Heathcliff’s determination to crush Hindley and Edgar crescendos after Catherine’s death. However, in underhandedly obtaining his foes’ property, Heathcliff

aims at more than personal gratification. For, “however complicated his revenge, it is she [Catherine] who is still the center of his tempestuous world” (MacAndrew 183). Angered by her abandonment and desperate to feel her presence, Heathcliff attempts to rouse Catherine’s spirit the only way that he knows how—by consciously injuring those whom she would protect while alive. When Hindley attempts to injure him on the night of Catherine’s funeral, therefore, Heathcliff’s response transcends that of self-preservation. In an instant, he reverses their positions. With Hindley lying unconscious from a knife wound, Heathcliff swiftly undertakes the role of attacker: “The ruffian kicked and trampled on him, and dashed his head repeatedly against the flags” (WH 157). Consumed with fury and desperation,<sup>26</sup> Heathcliff appears here at his most villainous. Isabella, perhaps subconsciously, recognizes her husband’s underlying motive in this scene when she later remarks to Hindley: “Catherine used to boast that she stood between you and bodily harm—she meant that certain persons would not hurt you, for fear of offending her. It’s well people don’t *really* rise from their grave, or, last night, she might have witnessed a repulsive scene!” (159). Eventually, Heathcliff’s anger culminates in drastic results. Hindley’s suspicious demise a few months later appears the direct result of his violent temper. Found in a drunken stupor, Catherine’s brother quickly “change[s] into carrion” under Heathcliff’s supervision (165).

The desire to rouse Catherine’s spirit also shapes his revenge against Edgar.

Uninterested in physically attacking “the slaving, shivering thing” Catherine married,

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<sup>26</sup> Heathcliff reflects on this scene later in the novel. Having just felt Catherine’s presence at the graveyard, he hastens to Wuthering Heights in search of her. “I remember, that accursed Earnshaw and my wife opposed my entrance. I remember stopping to kick the breath out of him, and then hurrying upstairs, to my room, and hers—I looked round impatiently—I felt her by me—I could *almost* see her, and yet I *could not*! I ought to have sweat blood then, from the anguish of my yearning, from the fervour of my supplications to have but one glimpse! I had not one. She showed herself, as she often was in life, a devil to me!” (256-57).

Heathcliff steadfastly schemes to injure Edgar through his most prized possession—his daughter (*WH* 102). When he finally traps Cathy inside Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff appears almost exultant in victory. Indeed, Cathy’s impassioned supplications to visit her father increase his determination to keep the two separated: “Miss Linton, I shall enjoy myself remarkably in thinking your father will be miserable; I shall not sleep for satisfaction” (242). By forcing her to marry Linton, furthermore, Heathcliff effectively robs Edgar of both child and property. Cathy, a mere pawn in Heathcliff’s plans, shrewdly discerns the true origin of his ruthlessness when she remarks: “Mr. Heathcliff ... your cruelty rises from your greater misery! You *are* miserable, are you not?” (254).

Heathcliff’s “greater misery” arises from Catherine’s refusal to materialize in spirit form. When she finally does appear before Heathcliff, the latter no longer experiences the need to seek revenge. On the contrary, the disgust he feels for his enemies’ children dwindles into a state of indifference:

“My old enemies have not beaten me—now would be the precise time to revenge myself on their representatives—I could do it; and none could hinder me—But where is the use? I don’t care for striking, I can’t take the trouble to raise my hand! ... I have lost the faculty of enjoying their destruction, and I am too idle to destroy for *nothing*.” (*WH* 287; my emphasis)

Catherine’s appearance (which commences and then gradually increases in frequency after he opens her coffin for the second time) also forces Heathcliff to recognize that he has erred in focusing on earthly matters. The sight of Catherine reminds him that the happiness which he seeks exists, not in the physical realm, but in the world beyond. On

perceiving Catherine's spectral form before him, he tells Nelly: "To-day, I am in sight of my heaven—I have my eyes on it—hardly three feet to sever me!" (WH 292).

In addition to abandoning his revenge, Heathcliff also forfeits the fundamental necessities for sustaining life—food and sleep. As he explains to Nelly, the physical realm no longer holds any interest for him:

"I have to remind myself to breathe—almost to remind my heart to beat! And it is like bending back a stiff spring ... it is by compulsion that I do the slightest act not prompted by one thought, and by compulsion, that I notice anything alive or dead, which is not associated with one universal idea ... I have a single wish, and my whole being and faculties are yearning to attain it. They have yearned towards it so long, and so unwaveringly, that I'm convinced it *will* be reached—and *soon*—because it has devoured my existence—I am swallowed in the anticipation of its fulfilment." (289)

Heathcliff's "single wish," to reunite with his dead love, results in a physical decline which mirrors Catherine's demise earlier in the novel. Nelly, as with Catherine, observes Heathcliff's sixth sense strengthen as his body weakens. Thus, the servant notes Heathcliff's attraction to an object invisible to all but himself which "was not fixed, either; his eyes pursued it with unwearied vigilance, and, even in speaking to me, were never weaned away" (295). Heathcliff, confident in the existence of his heaven on earth, and completely absorbed in his passion for Catherine, gradually allows the latter to draw him into the "spirit world" (MacAndrew 184).

#### IV

Reality in the world of *Wuthering Heights* encompasses both the seen and the unseen. In fact, “the novel’s power *lies* in Emily Brontë’s perception of the supernatural as an essential dimension of the actual” (Smith 516; my emphasis). These two realms collide during Lockwood’s nightmare and Heathcliff’s death: Both instances reveal the dead interacting with the living. Yet what does this achieve? On one level (the most obvious), these fantastic events promote the ultimate love story: Two lovers, separated by material circumstances, reunite in the afterlife. On a deeper level, however, the author also presents us with a compelling psychological study. “Psychology, which had preoccupied the eighteenth century, was becoming increasingly a subject of general and scientific interest” during the Victorian era (MacAndrew 152). With *Wuthering Heights*, we see that Brontë grasps the complexity of the psyche and portrays it in a unique, yet psychologically realistic way. Though Catherine and Heathcliff may act bizarrely, their words and decisions remain consistent with their central belief system. These characters understand the dual reality in which they live, and embrace it.

Though Brontë frames *Wuthering Heights* as a ghost story, her tale is not about ghosts per se. Rather it functions as a commentary on the power of the soul: “What it [the novel] reveals is not a social picture of nineteenth-century life on the Yorkshire moors, but the restless human spirit that cannot be content with the respectable humdrum of everyday” (MacAndrew 206). For Catherine and Heathcliff, apparitions and prescience (among others) represent an authentic facet of the everyday. With *Villette*, we see the exact opposite. Lucy Snowe struggles to *overcome* her emotional investment in the fantastic which, in terms of the reality that Charlotte Brontë constructs, represents the



imaginary. Although these characters indulge in an ideology which contrasts with Lucy's, Catherine and Heathcliff achieve the same emotional fulfillment as Charlotte's heroine. When circumstances in the physical realm do not satisfy their expectations, Catherine and Heathcliff seek contentment elsewhere. For Emily Brontë's lovers, first separated by marriage and then by death, "only a supernatural otherworld can resolve the conflicts they experience" (Grudin 391). Unhappily constricted in the corporeal world by social and material conventions, they relinquish their bodies so that their spirits may roam free together on the moors.

## Conclusion

*Villette* both commences and ends in a matter-of-fact style. Its simple, straightforward opening sentence describes a place of Lucy Snowe's childhood: "My godmother lived in a handsome house in the clean and ancient town of Bretton" (*Villette* 7). Its succinct, concluding lines refer to the material successes of three of Lucy's acquaintances: "Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life; so did Père Silas; Madame Walravens fulfilled her ninetieth year before she died. Farewell" (546). The bulk of the novel retains this realistic flavor, particularly with regard to the protagonist's psychological complexity. Supernatural imagery does, however, periodically intrude upon the narrative. And, at other times, the paranormal assumes a physical presence—namely in the form of a ghostly nun. Yet, with this novel, Charlotte Brontë refuses to base the fantastic in reality. Elements of the surreal originate from the combined loneliness and overactive imagination of the protagonist. Human actions (not mysterious powers) produce the appearance of the supposed resident ghost. While Charlotte Brontë's work may or may not speak for her own set of beliefs, it certainly offers a vivid portrayal of one system of Victorian thought—that of the supernatural as Imaginary.

In *Wuthering Heights* the preternatural requires no explanation. Apparitions materialize as genuine phenomena, dreams contain prophetic power, and second sight seems plausible. Even folkloric creatures make regular appearances through character discourse. Though characters like Nelly and Lockwood attempt to rationalize firsthand

experiences and secondhand accounts, the text itself does not promote this skeptical view. When Heathcliff dies at the end of the novel, therefore, he does not disappear from the narrative like Paul Emanuel in *Villette*. On the contrary, he continues to inhabit both Wuthering Heights and the surrounding countryside with his soul mate Catherine. As Nelly informs Lockwood, “the country folks, if you asked them, would swear on their Bible that he *walks*. There are those who speak to having met him near the church, and on the moor, and even within this house” (*WH* 299). Emily Brontë’s complex novel of love, death, and revenge advocates a nineteenth century viewpoint opposite to that expressed in *Villette*. This work clearly represents the Victorian perspective of the supernatural as Real.

Charlotte and Emily Brontë, in the novels mentioned above, create contrasting versions of reality. Even so, the supernatural permeates both of these narratives. To reconcile this apparent contradiction, we must recognize that the Brontës include otherworldly manifestations which conform *specifically* to the rules that govern their respective realities. Whereas the paranormal surfaces via the imagination (and physically, in the form of a hoax) in *Villette*, therefore, ghosts literally haunt the moors of *Wuthering Heights*. Moreover, despite these fundamental differences, the supernatural performs the same function in both novels. Whether Imaginary or Real, it contributes to the psychological realism of the novels’ protagonists: Lucy, Catherine, and Heathcliff.

Lucy Snowe, suffering from continual isolation, suppresses her emotions through her vivid imagination. Her response to the ghostly nun—a force outside of her control—demonstrates this internal struggle. As she discovers the courage to acknowledge her feelings (symbolized by the attack against the nun) and express them to Paul, the

supernatural phenomena subsequently fade from the text. Unlike Lucy, Catherine and Heathcliff do not restrain their feelings. On the contrary, they parade their emotions before the world—unconcerned with how their behavior may affect those around them. Their attitude toward spirits and the unseen realm mirrors the nature of their eternal devotion to one another. Accordingly, their thoughts and actions reflect their ultimate desire: reunion in the afterlife. Thus we see that, in *Villette*, Lucy requires an earthly event—an engagement to Paul—to aid in her discovery of true happiness. On the other hand, Catherine and Heathcliff require an otherworldly solution—death. In both instances, the Brontës draw on aspects of the supernatural to illuminate the credibility of their characters' psychology. The manner in which Lucy, Catherine, and Heathcliff respond to the supernatural in their respective realities plays an integral role in their individual journey toward emotional fulfillment.

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