

Doctoral Dissertation

Diet, Dress and Disease:
Images of Female Alienation in Charlotte Brontë's Works

食べ物、衣服、そして病：
シャーロット・ブロンテの作品における女性疎外のイメージ

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Introduction

When non-British people read Charlotte Brontë's novels, they may feel some embarrassment. This is because Brontë represents foreign countries with prejudice and sometimes her depiction is harsh and cynical. The typical passage which reveals Brontë's insularism is given below. It is the scene of Jane Eyre's farewell to her students at Morton school.

I stood with the key in my hand, exchanging a few words of special farewell with some half-dozen of my best scholars: as decent, respectable, modest, and well-informed young women as could be found in the ranks of the British peasantry. And that is saying a great deal; for after all, the British peasantry are the best taught, best mannered, most self-respecting of any in Europe: since those days I have seen paysannes and Bäuerinnen; and the best of them seemed to me, ignorant, coarse, and besotted, compared with my Morton girls. (*Jane Eyre* 331-32)

She innocently declares that British peasantry is the best in Europe. The idea of British superiority and foreign inferiority is a widespread notion among Victorian people. The British Empire needed this principle to keep domestic prosperity.

Patriotism is one of the means of state-sponsored project to

consolidate the national power. From the end of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, the middle class gradually attained economic and political power. The Industrial Revolution favoured their economic success and it enabled them to enter the upper class. Thus, they became influential both economically and politically, so it was believed that the prosperity of the middle class had led to domestic stability, which in turn sustained colonial management. Therefore, the British Empire needed to establish the authority of the middle class. Jingoistic discourse was employed for this aim. The moral standard of middle class society became the backbone of Britain, so the things or behaviour acceptable to the middle-class moral code were praised as “British” while whatever deviated from it was called “foreign” and was to be excluded from society. In this thesis, we interpret “foreign” in a broader sense. It suggests not only something or someone coming from other countries but also a misfit in society. “Foreignness” is a form of deviation from the Victorian patriarchal system.

The important thing is that, such social condition was much related to feminist arguments at that time. “Victorian feminism” was deeply involved with jingoism and middle class values. We enclose the term “Victorian feminism” in quotation marks because the feminism of the Victorian era is quite different from the modern one. The biggest difference is that “Victorian feminism” postulated women’s sexual purity. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Evangelical movement stressed the sinfulness of indulgence in sensual pleasure and this ideology was especially adapted to middle-class women. They were thought to be

highly moral because they were supposed to be indifferent to sexuality. Today, “sexuality” is a wide ranging term, but we define it as “the things people do, think, and feel that are related to their sexual desire,” according to the definition of *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. Victorian people believed that women should not have anything to do with sexual matters, and in fact, the famous Victorian doctor, William Acton declared that “the majority of women are not very much troubled with sexual feelings of any kind” and “the best mothers, wives and managers of households know little or nothing of sexual indulgences” (Acton 213). Women writers at that time were influenced by this medical discourse and utilised it for supporting their feminist agenda. They argued for women’s independence and freedom in the public sphere on the ground that women were morally and intellectually superior to men because they were less sexually passionate. In their instructive writings, Maria Edgeworth, Hannah More and other “feminist” writers stressed the importance of women’s role in moral improvement. Their arguments were based on the ideology of women’s sexual purity.

To emphasise their moral superiority, Victorian feminists often used “foreign” images. Antoinette Burton suggests that British feminists at that time emphasised their chastity and moral superiority by contrasting English with colonial women (Burton 137). For example, Mary Wollstonecraft referred to the harem to imply moral and intellectual dullness.

Children, he [Rousseau] truly observes, form a much more

permanent connexion between married people than love.

Beauty he declares will not be valued, or even seen, after a couple have lived six months together; artificial graces and coquetry will likewise pall on the senses: why then does he say, that a girl should be educated for her husband with the same care as for an eastern harem?

I now appeal from the reveries of fancy and refined licentiousness to the good sense of mankind, whether, if the object of education be to prepare women to become chaste wives and sensible mothers, the method so plausibly recommended in the foregoing sketch, be the one best calculated to produce those ends? (Wollstonecraft ch.5)

Here “an eastern harem” implies an objective to which moral and intellectual British women should not aspire to.

The belief that Eastern people were more sensual, lethargic and hedonistic than Westerners was a very common idea in contemporary Europe. Christoph Meiners, an the eighteenth-century German philosopher, influenced by Montesquieu’s theory of climate, divided nations into “Celtic” and “Oriental” types and argued that Eastern or Southern (Oriental) women were passionate and promiscuous while Western or Northern (Celtic) women were virtuous (Brunschwig 269). His work was translated into English and published in England in 1808, and it had great impact on British contemporaries. Edward Said has exposed the implication hidden in this prejudice. In *Orientalism*, he says that Europeans imposed unfavourable tendencies that they should keep

away from—such as indecency and filthiness—on the “Oriental” people. Only by doing so, Europeans were able to construct their identity as a civilised nation. In Britain, people often contrasted themselves not only with the Eastern but also with people in southern European countries like southern France, Spain and Italy to emphasise their own moral superiority.

Thus, Victorian feminists came to think that they were superior to the women of any other country. Here is an example from a conduct book by one of Victorian imperial feminists¹.

Still I do believe that women of England are not surpassed by those of any other country, for their clear perception of the right and the wrong of common and familiar things, for their reference to principle in the ordinary affairs of life, and for their united maintenance of that social order, sound integrity, and domestic peace, which constitute the foundation of all that is most valuable in the society of our native land. (Ellis 35)

Charlotte Brontë was not free from being contaminated by such an ideology: she believed in the national/racial superiority of Britain. Enid Duthei says that Brontë’s “insular sense of superiority” (Duthei 112) is inherited from Thackeray, one of the most influential novelists for Brontë, and Tory newspapers which were read in her family circle. So when she went to Belgium to study French,

[s]he brought with her the opinions she had imbibed, from childhood onwards, in Tory atmosphere of Haworth

parsonage. Prominent among these was the conviction of British superiority, raised to the intensity of passion by her pride in triumph of her hero Wellington in Peninsula and Waterloo. (Duthei 105)

Her insularity is clearly shown in harsh descriptions of foreign women in the novels. For example, Lucy Snowe runs her Labassecourian students down as follows.

Severe or continuous mental application they could not, or would not, bear: heavy demand on the memory, the reason, the attention, they rejected point-blank. Where an English girl of not more than average capacity and docility would quietly take a theme and bind herself to the task of comprehension and mastery, a Labassecourienne would laugh in your face, and throw it back to you with the phrase,—“Dieu, que c’est difficile! Je n’en veux pas. Cela m’ennuie trop. [Heavens, this is difficult! I don’t want to do it. It’s too boring.]” (*Villette* 83)

So far, the critics have tended to regard Brontë as a radical feminist as a matter of course. She certainly was that, but she was a conservative “Victorian feminist” as well. We should think her as a woman novelist who has inconsistencies rather than a feminist of an independent mind: she is both radical and conservative.

Brontë’s heroines are all British middle-class gentlewomen. Their racial, national and class identities are inseparable from their construction of selfhood. However, what is interesting is that there are

always foreigners who affect the heroines' way of thinking. Brontë's heroines often confess that they feel themselves alienated from the Victorian middle-class society when they realise their "unfeminine" desire. Foreigners or foreign elements are projections of their sense of alienation. "Foreignness" in Brontë's works is very complex: it represents both anxiety for their desire and its possible realisation of it. This thesis tries to examine the conflict between female desire and Victorian ideology in Brontë's novels through analyses of colonial and foreign images. It will show not only how the foreign images work as a feminist strategy but also how they unsettle and reconstruct the heroines' subjectivity in her novels. For this aim, we will focus on three images: diet, dress and disease. What heroines eat and dress themselves in is a metaphorical manifestation of their inner selves. Similarly, her physical state exposes her hidden desires. These images work for the heroines as a conscious or unconscious assertion of themselves and interestingly, they are often presented in foreign and colonial discourses. That is, the heroine's self-representation is always influenced by foreign factors. This thesis will deal mainly with three novels: *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and *Villette*. Because we focus on heroines, we will omit *The Professor* whose protagonist is a man.

We will now explain the significance of this thesis. Over the past few years, several studies have been made on the post-colonial feminism of Brontë's novels, but most of them are concerned with Bertha, the Creole woman in *Jane Eyre*. Strangely, little attention has been given to Brontë's other novels although they are filled with foreign images.

Moreover, past studies have often just pointed out her racial discrimination without investigating further into her national consciousness. This thesis, on the other hand, does not take the position of facilely criticising her discriminative expressions. It will study the effects of foreign images on her works and the formation of the characters. As a study based on this view, there are three significant points to be made in this thesis.

Firstly, we are going to deal with Brontë's works inclusively, not only the masterpieces but also the juvenilia. Her early writings, the so-called "Tales of Angria" are so complicated and fragmental that very few attempts have been made to study them. In her childhood, she began to write a series of stories about the imaginary kingdom called "Angria" with her brother Branwell. There are two Byronic heroes in these stories: Alexander Percy and the Duke of Zamorna. John Maynard points out that Percy is a character who is closest to Branwell, and Zamorna is a projection of Charlotte's own desire (Maynard 11). The story-making continued to give her an outlet for her secret desires and overflows of imagination. The pioneering study of the Angrian stories is Fanny E. Ratchford's *The Brontë's Web of Childhood* in 1941. She brought Brontë's early writings into the limelight for the first time, but she seems to connect the juvenilia with the latter works too easily: she simply listed the similarities of plots and characters between the early writings and the masterpieces. Christine Alexander, on the other hand, rejects the kind of approach that is focused only on finding similarities between Brontë's novels and her juvenilia. She tries to follow the thematic transition from

adolescence to maturity in her great work, *The Early Writing of Charlotte Brontë* in 1983. We will follow Alexander's approach, but especially focus on how imperialism and Romanticism, particularly that of Byron, have been digested in the process of maturing. Moreover, early writings are very important especially for the study of imperialism because the scene of the tales of Angria is set in Africa. The story begins with the colonisation by the twelve British adventurers in Africa in the kingdom called Ashantee. It is helpful to see the foreign setting and characters in early writings for the understanding of imperial feminism in Brontë's novels.

Secondly, this thesis illuminates the influence of Byron on her female characters. As is generally known, Brontë is greatly influenced by George Gordon Byron, and her archetypal heroes are often called "Byronic." However, the examination of Byronism has been made only about the heroes and there has been no study of Byron's effect on the heroines in spite of the fact that Byron's passionate heroines of Greece, Turkey and Spain (which constitute Byron's idea of the East) are certainly at the root of Brontë's creation of her heroines. So we will inquire into the female Byronism of Brontë's heroines, comparing them with Byron's Oriental women.

Lastly, we deal with Brontë's works in the light of the historical context. So far critics have tended to give too much stress on the Brontës' isolation from society. According to Joanne Wilkes, after the death of her sisters, Charlotte wrote a biographical notice for the new editions of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, "which offered

impressions of their personalities and focussed attention on the isolation and brevity of their lives” and thus “the legend of the Brontë had begun to shape: the mysterious, closely bonded sisters, producing works of literary genius in a wild and lonely Yorkshire village” (Wilkes 41).

However, Christine Alexander points out that they were interested in the current economic and political questions such as the British colonisation and the Catholic Emancipation. They read magazines and newspapers and often discussed the political and cultural issues of the day. Furthermore, Brontë and her sister Emily had studied in Belgium. As Brontë’s interest in social problems and experiences in a foreign country are clearly projected on her works and the creation of her heroines, we can never examine her works without considering their social and cultural background.

Taking this approach, we pay attention to the social climate at the time. The daily life of the Victorians was closely connected with the Empire through common groceries such as sugar, tea, and cotton. These “exotic” things brought Victorians not only drastic changes in their ways of life but also a new way of looking at their own culture. They came to know about foreign regions and cultures from these colonial commodities. In the process of assimilation of other cultures, they compared them with their own and created a new culture of Britishness. To consider the social background, we are going to refer to contemporary poets and novelists. There are many writers who influenced and were influenced by Brontë, such as Byron, Shelley and Gaskell. Their works give us insights into the social conditions and women’s situations at that time.

Now we will explain the significance of the images which are dealt with in this thesis. As we discussed above, we will focus on the images of diet, dress and disease. They cannot be separated from a woman's life of the time as well as from foreign relations in Britain. We try to analyse how these three images work as representations of the heroines' alienation. In the first place, the food image shows the resemblance between the system of colonial food production and patriarchal social structure. We will illuminate how the heroines challenge male authority by examining their choice of food in the context of production and consumption of colonial diet in the British Empire.

In the second place, dresses are deeply concerned with female self-expression. It is hinted in what the dress is made of and who makes them. We focus on the historical background of the colonial trade of fabrics and the situation of working-class people such as dressmakers, laundresses and mill-workers. Colonial domination and class control are lurking under the beautiful dresses of Victorian "respectable" ladies and these images are directly associated with patriarchal oppression in Brontë's novels.

In the third place, the image of disease is connected with women's sense of alienation. Interestingly, Brontë's depiction of disease closely reflects the imperial medical geography. We focus on two kinds of diseases: infectious and the nervous diseases. According to the Victorian medical discourse, infections and plagues are "Eastern" while the nervous disease is "British." Women writers compared their anxiety for the actualisation of the "unfeminine" desire for self-expression with the

Eastern pathogenic space because they thought that their desire and ambition should have been excluded from British “respectable” society. Brontë at first uses the image of the Eastern plague as a symbol of women’s deviation from Victorian society. However, the image is intertwined with “British” nervous disease. The border of “foreignness” and “Britishness” becomes ambiguous and that means the possibility of developing a new relation with the world.

Thus, by analysing these three images, the metaphoric correspondence of foreignness and female alienation will be illuminated. This thesis will discuss this matter with detailed analyses of the images in the novels and inquiry into the social and cultural context behind them.

Chapter 1

Brontë's "Byronic Heroine"

“Don’t be startled at the name of Byron.” —Charlotte Brontë’s letter

1-1: Byronism of Brontë’s Heroines

When she was eighteen years old, Charlotte Brontë wrote a letter to her best friend Ellen Nussey, answering her request to recommend books to read.

You ask me recommend some books for your perusal; I will do so in as few words as I can. If you like poetry let it be first rate, Milton, Shakespeare, Thomson, Goldsmith, Pope (if you will, though I don’t admire him) Scott, Byron, Campbell, Wordsworth and Southey. Now Ellen don’t be startled at the name of Shakespeare, and Byron. Both these were great Men and their works are like themselves, You will know how to chuse the good and avoid the evil, the finest passages are always the purest, the bad are inevitably revolting: you will never wish to read them over twice, Omit the Comedies of Shakespeare and Don Juan, perhaps the Cain of Byron though the latter is a magnificent Poem and read the rest fearlessly. (Letters 130)

An ordinary Victorian gentlewoman must have been “startled at the name

of Byron.” George Gordon Byron placed great importance on natural impulses in sexual affairs and physical reality in love. The society at the time did not accept his idea, and he in turn criticised its prudish hypocrisy and resisted the current social mores. His life and works were so passionate, sexually candid, and immoral that his books were thought to be inappropriate for Victorian ladies. Consequently defenders of middle-class morality carefully kept themselves away from Byron’s “extreme” works.

Despite the prevailing view of Byron, Brontë was able to read freely his poems, dramas and his biography in her father’s library. Today, we cannot discuss his works without referring to his profound influence on her. John Maynard points out that her “[e]arly letters and creative writing refer to or imitate outright *Childe Harold*, *The Corsair*, *Manfred*, and *Cain* as well as *Don Juan*” and she also “obtained a full impression of the glamour of Byron himself” (Maynard 10). Brontë’s dark, furious, passionate (and mostly ugly, but only the heroine can recognise his special charm) heroes such as the Duke of Zamorna in the tales of Angria, Rochester in *Jane Eyre* and Paul Emanuel in *Villette* are called “Byronic heroes.” However, it is strange that his influence on her has been recognized only in her heroes: there are few references to her female characters until now².

Caroline Franklin defines the Byronic heroines as “a creature of appetite and will”(Franklin 126), and Byron portrayed such female characters only in the Eastern or primitive context. According to Franklin, Byron’s Oriental heroines are unconstrained by the

considerations of conventional femininity and take the sexual initiative because they do not know “the meaning of modesty or Christian marriage” (Franklin 97). In his books, the female protagonists of Spain, Turkey, Greece and South Sea Islands do not try to conceal their passion for lovers and act according to their own will. Byron’s idea of love and femininity also has great importance on her creation of her heroines. All the heroines in Brontë’s novels are Western women, but they clearly inherit these inclinations from Byron’s Oriental girls. We call these characteristics as the female Byronism, and examine it focusing on three points: passion, “real” femininity freed from the conventional bipolarity of the angel and the demon, and the reversal of gender-roles. Female Byronism is, in other words, unacceptable desire of women in the Victorian middle-class society. There is the root of the Brontë’s heroines’ sense of alienation in it. It is what they aspire to, but at the same time, it causes severe conflict with the Victorian norm.

1-1-1: Passion

During the nineteenth century, the idea that women are passionless spread rapidly through religious and biological discourses. This ideology was constructed by male authority, but women feminist writers like Hannah Moore and Sarah Ellis employed it for asserting women’s moral superiority. Even Mary Wollstoncraft, who is known as a radical feminist claimed that women were less passionate than men were in order to emphasise women’s moral and intellectual power. According to Nancy Cott, “By replacing sexual with moral motives and determinants, the

ideology of passionlessness favoured women's power and self-respect" (Cott 228). This ideology surely elevated women from the position of "the weaker sex," but at the same time, a wrong notion about women's sexuality became fixed as a result. Byron, as a Romantic individualist, attacked this prudish idea and celebrated female libido. Caroline Franklin says Byron's *Don Juan* is "the voice of opposition to this bourgeois, protestant ideology of femininity" (Franklin 118-9).

Don Juan opens with the illicit love between Juan and Julia, a Spanish lady who is "married, charming, chaste, and twenty-three" (*Don Juan* 1:59). As a victim of an arranged marriage, she meekly accepts her role of a virtuous wife, but her passion cannot be always curbed:

Her eye (I'm very fond of handsome eyes)
 Was large and dark, suppressing half its fire
 Until she spoke, then through its soft disguise
 Flash'd an expression more of pride than ire,
 And love than either; and there would arise
 A something in them which was not desire,
 But would have been, perhaps, but for the soul
 Which struggled through and chasten'd down the whole
 (*Don Juan* 1:60)

Julia meets Juan and falls in love with him. At first, she "[resolves] to make/ The noblest efforts for herself and mate,/ For honour's, pride's, religion's, virtue's sake" (*Don Juan* 1:75), but she soon thinks "of the folly of all prudish fears" (*Don Juan* 1:107). Byron explains that it is ridiculous to restrain passion;

But passion most dissembles, yet betrays
 Even by its darkness; as the blackest sky
 Foretells the heaviest tempest, it displays
 Its workings through the vainly guarded eye,
 And in whatever aspect it arrays
 Itself, 't is still the same hypocrisy;
 Coldness or anger, even disdain or hate,
 Are masks it often wears, and still too late.

(Don Juan 1:73)

They love each other deeply but when their love affair is exposed, Julia is sent to a convent and Juan leaves Spain. She writes a letter before his departure.

“I loved, I love you, for this love have lost
 State, station, heaven, mankind's, my own esteem,
 And yet can not regret what it hath cost,
 [. . .]

My breast has been all weakness, is so yet;
 But still I think I can collect my mind;
 My blood still rushes where my spirit's set,
 As roll the waves before the settled wind;
 My heart is feminine, nor can forget—
 To all, except one image, madly blind;
 So shakes the needle, and so stands the pole,
 As vibrates my fond heart to my fix'd soul.”

(Don Juan 1:192-6)

Images of rushing blood, rolling waves, the needle of a compass fixed on the pole suggest unrestrainable passion which Byron respects. Although her love for Juan is adulterous, its strength and purity are implied in the seal: “The seal a sun-flower; ‘Elle vous suit partout,’/The motto cut upon a white cornelian;/The wax was superfine, its hue vermilion” (*Don Juan* 1:198). A sunflower is traditionally a symbol of ardent love. A white cornelian and vermilion wax suggest Julia’s purity and passion. Byron represents the meaninglessness of the prudish restraint of natural emotion through Julia.

Julia’s unrestrainable feeling which has no regard for social mores is a foreshadowing of Byron’s ideal heroine, Haidée. The narrator calls her “Nature’s bride,” and “Passion’s child” (*Don Juan* 2:202). Her natural response to passion is what Byron esteemed highly. She knows nothing about prudish shyness and amatory tricks.

Haidée spoke not of scruples, ask’d no vows,
Nor offer’d any; she had never heard
Of plight and promises to be a spouse,
Or perils by a loving maid incurr’d;
She was all which pure ignorance allows,
And flew to her young mate like a young bird;
And, never having dreamt of falsehood, she
Had not one word to say of constancy.

(*Don Juan* 2:190)

Urged by a passionate impulse, Juan and Haidée have sexual intercourse. The narrator beautifully depicts the scene and says that they are “[s]o

loving and so lovely—till then never, [. . .] such a pair/ Had run the risk of being damned for ever” (*Don Juan* 2:194). Thus, Byron hails unconstrained heroines, and at the same time, criticises the defenders of morals who will declare them to be “damned for ever.”

Brontë also creates passionate heroines who have little regard for conventional morality. Mina Laury, one of the typical “Byronic heroine” of Brontë’s juvenile works, becomes a mistress of the Duke of Zamorna. When Lord Hartford asks her to marry him, she refuses and says,

“[. . .] Do you think, Hartford, I will tell you what feelings I had for him? No tongue could express them; they were so fervid, so glowing in their colour that they effaced everything else. I lost the power of properly appreciating the value of the world’s opinion, of discerning the difference between right and wrong. [. . .]” (“Mina Laury” 33)

She thinks that if she had met him before she knew Zamorna, she would have accepted his proposal and “[make] it the glory of [her] life to cheer and brightened [his] hearth” (“Mina Laury” 33). However, she rejects the conventional happiness and chooses to devote herself to her dishonest lover.

Another heroine of the tales of Angria, Caroline Vernon is very similar to Mina Laury. Caroline, the illegitimate daughter of Alexander Percy and the ward of the Duke of Zamorna, is a girl who is just entering adolescence. When Zamorna tempts her to be his mistress, Caroline decides to follow her passion:

He caressed her fondly, lifted with his fingers the heavily

curls which were lying on her neck. Caroline began to feel a new impression. She no longer wished to leave him; she clung to his side. Infatuation was stealing over her. The thought of separation and return to Eden [the place where Caroline has been brought up] was dreadful. [. . .] She feared; she loved. Passion tempted, conscience warned her; but, in a mind like Miss. Vernon's, conscience was feeble opposed to passion. ("Caroline Vernon" 434)

"Caroline Vernon" closely describes woman's sexual reality. Margaret Blom states that "Caroline Vernon" is "a study of young girl's awakening to sexual desire" and says, "[t]he skillful portrayal of Caroline's fluctuation between passionate ecstasy and fear foreshadows the similarly ambivalent responses of Jane Eyre, Shirley Keeldar, and Lucy Snowe to their aggressive lovers" (Blom 55-57). This story shows how Brontë was interested in depicting woman's passion. Also, it shows her rejection of conventional morality as Christine Alexander points:

"Caroline Vernon" has been called Charlotte's "last Byronic fling." The creation of yet another heroine dominated by passion was a bold move by the twenty-three-year-old Charlotte, who must have been aware of society's disgust at openly expressed passion of Claire Clairmont and Caroline Lamb, whose name may have suggested that Caroline Vernon. Obviously her story was not meant for public consumption, but it clearly shows that lack of interest in conventional morality which brought her such condemnation on

publication of *Jane Eyre*. (C. Alexander 196)

The propensity of these women in juvenilia to have priority of passion to social moral code is inherited by female characters in later masterpieces. For example, when Jane Eyre begins to love his master, she tries to give up the love for Rochester only to realise that she cannot stop loving him:

Did I say, a few days since, that I had nothing to do with him but to receive my salary at his hands? Did I forbid myself to think of him in any other light than as a paymaster?

Blasphemy against nature! Every good, true, vigorous feeling I have gathers impulsively round him. I know I must conceal my sentiments: I must smother hope; [. . .]. I must, then, repeat continually that we are for ever sundered:—and yet, while I breathe and think, I must love him. (*Jane Eyre* 149)

Despite the difference of class, she “must love him,” and more importantly, she thinks her feelings as “good, true, vigorous.” Even though the opinion of society would disparage her love, it is more valuable for her.

1-1-2: “Real” Femininity

Brontë describes how utterly men fail to see the “real” women in *Shirley*.

“If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about woman: they do not read them in a true light:

they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend. [. . .] ” (*Shirley* 296)

As Shirley complains, for Victorian gentlemen, women have been something either more or less than human, never fully or simply human. According to John Maynard, Victorians had “the notion that women were either angels or fallen creatures” (Maynard 3). They polarised femininity into spirituality and sensuality, and would not see the “real” woman. The term “real” femininity is used to describe female subjectivity freed from patriarchal stereotypes³.

The ideal image of an angel is, needless to say, fixed by Coventry Patmore’s “The Angel in the House.” This poem spread the idea that women should be modest, obedient, and pure. With their spiritual superiority emphasised, women have become, so to speak, a bodiless existence. Gilbert and Gubar say that such an angelic image is connected with woman’s figurative death. They argued that becoming an angel means “the surrender of her self” and the life “is really life of death, a death-in-life” (Gilbert and Gubar 25). Thus, the idea of “the angel in the house” forced woman to be a living corpse.

On the other hand, woman’s image as the fallen creature originates in the Bible. It says women should keep silent and submit to men because “Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and becomes transgressor” (*The Holy Bible* Timothy. 2:11-14). The image of woman as a transgressor is reinforced by Milton’s Eve. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton declares that woman is a nuisance on

Earth:

[. . .] O why did God,
 Creator wise, that peopl'd highest Heav'n
 With Spirits Masculine, create at last
 This noveltie on Earth, this fair defect
 Of Nature, and not fill the World at once
 With Men as Angels without Feminine,
 Or find some other way to generate
 Mankind? [. . .] (*Paradise Lost* 9:888-95)

Virginia Woolf criticised his misogynic description and insists that women should “look past Milton’s bogey” (Woolf 112) to get back their life.

Brontë strongly condemned the polarisation of the woman image. In *Villette*, she shows her anger about it in the scene of the gallery. One day, Lucy sees two pictures at the gallery. One is titled “Cleopatra.”

It represented a woman, considerably larger, I thought, than the life. [. . .] She was, indeed, extremely well fed: very much butcher’s meat—to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids—must she have consumed to attain that breadth and height, that wealth of muscle, that affluence of flesh. She lay half-reclined on a couch: [. . .] She had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa. She ought likewise to have worn decent garments; a gown covering her properly, which was not the case: out of abundance of material—seven-and-twenty yards, I should say, of

drapery—she managed to make inefficient raiment. (*Villette* 200)

The flesh, lassitude and a loose dress of the model of this picture are stressed. All of them remind the reader of the women in a seraglio. This voluptuous Cleopatra represents the woman's image as a sensual being. Lucy regards this picture as a "coarse and preposterous canvass" (*Villette* 200).

The other one, the pictures of four-piece set, is named "La vie d'une femme," and they represent women as angels. Lucy thinks that these four angels are "[a]s bad in their way as the indolent gypsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers," because they are "grim and gray as burglars," "cold and vapid as ghosts," and "insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless, nonentities" (*Villette* 202). Lucy does not accept image of a ghost-like angel as well as that of sensual Cleopatra. Brontë's heroines try to release themselves from these patriarchal prejudices. They hope to be "a real woman."

In creating a heroine who is neither an angel nor a fiend, Brontë must have referred to the female characters of Byron. Frank Riga suggests that Haidée in *Don Juan* "transgresses traditional constructions of femininity" (Riga 6) because she is both sensual and innocent. When she is introduced, she wears oriental garments which remind contemporary Western people of the mistress in a harem:

Her locks curl'd negligently round her face,
But through them gold and gems profusely shone:
Her girdle sparkled, and the richest lace

Flow'd in her veil, and many a precious stone
 Flash'd on her little hand; but, what was shocking,
 Her small snow feet had slippers, but no stocking.
 (*Don Juan* 2:121)

The rich ornaments such as gold, gems and veil are shown in the Western paintings and literature which describe the women in seraglio.

In spite of that, the narrator calls her “the lady of the cave” (*Don Juan* 2:120). It suggests Leonardo da Vinci’s famous picture of Virgin Mary. Thus, she is described as an erotic oriental woman and as a Madonna at the same time. Also, Haidée’s “feminine” act of nursing is minutely described. She nurses Juan who has been nearly drowned. Her “soft warm hand of youth/Recall’d his answering spirits back from death” and “[baths] his chill temples, tried to soothe/Each pulse to animation” with “gentle touch and trembling care” (*Don Juan* 2:113). Nursing is connected with Victorian ideal femininity. Riga says, “[b]y fusing these conflicting constructions of conventional female identity in a single figure, Byron implicitly destabilises, undercuts, and criticizes polarized views of women’s nature and women’s role” (Riga 6).

Brontë also tries to create a “real” woman character in opposition to the polarised woman images. She frequently uses the expressions as “terrestrial,” “so far from perfect,” “not suited in a heroine of romance” in her early writings. It is a kind of defiance against the angelic heroines of her contemporaries. Such a challenge to make a new heroine can be seen in the creation of Jane Eyre. She opposed her sisters Emily and Anne, who insisted that heroines must be beautiful, and decided to make

her heroine ugly and poor:

She once told her sisters that they were wrong—even morally wrong—in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting on any other terms. Her answer was, “I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as a plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours.”(Gaskell 247)

Then she made a heroine who is “disconnected, poor and plain” (*Jane Eyre* 137), but very attractive. This episode shows us how great a point She made in presenting the real femininity.

In considering the problem of polarisation of women, we should focus on Ginevra Fanshawe in *Villette*. She is an anti-heroine: a “coquettish, and ignorant, and flirting, and fickle, and silly, and selfish” girl (*Villette* 91). However, Lucy is certain that she “[is] honest enough, with all her giddiness” (*Villette* 224). In fact, her honesty is what Lucy highly values.

‘Yes,’ said she, with that directness which was her best point—which gave an honest plainness to her very fibs when she told them—which was, in short, the salt, the sole preservative ingredient of a character otherwise not formed to keep. (*Villette* 308)

She is honest, so she never pretends to be an angel. She desires to be what she really is, not an idealised angel. However, her suitor John Graham Bretton would not see her nature. Ginevra confesses to Lucy that

she is tired of her lover's blind admiration.

“[T]he man is too romantic and devoted, and he expects something more of me than I find it convenient to be. He thinks I am perfect: furnished with all sorts of sterling qualities and solid virtues, such as I never had, nor intend to have. [. . .]” (*Villette* 91)

She is, like Lucy, oppressed by a distorted view of woman. In *Villette*, Brontë makes an ironical remark on such a patriarchal ideology through the relation between Ginevra and Graham from Lucy's point of view.

Lucy listens as Graham praises Ginevra as “a simple, innocent, girlish fairy” or a “graceful angel” (*Villette* 151), then she praises his rival Colonel De Hamal in return:

“I cut short these confidences somewhat abruptly now and then,” said I. “But excuse me, Dr. John, may I change the theme for one instant? What a god-like person is that de Hamal! What a nose on his face—perfect! [. . .] You, Dr. John, and every man of a less-refined mould than he, must feel for him a sort of admiring affection, such as Mars and the coarser deities may be supposed to have borne the young, graceful Apollo.” (*Villette* 151-2)

She repeats exaggerated eulogies about him as Graham does in praising Ginevra to tease him on his illusion, and furthermore, tries to reverse the positions of men and women by adopting a patriarchal woman image for man.

Lucy criticises Graham's unjust blaming of Ginevra, as well as his

blind worships. At a concert, he sees Ginevra's scoffing at Mrs. Bretton and flirting with Colonel de Hamal. Then he says, "Ginevra is neither a pure angel nor a pure-minded woman" (*Villette* 218). For Graham, a woman who is not an angel is an evil creature. Lucy tells Graham that it is nonsense and she wants him to be just.

Lucy never reproaches him directly, but once she attempts to attack him. At the school festival, Lucy and Ginevra take part in a play. The play runs on the two men's labour to win the heart of a beautiful girl. One lover is called "Ours" ("bear" in English), a good, sincere man. Another is "an empty-headed" fop (*Villette* 134). Ginevra plays the role of the girl, and Lucy's part is the fop. The play begins, and Lucy observes that Ginevra singles out one specific person in the audience to show her performance. When Lucy discovers that Ginevra's aim is Graham, she is suddenly animated.

I put my idea into the part I performed; I threw it into my wooing of Ginevra. In the 'Ours,' or sincere lover, I saw Dr. John. Did I pity him, as erst? No, I hardened my heart, rivalled and over-rivalled him. I knew myself but a fop, but where *he* was outcast *I* could please. Now I know acted as if wishful and resolute to win and conquer. Ginevra seconded me; between us we half-changed the nature of the *rôle*, gilding from top to toe. Between the acts M. Paul, told us he knew not what possessed us, [. . .] I know not what possessed me either; but somehow, my longing was to eclipse the "Ours:" i.e., Dr. John. (*Villette* 141)

Two suitors for the girl, a butterfly fop and a sincere “Ours” correspond to Ginevra’s courtiers, Alfred de Hamal and Graham. Ginevra “once or twice [throws] a certain marked fondness, and pointed partiality into her manner towards me—the fop” (*Villette* 140) and shows off this act to Graham. Through this act, Ginevra declares that she refuses Graham’s blind worship, and chooses Alfred de Hamal, “with whom [she] can talk on equal terms” (*Villette* 149). Her declaration stirs up Lucy’s submerged desire to rebel against patriarchal values. She “recklessly [alters] the spirit of the *rôle*” (*Villette* 141) to express her resentment toward Graham’s partial view of women.

1-1-3: Reversal of Gender-Roles

John Ruskin has famously explained the roles of man and woman in *Sesame and Lilies*.

The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. [. . .] But the woman’s power is for rule, not for battle, —and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision. [. . .] By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial: [. . .]. But he guards the woman from all this; [. . .]. (Ruskin 143)

This passage epitomises the Victorian conception of gender roles; the man’s role is a protector and the woman’s a protégée.

Byronic heroines are free from the Ruskinian idea about stereotyped gender roles. Byron's Neuha in *The Island* is a Tahitian girl, who is "the sun-flower of the island daughters,/ [. . .] / the valiant and the free" (*The Island* 2:10). She bravely saves her English lover Torquil and helps him to escape from foes.

Neuha, and pointing to the approaching foes,
Cried, "Torquil, follow me, and fearless follow!"
[. . .]
Young Neuha plunged into the deep, and he
Followed: her track beneath her native sea
Was as a native's of the element,
So smoothly—bravely—brilliantly she went,
(*The Island* 4:4-10)

She leads him to a safe hidden place. Franklin says that "the conventional qualities of European femininity—modesty, chastity, submissiveness, silence—are all absent in Neuha" and "she is the leader, not follower" (Franklin 96). She reverses the conventional gender roles.

Brave heroes and tender heroines who are always saved by men are stereotypes in the fairy-tale romance. Byron and Brontë attempt to overturn these gender roles. Byron, as Riga says, presents "a reversal—surely intentional—of the various fairy tales in which sleeping young women are awakened by the kiss of a prince who has come to rescue them" (Riga 7). Not only Neuha but also Haidée in *Don Juan* and Gulnare in *The Corsair* are active valiant heroines who rescue heroes.

Likewise, Brontë's Byronic heroine, Mina saves her lover

Zamorna. In “The Spell,” Zamorna declines in health due to a curse but Mina comes into the sickroom “as swift, almost as noiseless as lightning” and tells that “Zamorna will not die & this gloomy chamber is darkened for nothing” because she breaks the curse (*The Spell* 113). Mina is not a feeble passive heroine. She makes a vehement declaration for Mary, the wife of Zamorna:

“ [. . .] My Lady Duchess, [. . .] it is not for an indulged daughter of aristocracy [. . .] to talk of serving Zamorna. She may please & entertain him & blossom brightly in his smiles, but when adversity saddened him, when there are hard duties to perform, [. . .] I warn you, he will call for another hand-maid, [. . .] who knows the feel of a hard bed & the taste of a dry crust, who has been rudely nurtured & not shielded like a hot-house flower from every blast of chilling wind. [. . .]” (*The Spell* 92)

Brontë protests against a stereotypical image of “delicate, soft-bred, brittle” (*The Spell* 91) woman who is protected by the hero, and creates a strong heroine who helps and saves a hero when he is in troubles.

The overturning of fairy tales also can be seen in *Shirley*. Caroline comes to Robert’s sickroom, slipping through the eyes of dragon-like Mrs. Horsfall and Mrs. Yorke. Then she says that she will rescue him from the state of dreary confinement, “were there ten Mrs. Yorkes to do battle with” (*Shirley* 488). Here Caroline plays the role of a hero who rescues a princess from the castle where she is imprisoned, fighting with dragons and monsters. Thus, conventional gender roles are reversed in

the fairy-tale framework.

Another device for overturning gender roles is disguise. For example, Byron's Kaled in *Lara, A Tale* dresses as a man to join the battle to help her lover. As Franklin points, "[i]t is now the disguised heroine who demonstrates the chivalrous self-sacrifice of courtly love and knightly service to her lover" and Kaled "does enact a masculine role as friend and subordinate fellow-soldier to Lara" (Franklin 86-7). Disguise frees her from "the service of the 'feminine' virtue of selfless devotion" (Franklin 86) and gives independence and equality with her lover.

Brontë uses disguise as an instrument for liberating heroines from the conventional feminine role. Lucy Snowe in *Villette* plays a role of a man in the school-play and puts on a man's costume. At first, she thinks "[t]o be dressed like a man did not please, and would not suit me" (*Villette* 138), but gradually feels "the right power [comes]—spring demanded gush and rise inwardly" (*Villette* 140). Normally, disguise seems to conceal the truth, but in Brontë's works, disguise contradictorily reveals the heroines' Byronic desire to release herself from a traditional gender role.

1-2: Southern Passion and Northern Reason

The fact that Brontë is a strict observer of morality may seem to be contradictory to what we have discussed. However, it is true: her heroines sometimes aggressively challenge convention, but at other times, fear to transgress moral law. We will see the scene of Jane's flight from

Thornfield for instance. After the unacted wedding, Rochester asks Jane to be with him. Jane almost yields herself to passion, but she decides to leave him:

“I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. [. . .] Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. [. . .]” (*Jane Eyre* 270)

Although Brontë created a heroine who is free from Victorian conventions, she did not intend to make her a breaker of social moral codes. Jane is passionate, but at the same time, she is rational enough to attach great importance to human law and the Christian doctrine.

As this passage shows, for Brontë, reason was connected with the Victorian moral sense, and she thought, it was as important as passion which is one of the most prominent elements comprising the concept of Byronism. According to Margaret Blom, Brontë may have known that uncontrolled passion will destroy herself (Blom 94). Women who yield themselves to passion become a subject of men and lose their autonomy. Passion can be a double-edged sword; Brontë’s heroines “[seek] emotional and erotic involvement as the only available form of self-actualization,” but they fear “such involvement will lead either to submission or to destruction, suicide or homicide” (Gilbert and Gubar 432). Then, they must control their passion by reason so as not to ruin

themselves and others.

Jane's struggle between passion and reason is a projection of Brontë's conflict in her real life. Christine Alexander epitomises her ambivalent feelings toward her Byronic desire:

Her duties as a Victorian woman were in conflict with her emotional need to express herself. If she persisted in writing, she might be neglecting her duty. [. . .] The ambiguity of her feelings about her writing had its roots in fact that she delighted in stories of love and sexual passion, yet she felt moral discomfort over the rakish nature of her material. As a woman and as a Christian she seems to have felt considerable unease about her favorite subject matter. (C. Alexander 228)

Brontë felt an anxiety for Byronic unrestrained passion. Furthermore, she thought it is dangerous, as we can see her in her letter to Ellen Nussey. She stated, "[A]s to intense passion, I am convinced that is no desirable feeling" (*Letters* 1: 218). Then, she tried to contain her Byronic desire by means of reason, and she suffered from the conflict between enthusiasm for romantic passion and Victorian gentlewoman's duties throughout her life.

Such a dilemma caused her a mental crisis when she was nineteen years old. When she was a teacher at Roe Head School, she often daydreamed about Angria, and suffered from the guilt of indulging herself in hallucinatory practices. She sought relief. At Christmas of the year, she wrote a letter to Robert Southey, and asked him for his advice

on her poems. She received a reply which warned about the danger of her daydreams, suggesting her not to continue writing. His answer was that of the conservative Victorian moralist, but she was impressed with his sincere answer, and swore to keep his advice forever. Her resolution is shown in her prose called “Farewell to Angria:”

Still, I long to quit for a while that burning clime where we
have sojourned too long. Its skies flame—the glow of sunset
is always upon it. The mind would cease from excitement
and turn now a cooler region, where the dawn breaks grey
and sober, and the coming day for a time at least is subdued
in clouds. (“Farewell to Angria” 314)

We have to note that Brontë uses geographic images to illuminate this conflict. She uses the image of hot “burning clime” to depict Byronic desire and the “cooler region” (cool country which has a grey dawn and cloudy day reminds us of Britain) to imply reason. In this topological image, she internalised two different kinds of notion: the Victorian common sense and Byron’s influence.

As we have discussed in the Introduction, Victorian people believed that British women were morally and intellectually superior to women of other countries, but Byron protested against such a notion. He used, like his contemporaries, topological images but they were, in his works, instruments for applauding the sexual freedom and individual autonomy of foreign women and criticising the British frigidness. Take a look at “The Girl of Cadiz” for example:

Oh never talk again to me

Of northern climes and British ladies;
 It has not been your lot to see,
 Like me, the lovely girl of Cadiz
 Although her eye be not of blue,
 Nor fair her locks, like English lasses,
 How far its own expressive hue
 The languid azure eye surpasses!
 (“The Girl of Cadiz” 1:1-8)

Byron compares women of northern countries with the girls of Cadiz, Spain, and declares they are superior in “expressive hue.” He says “Our English maids are long to woo,/ And frigid even in possession,” but Spanish girls who, “born beneath a brighter sun,” are so passionate that they “Ne’er taunts you with a mock denial.” Also, their honesty is assured:

The Spanish maid is no coquette,
 Nor joys to see a lover tremble,
 And if she love, or if she hate,
 Alike she knows not to dissemble.
 Her heart can ne’er be bought or sold—
 Howe’er it beats, it beats sincerely;
 (“The Girl of Cadiz” 4:1-6)

Byron’s girls of foreign countries are honest and autonomous, so they are more attractive than frigid British women.

Brontë’s conception of “foreignness” is formed by these two antipodal ideas; the Victorian patriotic discourse which condemned

foreign women's irrational licentiousness and Byron's praise of passionate nature of Eastern girls. Passionate heat and racial coolness are conflicting, but interestingly, both principles coexist in Brontë's heroines. They keep their Byronic desire, but they hide it under "British" reason because it is impermissible in Victorian society. Like the author, they are taught to conceal their passionate desire and ambition, but foreign images expose their Byronism which lies under the mask of Victorian ladies. The next chapter will explain how the foreign woman function as disclosers of heroines' Byronism in Brontë's works.

Chapter 2

Foreign Images in Brontë's Works

“My blood was still warm; the mood of the revolted slave was still bracing me with its bitter vigour”—*Jane Eyre*

Brontë's female Byronism is projected on foreign women because the idea is not acceptable in Victorian Britain. However, they are not simply reflections of the heroines' desire. The heroines gradually learn to accept their alienation and how to accord with their society. We will take up for our discussion Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, Hortense in *Shirley*, Madame Beck, Madame Walravens and Vashti in *Villette*.

2-1: Bertha's Autonomous Suttee

Since the advent of the postcolonial school of criticism, *Jane Eyre* has proved especially amenable to the kind of reading. Bertha, the Creole wife of Rochester from the West Indies, is the most outstanding of the numerous colonial images in the novel. Understandably, the critical assessment of her as a character has undergone a radical transformation as a result of postcolonial reading. For example, Carl Plasa criticises the psychoanalytic feminists' view of her as “Jane's truest and darkest double” (Gilbert and Gubar 360). He takes Gilbert and Gubar to task for ignoring Bertha's racial identity, denying her “status as an autonomous

subject” (Plasa 80) thus reducing her to the heroine’s alter ego. Also, Gayatri Spivak argues that, to play her role, Bertha must “set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction” and she reads this as “an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer” (Spivak 251).

As these critics have pointed out, Bertha’s death leaves the reader with the uncomfortable impression that she has been conveniently banished in order to bring about the happy union of Jane and Rochester, but, is she really victimised due to her racial background to make the British middle-class woman’s marriage possible? Laura Donaldson suggests that “no” is the answer to this question. Taking feminism and postcolonialism as her point of departure, she reads Bertha’s death as an expression of positive will, suggesting that her suicide is “an act of resistance not only to her status as a woman in patriarchal culture but also as a colonized object” (Donaldson 30). Her view is valid in terms of recent critical trends and is useful in probing into the deeper stratum of the novel. We try to reconsider both interpretations, psychoanalytic feminism and postcolonialism and show that Bertha is neither the heroine’s shadow nor a victim of Anglo-Saxon supremacism.

So far, Bertha has been too easily defined as a “racial other” simply because she is a Creole. However, Susan Meyer offers a new explanation of Bertha’s “racial otherness” as follows: she argued that her racial ambiguity is “directly related to her function as a representative

dangers which threaten the world of the novel.” She is the daughter of a father who is a West Indian planter and merchant, so she is clearly imagined as white, but “when she actually emerges in the course of the action, the narrative associates her with blacks.” Then she concludes, “[i]n the form in which she becomes visible in the novel, Bertha has *become* black as she is constructed by the narrative” (Meyer 151).

Following Meyer’s argument, we define Bertha as “racial other” not because she is a Creole but because the rhetoric of the novel makes her so. Then, we try to show how she recovers her subjectivity, referring to her influence on the heroine, Jane Eyre.

The image of racial otherness has a significant meaning in *Jane Eyre*. Racism can be paralleled with women’s question. Brontë compares women who deviate from the Victorian sexual convention with racial other. As we discussed in Chapter 1, women had the image of an angel or a demon imposed upon them by male authority. The problem is that women unconsciously internalised the patriarchal view and shaped themselves to the stereotypical women images. Quoting from the scene where the heroine watches her dead mother’s portrait in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh*, Gilbert and Gubar explain how women internalise male imagery of women. Aurora sees extreme female image that men imposes women such as “Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and spirit” in her dead mother’s picture. They say what this implies is “not only that she herself is fated to inhabit male-defined masks and costumes, as her mother did, but that male-defined masks and costumes inevitably inhabit her, altering her vision” (Gilbert and Gubar 19). To

recover “real” femininity, women “must examine, assimilate and transcend the extreme images of ‘angel’ and ‘monster’ which male authors have generated for her” (Gilbert and Gubar 17) and redefine themselves. A woman’s attempt at redefinition of her identity leads inevitably to deviation from the Victorian moral code. When women realise their desire for breaking patriarchal stereotypes of women and asserting themselves, they feel that they are not accepted in society. This sense of alienation is represented in the image of racial otherness. It is a symbol of women’s desire for self-assertion and possibility of overturning the patriarchal authority. Brontë connects Bertha’s figure with the heroine’s alienation, the feeling of “otherness.”

Bertha has already been robbed of “real” femininity when she first appears in the novel. She is depicted not as a woman but as a “beast:” Jane sees Bertha “[snatches] and [growls] like some strange animal” (*Jane Eyre* 250). It is Rochester who has made her such a beast as Elaine Showalter argues that “[m]uch of Bertha’s dehumanization, Rochester’s account makes clear, is the result of her confinement not its cause” (Showalter 121-22). Jane and the readers never learn about Bertha’s character before she has become mad. Rochester is the only source of information on this, but his estimation of her is so twisted that it is unreliable. He calls her in his recollection a “harlot” (*Jane Eyre* 262), “a monster” (*Jane Eyre* 264), an “Indian Messalina” (*Jane Eyre* 265) and every other infamous title reserved for a woman who has deviated from the feminine ideal. Thus, Rochester, the embodiment of male authority, robs Bertha of her “real” femininity and defines her as a beast. Bertha

defies him and furthermore, she stimulates Jane to rebel against patriarchal oppression. The significance of Bertha's death will become understandable if it is considered as part of the concerted female efforts at retrieving "real" femininity from male control. This process is represented through the image of fire.

Bertha is strongly connected to the image of fire: she sets fire to Rochester's bed and burns down Thornfield Hall. The image is especially important in considering her death because it is deeply involved with her racial otherness. Could it be a ritual immolation of the wife on the funeral pile of her husband's body, an act of "suttee"?⁴ We should note that Bertha's metaphoric suttee can be interpreted as a form of protest against both patriarchy and British colonialism.

Jane refers to this Indian custom as she tells Rochester that she "should bide that time [to death], and not be hurried away in a suttee" (*Jane Eyre* 233). It should safely be said that Brontë had interest in and knowledge of suttee, and she may well have been concerned with it when she depicted Bertha's death. Significantly, she wrote an essay on suttee in French when she was studying in Belgium. In this essay, the narrator observes the ritual of suttee and vividly describes its details. Above all, the depiction of the widow is very striking because she is represented as a strong-willed woman. She "[advances] toward the pyre with a firm step" (*Belgian Essay* 4). Her face is pale but "still resolute" (*Belgian Essay* 4) and the narrator sees in her gaze "an agonizing struggle between bodily weakness and spiritual power" (*Belgian Essay* 6). Although the widow is described as an "unhappy woman" (*Belgian Essay* 6), Brontë

represents that her mind is strong. This was an unusual view in the nineteenth century, as contemporary feminists shared the idea that suttee was a symbol of the weakness of the Eastern women who had to subject themselves slavishly to patriarchy. However, Brontë rewrites the meaning of suttee through her presentation of Bertha. Bertha's fire functions not to end her life but to destroy patriarchal structure. She revenges herself on it which has imposed a distorted woman image on her by burning Rochester and his property, Thornfield Hall, the symbol of his power as a patriarch. At the same time, she tries to invalidate the image of woman as a "beast" by erasing her own dehumanized figure.

Another reason why Bertha's death is an act of autonomous protest is the method of her suicide. She does not burn herself as is the case with suttee, but rather jumps from the rooftop of Thornfield Hall. Barbara Gates offers an analysis on the female suicide by jumping. She notes that jumping is to fly, although it is momentary, and that is an act of self-assertion (Gates 254). Bertha is "standing, waving her arms" and her long hair is "streaming against the flames" (*Jane Eyre* 365) before she jumps. Her arms and hair look like wings. They symbolise the power of flying from patriarchal constraint. Moreover, her wings make an ironic contrast to the wings of the "angel in the house." She rewrites the conventional image of the ideal woman. Bertha kills herself by jumping to prove that she is an autonomous woman. Thus, by radically subverting the meaning of suttee as a symbol of woman's obedience, Brontë not only rebelled against patriarchy but also showed the autonomous power of a woman from a different race, thought to be silenced and weak.

Moreover, Bertha awakes Byronic desire in Jane. Like Bertha, Jane is also denied her “real” femininity. She experiences it in the red-room. She gets angry at brutal oppression by John Reed, the young patriarch of the Reeds, and rebels against him. Consequently, Jane is confined in the red-room and punished for her “unfeminine” desire. She is denied her “real” femininity through confinement like Bertha. Instead of Rochester, John calls her a “bad animal” (*Jane Eyre* 7) and “a mad cat” (*Jane Eyre* 22) in order to force upon her the image of a deviant woman as a beast, mad and evil. A significant point to be noted here is that Jane identifies herself with the racial other. She calls herself “a heterogeneous thing” (*Jane Eyre* 12) in the Reed family and “an interloper not of her [Mrs. Reed’s] race” (*Jane Eyre* 13). Her rebellion against the patriarchal oppression is associated with the feeling of racial otherness as Carl Plasa points out, “the division between oppressor and oppressed, the Reeds and Jane are indeed mapped in terms of racial difference” (Plasa 84). Furthermore, Brontë uses the colonial image of slavery to represent Jane’s anger. Jane compares John with “a slave-driver” (*Jane Eyre* 8). She feels herself to be “like any other rebel slave” (*Jane Eyre* 9) and “the mood of the revolted slave” (*Jane Eyre* 12) braces her. This striking image clearly shows the parallelism between patriarchal oppression and colonial domination.

However, Jane is “deracialised” by the education at Lowood School and becomes a Victorian gentlewoman. She has forgotten her own racial otherness until she finally encounters Bertha. The night just before the wedding day, when Jane lies on a bed, she sees Bertha come into her

room and tears her wedding veil. Then she loses her consciousness in fear. This is, she says, the second time in her life, the first being when she was locked up in the red-room. Jane's re-experiencing of the episode of her childhood suggests that Bertha arouses Jane's submerged rebellious spirit for patriarchal oppression which she has realised in the red-room.

Jane awakens her otherness on the morning of her wedding day. When she sees her reflection in the mirror with her wedding costume, she thinks that the figure is "so unlike [her] usual self that seems almost the image of a stranger" (*Jane Eyre* 244). She cannot identify herself with her own figure as a bride in the mirror because she feels discomfort at being involved in the patriarchal system of marriage. Marriage is a kind of "domestication" where woman is deprived of the power of self-assertion and is transformed into selfless wife and mother. That is, marriage is one of the processes of "deracialisation;" the removal of rebellious racial otherness to become a "respectable" British lady. By tearing the wedding veil, Bertha alerts Jane to the danger of patriarchal trap of marriage and effectively tells her not to lose a desire for self-assertion.

Also, after she confronts Bertha in the attic, she dreams of the red-room:

That night I never thought to sleep; but a slumber fell on me as soon as I lay down in bed. I was transported in thought to the scenes of childhood: I dreamt I lay in the red-room at Gateshead; that the night was dark, and my mind impressed

with strange fears. The light that long ago had struck me into syncope, recalled in this vision, seemed glidingly to mount the wall, and tremblingly to pause in the centre of the obscured ceiling. (*Jane Eyre* 272)

Again, Jane relives her childhood. Resuming her racial otherness, she criticises Rochester for his cruel oppression as she once has done for that of John Reed. She says to him, “[Y]ou are inexorable for that unfortunate lady: you speak of her with hate—with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel—she cannot help being mad” (*Jane Eyre* 257). This word shows that she learns from Bertha that male domination makes women mad. Jane regains her identity as a “rebel slave” (*Jane Eyre* 9), then she revolts against Rochester: she flies from Thornfield.

At the end of the story, Jane meets Rochester again and they are united at Ferndean. The image of racial otherness does not appear there. Bertha’s suttee and Jane’s flight make Rochester relinquish his power as a patriarchal tyrant. When the power structure of the oppressor and the oppressed is dismantled, the image of racial otherness is also cleared because there is no need of rebellion. It is important that Rochester touches Jane’s body to recognise her:

“And where is the speaker? Is it only a voice? Oh! I *cannot* see, but I must feel, or my heart will stop and my brain burst. Whatever—whoever you are—be perceptible to the touch or I cannot live!”

He groped; I arrested his wandering hand, and prisoned it in both mine.

“Her very fingers!” he cried; “her small, slight fingers! If so there must be more of her.”

The muscular hand broke from my custody; my arm was seized, my shoulder—neck—waist—I was entwined and gathered to him.

“Is it Jane? *What* is it? This is her shape—this is her size—”

“And this her voice,” I added. “She is all here: her heart, too. God bless you, sir! I am glad to be so near you again.”

(*Jane Eyre* 369)

Jane’s physical reality is told in detail here. Rochester knows she is not a bodiless angel but “altogether a human being” (*Jane Eyre* 372). Jane attains to “real” femininity at last. Buried deep in the wood, Ferndean is isolated from society. It is a kind of “foreign” place free from patriarchal conventions. The “foreignness” of Ferndean will be examined again in the last chapter of this thesis.

2-2: The Nurse in the Sickroom as a “Foreign” World in *Shirley*

There are many images of “foreignness” in *Shirley*. Of all others, Hortense Moore, the Belgian, constitutes the most significant one. She clings fiercely to the custom of her homeland in Yorkshire, and Brontë depicts her ironically to make a contrast with British heroines, Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keelder. The influence of British supremacism can be seen in Brontë’s portrayal of Hortense.

Concerning this matter, it should be noticed that Caroline compares Hortense with Lucretia and Solmon’s virtuous woman.

Caroline imagines that Lucretia annoys her maidens:

“[. . .] Lucretia, spinning at midnight in the midst of her maidens, and Solomon’s virtuous woman, are often quoted as patterns of what ‘the sex’ (as they say) ought to be. I don’t know: Lucretia, I dare say, was a most worthy sort of person, much like my cousin Hortense Moore; but she kept her servants up very late. I should not have liked to be amongst the number of the maidens. [. . .] The ‘virtuous woman,’ again, had her household up in the very middle of the night; [. . .] but *she* had something more to do than spin and give out portions. She was a manufacturer—she made fine linen and sold it; she was an agriculturist—she bought estates and planted vineyards. *That* woman was a manager. [. . .] On the whole, I like her a good deal better than Lucretia; [. . .]”
(*Shirley* 392)

Lucretia is so virtuous and hardworking that she is known as an ideal woman. She seems to be a capable manager of her maidens as Victorian conduct books state that good housewives should wisely direct servants. It is, however, important that Caroline refers to Solomon’s virtuous woman as well. She says that she prefers the virtuous woman to Lucretia because she is a business manager. She is equal to men. These two legendary women suggest the possibility that women should have power behind the mask of the virtuous “angel in the house.” Brontë represents Hortense as a woman who secretly desires to have power as a man. Victorian social mores demanded that women should obey and serve men,

so women had to pretend to be virtuous to conceal her desire to be equal to men. Like Lucretia, Hortense ostensibly devotes herself to “feminine” works such as cooking and needlework, but she wants to attain power. Brontë uses the image of “foreignness” to imply such desire.

In this novel, “foreignness” means a threat to patriarchal system, and it has effects on British middle-class heroine as the following episode shows: Hortense insists on Caroline’s wearing a Belgian-style apron and a neckerchief, but she refuses to do so. On the other hand, for Belgian food at which Sarah looks scornfully as if she wants to say “I never dished such stuff i’ my life afore; it’s not fit for dogs,” Caroline “[has] no objection to this Belgian cookery—indeed she rather liked it for a change” (*Shirley* 68). Clothes just cover the surface but foods are taken in inside the body. That is, they are assimilated by the ingester to be a part of herself. Caroline’s refusal of foreign clothes and fondness for foods means that she accepts “foreignness” although she rejects it on the surface. We try to elucidate how the image of foreignness helps to fulfil female secret desire to be powerful.

For this aim, it is useful to focus on the act of nursing. In *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction*, Miriam Bailin says that “nurse embodies feminine ideals of compassion and self-abnegation,” but, at the same time, “nursing puts her in a position of authority which may be openly exercised under the aegis of uniquely feminine power” (Bailin 28). The nurse is a very convenient role for women who have “aberrant” ambition behind the “normal” femininity. Bailin defines a sickroom as the special sphere which is distinct from the Victorian society. In other words, a

sickroom is a “foreign” place where one is freed from conventional gender roles. In addition, she explains that people in a sickroom can “express feelings and essential truths about the undisfigured self” (Bailin 24). Women can declare that they are not angels only in a sickroom.

As we have discussed, nursing has two conflicting aspects: an incarnation of the Victorian feminine ideal and a flight from the patriarchal norm. However, there is a difference between a woman who nurses her family members and a nurse in a hospital. According to Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, until Florence Nightingale reformed the status of hospital nurses, nursing had not been a profession. Before that, a nurse was “simply a woman who happened to be nursing someone—a sick child or an aging relative,” and women who worked in hospitals were but nominal nurses: they were “a disreputable lot, prone to drunkenness, prostitution and thievery” (Ehrenreich and English 34-37). Nightingale’s reform established nursing as a profession, and nurse was divided into a nurse in a home and a professional nurse.

We tend to recognise that the status of a nurse as a profession gave women a new field of activity, but Ehrenreich and English point out that a nurse in a home and a professional nurse are both founded on the concept of the angel in the house.

The finished product, the Nightingale nurse, was simply the ideal Lady, transplanted from home to the hospital, and absolved of reproductive responsibilities. To the doctor, she brought the wifely virtue of absolute obedience. To the patient, she brought the selfless devotion of a mother. To the

lower level hospital employees, she brought the firm but kindly discipline of a household manager accustomed to dealing with servants. (Ehrenreich and English 35)

Nurse was accepted as a female profession in Victorian society because it was not incompatible with the traditional women's role. Therefore, even though nursing was fixed as a profession, the nurse needed to obey male authority: i.e. male doctors.

The typical example is Ruth Hilton in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*. She is "the very type of what a woman should be—a calm, serene soul, fashioning the body to angelic grace" (*Ruth* 308). She confides a plan to be a nurse to her friend Jemima, and talks about what the ideal nurse is:

"[. . .] Would you not rather be nursed by a person who spoke gently and moved quietly about than by a loud bustling woman?"

"Yes, to be sure; but a person unfit for anything else may move quietly, and speak gently, and give medicine when the doctor orders it, and keep awake at night; and those are the best qualities I ever heard of in a sick nurse." (*Ruth* 389)

They list the qualifications for a good nurse—gentleness, quietness, diligence and docility to carry out doctor's orders. Ruth, who works with Dr. Davis acts perfectly as a nurse: when a plague breaks out in Eccleston, she works "constant and still, [. . .] in obedience to Dr. Davis's direction" (*Ruth* 444). Hired nurses had to act within the bounds of a doctor's order. In fact, Ehrenreich and English mention the fact that Nightingale did not let her fellows lift a finger to help thousands of

patients until the doctors gave an order (Ehrenreich and English 38).

Now we will return to *Shirley*. This novel introduces the hired nurse named Mrs. Horsfall. She is seemingly far from the Victorian ideal femininity: she has a “rough bulk,” “hard hands” (*Shirley* 473) and a drinking habit. Nevertheless, she is a model of a nurse because she “[has] one virtue—orders received from MacTurk she obeyed to the letter” (*Shirley* 473). The doctor makes a remark on her that “But Horsfall has this virtue, [. . .] drunk or sober, she always remembers to obey *me*” (*Shirley* 474). Mrs. Horsfall is not an angelic woman, but she has the “feminine” virtue of obedience: because of this, she is given credit for being a competent nurse by a doctor. Hired nurses were obliged to obey men, due to her profession.

Then, how about a nurse in a home? At the end of *Jane Eyre*, Jane says to disabled Rochester, “I will be your neighbor, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you” (*Jane Eyre* 370). She comes to take the role by her own will. Soon after, she marries him and becomes “his prop and guide” (*Jane Eyre* 382). She is not a protected being any longer. As many critics point out, Rochester’s deformity makes their marriage on equal standings possible. That is, the role of a nurse makes Jane equivalent to men.

Brontë’s representation of the nurse in a home in *Shirley* is much more radical than in *Jane Eyre*. Robert is carried into Mr. Yorke’s house when he was shot by a madman, and taken care of by Mrs. Yorke and Hortense. They “[promise] faithful observance of directions” (*Shirley*

472) but tamper with Robert's wound only to make his condition worse. They keep him under their domination in the "foreign" place named the sickroom without being controlled by patriarchal power. Hired nurses had to subject themselves to men's direction to establish their position in hospitals, but nurses in a home did not need to do so: because the sickroom is originally a woman's sphere.

Hortense and Mrs. Yorke secretly desire to upset a patriarchal system, conforming to the Victorian norm on the surface. We can see their similarity in the passage that "Hortense and she possessed an exhaustless mutual theme of conversation in the corrupt propensities of servants. [. . .] They watched them with the same suspicion, and judged them with the same severity" (*Shirley* 471). They remind the readers of Lucretia, who keeps her maidens working all night.

Brontë represents their desire for power with foreign imagery. Mrs. Yorke appears to be a typical Victorian lady but when Robert is carried in, she suddenly changes and becomes animated. It is a chance to display her power behind the "feminine" role as a nurse. Brontë writes that this incident "[sets] her straight, [cheers] her spirits, [gives] her cap the dash of a turban" (*Shirley* 471). She expresses Mrs. Yorke's secret desire by using the eastern image: a turban. Hortense soon joins her. They shut Robert up in a sickroom and nurses him, keeping other people out of the room, as Martin Yorke describes: "[Robert is] mewed up, kept in solitary confinement. They mean to make either an idiot or a maniac of him, and take out a commission of lunacy" (*Shirley* 496). Hortense and Mrs. Yorke attempt to emasculate Robert and deprive him of his power.

Caroline is involved in the struggle for the patriarchal power. Although she comes to see Robert, she is turned away by Mrs. Yorke. In spite of her interference, Caroline decides to see him, asking for help of Martin. Like Byron's heroines such as Gulnare in *Corsair* or Kaled in *Lara*, she is going to save her hero. She steps into the "foreign" sphere of Byronism. The chapter in which Martin encounters Caroline is entitled "The Schoolboy and the Wood-Nymph." When Martin reads "a contraband volume of Fairy-tales" (*Shirley* 475), Caroline comes and talks to him. Brontë describes this scene as if there is a fairy-land as distinct from Victorian society.

He reads. He is led into a solitary mountain region; all round him is rude and desolate, shapeless, and almost colourless. He hears bells tinkle on the wind. Forth-riding from the formless folds of the mist dawns on him the brightest vision—a green-robed lady, on a snow-white palfrey. He sees her dress, her gems, and her steed. She arrests him with some mysterious question. He is spell-bound, and must follow her into fairyland. (*Shirley* 475)

Thus, the readers were led to the other world. Caroline does not wait for her lover passively and acts on her own will there. Such aggressiveness of women will be seen as an aberration in terms of the Victorian moral code, but the image of "foreignness" makes Caroline's act and desire acceptable. Then she realises her hopes in Robert's sickroom: He appreciates her value and they establish intimacy.

Thus, the image of "foreignness" reveals the female secret desire

to overturn the conventional power relation between men and women. The role of a nurse enables women to exercise their desire for power. Because nursing a sick person is originally the role of women, they can use their power without hesitation in the sickroom. The sickroom is, so to speak, a “foreign” region far removed from patriarchal control of Victorian society. Brontë represents this other space using images of foreign countries and fairy-tale elements. These images of “foreignness” reveals Byronism in Caroline, who looks like a model of “an angel in the house.”

2-3: The Three Witches in *Villette*

In Brontë’s poem entitled “Reason,” the narrator grieves for her unrequited passion and tries to overcome it with reason. Women who were not loved nor got married had to be reconciled with their fate of becoming old maids. In Victorian Britain, these women were denied their *raison d’être*, as we can see in the life of Miss Marchmont in *Villette*. Gilbert and Gubar say that it is “a life of service, self-abnegation, and chastity” and this was “the only socially acceptable life available to single women” (Gilbert and Gubar 426). According to Victorian ideal femininity, a woman who cannot be a wife or mother must lead a life of renunciation. So, the narrator of “Reason” decides to cross the sea in search of another way of living:

Have I not fled that I may conquer?

Crost the dark sea in firmest faith

That I at last might plant my anchor

Where love cannot prevail to death? (“Reason” 33-44)

The interesting overturning of a geographic image occurs here. As we have discussed in Chapter 1, reason has been connected with Britain, but now it is linked to a foreign country. In Victorian society, reason leads women to a deadly submissive life, but outside Britain, there is a chance of self-assertion. The image of crossing the sea is worth noticing, because it appears in Brontë’s works frequently. Getting stuck in their suffocating situation, female characters in her novels and poems often go abroad or dream of doing so.

Lucy Snowe in *Villette* is one of such women. She goes to Labassecour, Brontë’s imaginary kingdom, and meets three women there: Madame Beck, Madame Walravens, and Vashti. They are all associated with the image of a witch. The witch is traditionally a symbol of deviation from the norm of femininity. For Lucy, these three women are “foreign” in two senses: firstly, they are literally foreigners and secondly, they are “foreign” to Victorian conventional femininity. Contemporary poets and novelists depicted witch-like women as terrible and destructive figures. However, witches have another aspect as Ehrenreich and English suggest:

She relied on her senses rather than on faith or doctrine [. . .].

The witch was a triple threat to the Church: She was a woman, and not ashamed of it. She appeared to be part of an organized underground of peasant women. And she was a healer whose practice was based in empirical study. In the face of the repressive fatalism of Christianity, she held out

the hope of change in this world. (Ehrenreich and English
13-4)

Indeed, a witch's power is destructive, but she embodies the possibility of liberation from the oppressive moral law and prescribed gender roles. In *Villette*, the figure of a witch represents two ways of woman's life: a life of a rational director (Madame Beck managing her school and Madame Walravens ruling her granddaughter) and that of an artist. Through the image of a witch, we will explain how Lucy finds her new way of life in a foreign place. For this purpose, we firstly discuss the roles Madame Beck and Madame Walravens play in the life of the heroine. Secondly, we take up Vashti's influence on Lucy.

It is interesting that Brontë represents reason as a witch-like figure. Lucy calls reason a "hag" (*Villette* 229). "Reason" touches her with "a withered hand" and "the chill blue lips of eld" (*Villette* 229). It is "vindictive as a devil" and "always envenomed as a step-mother" (*Villette* 229). Reason tells her to repress passionate desire. As we have said before, reason is very important because it protects her from the destructive power of passion despite its "bitter sternness" (*Villette* 229). It seems to be strange that Brontë associated "British" reason with "foreign" image of a witch, but we must notice that in the foreign context, reason acquires a new meaning. Freed from Victorian moral convention, reason gives a power to women. We will clarify this, analysing Madame Beck.

Madame Beck is the incarnation of reason as Gilbert and Gubar say that she is "a symbol of repression, the projection and embodiment of

Lucy's commitment to self-control" (Gilbert and Gubar 408). Her power of repression is quite apparent in the episode of her love for Graham. Madame Beck is attracted to him, so she is carefully dressed up and receives him with an affectionate manner. However, Graham shows little attention to her. Madame Beck is greatly disappointed, but she overcomes frustration by her "genuine good sense" (*Villette* 105). Lucy approves her:

"She did not behave weakly, or make herself in any shape ridiculous. [. . .] Brava! Once more, Madame Beck. I saw you matched against an Apollyon of a predilection; you fought a good fight, and you overcame!" (*Villette* 105).

Lucy praises her rationality since it enables her to "see things in a true light and understand them in an unperverted sense" (*Villette* 294). Such a sense gives her power and authority. She achieves a reputation as a respectable director of the school. Lucy states that her reason makes her "a very great and a very capable woman" (*Villette* 74). As Jin-Ok Kim suggests, Lucy admires Madame Beck's administrative power and learns from her "how to repress her own desire and how to regulate others" (Kim 97). Kim also declares, "these experiences help her to find the authority to run her own school" (Kim 97). Madame Beck is a witch in Brontë's sense who teaches Lucy how a woman should attain power and independence by rational control.

However, Madame Beck is not a wholly attractive character.

Lucy's estimation of her is quite ambivalent:

[H]er forehead was high but narrow; it expressed capacity

and some benevolence, but no expanse; nor did her peaceful yet watchful eye ever know the fire which is kindled in the heart or the softness which flows thence. Her mouth was hard: it could be a little grim; her lips were thin. For sensibility and genius, with all their tenderness and temerity, I felt somehow that Madame would be the right sort of Minos in petticoats. (*Villette* 72)

Although she is a capable woman, she lacks compassion and sympathy because of the stern control of reason. Brontë warns us that rational discipline sometimes overwhelms humanity.

For further understanding of the terrible result of the excessive rational control, we will have a look at Madame Walravens. She is a person who is most closely associated with a witch in *Villette*. Lucy calls her “Cunegonde, the sorceress,” “Malevola, the evil fairy” (*Villette* 389) or “sullen Sidonia” (*Villette* 390). Lucy learns that her granddaughter, Justine Marie and Paul once loved each other, but Madame Walravens opposed them. Divided between love for Paul and her grandmother’s anger, Justine Marie became a nun and died young in a convent. Madame Walravens has played the role of reason which has kept Justine Marie away from amatory involvement, but far from protecting her, she has driven her to an early death. Madame Walravens’ power of rational control is destructive.

We have to note that her voice is “rather of male than of female old age” and that she has “a silver beard” on her chin (*Villette* 389). Gilbert and Gubar explain that such masculine features mean that she is

“a sort of male manqué” who has “attained power by becoming an essential part of patriarchal culture” (Gilbert and Gubar 432). Madame Beck is akin to her, as she is described as a woman who does not wear “a woman’s aspect, but rather a man’s” (*Villette* 77). Reason enables women to have power, but it turns them into inhumane oppressors.

Lucy does not want to be a “male manqué.” Her rejection of taking part in patriarchal culture is shown in the episode of the school-play. Paul tells her to be dressed in male clothes for her part, but she refuses it:

To be dressed like a man did not please, and would not suit me. I had consented to take a man’s name and part; as to his dress—*halte là!* [Stop right there!] No. I would keep my own dress, come what might. M. Paul might storm, might rage: I would keep my own dress. I said so, with a voice as resolute in intent, as it was low, and perhaps unsteady in utterance.

(*Villette* 138-39)

So she puts some of them, such as a vest, a collar, and cravat on her dress. Her rejection to be dressed like a man is an announcement that she would not be a part of patriarchy. She learns how to attain power from Madame Beck and Madame Walravens, but they are evil witches who bring harm to others. Indeed Lucy learns from them how important reason is, but she rejects their black magic and seeks power “not through the control of others but through her own self-liberation” (Gilbert and Gubar 433).

Then, what is this “self-liberation”? Brontë’s heroines often release their inner selves and desire in artworks. Jane Eyre’s painting is a

typical example. Also, Shirley's French composition and monologue about Eve can be seen as a kind of expression of her creative imagination. In *Villette*, Lucy firstly displays her artistry and interest in a play. She is fascinated with Vashti's performance:

The strong magnetism of genius drew my heart out of its wonted orbit; [. . .]. I had seen acting before, but never anything like this: never anything which astonished Hope and hushed Desire; which outstripped Impulse and paled Conception; which, instead of merely irritating imagination with the thought of what *might* be done, at the same time fevering the nerves because it was *not* done, disclosed power like a deep, swollen winter river, thundering in cataract, and bearing the soul, like a leaf, on the steep and steelly sweep of its descent. (*Villette* 259)

Vashti is clearly a witch, for she has "the magian power or prophet-virtue" (*Villette* 259). She uses her power not to control others, but to express her inner self, enchanting the audience. A witch as an artist is a woman who practices her magic to assert herself by representing her inner-world, instead of controlling others.

Lucy, a witch as an artist, seeks her way of representation of her Byronism. Gilbert and Gubar comment on her growth as an artist. They point that Lucy's creativity is severely limited, but "in the course of the novel she has learned to speak with her own voice, to emerge from the shadows" and "[h]er narrative increasingly defines her as the centre of her own concern, the heroine of her own story" (Gilbert and Gubar 434).

It is true, but it is to be regretted that they do not describe the process of Lucy's maturing as an artist. What has made Lucy "an accomplished author?"

At first, Lucy has an anxiety, even a sense of guilt, about self-expression as we can see in the scene of the school play. Although she has succeeded in representing her feelings for Graham through playing a role, Lucy forbids herself to perform in the future:

Cold, reluctant, apprehensive, I had accepted a part to please another: ere long, warming, becoming interested, taking courage, I acted to please myself. Yet the next day, when I thought it over, I quite disapproved of these amateur performances; [. . .]. I took a firm resolution, never to be drawn into a similar affair. A keen relish for dramatic expression had revealed itself as part of my nature; to cherish and exercise this new-found faculty might gift me with a world of delight, but it would not do for a mere looker-on at life: the strength and longing must be put by; [. . .]. (*Villette* 141)

She believes that she should not try to exercise her Byronic desire and be contented to be "a mere looker-on at life" because she is a plain, poor single woman. She is haunted by the fate of an old maid which Victorian culture prescribes. To be a self-assertive artist who can express her inner-self, Lucy has to overcome the cultural prescription that women's "strength and longing must be put by."

In considering Lucy's process of maturing as a female artist, it is

essential to focus on the experience of pain. Brontë's contemporary, Florence Nightingale argues the importance of the experience of pain in her feminist work, *Cassandra*:

Give us back our suffering, we cry to Heaven in our hearts—suffering rather than indifferentism; for out of nothing comes nothing. But out of suffering may come the cure. Better have pain than paralysis! A hundred struggle and down in the breakers. One discovers the new world. But rather, ten times rather, die in surf, heralding the way to that new world, than stand idly on the shore! (Nightingale 208)

Paralysis is traditionally the symbol of women's submissive state.

Nightingale claims women are far better to choose the experience of pain than a deadly insensitive life. Lucy is "a mere looker-on at life" because she always avoids experiencing pain. Her evasiveness is shown in her narrative. In the early part of the story, Lucy expresses her inner conflict and desire through other women's experiences like those of Polly, Miss Marchmont, Ginevra and Madame Beck. Lucy has to experience pain to speak with her own voice, to emerge from the life of someone's shadow.

Lucy's confrontation with pain and growth as an artist can be seen in her love with two men: Graham and Paul. When she accepts her broken heart for Graham, she learns how to confront pain and to write her own story:

It is right to look our life-accounts bravely in the face now and then, and settle them honestly. [. . .] Call anguish—anguish, and despair—despair; write both down in

strong characters with a resolute pen: you will the better pay your debt to Doom. Falsify: insert “privilege” where you should have written “pain;” and see if your mighty creditor will allow the fraud to pass, or accept the coin with which you would cheat him. Offer to the strongest—if the darkest angel of God’s host—water, when he has asked blood—will he take it? Not a whole pale sea for one red drop. I settled another account. (*Villette* 361-2)

It is her first attempt at self-representation. The experience of pain changes her narrative: Lucy is firstly evasive in telling her true feeling, but now, she is willing to express her anguish and despair. Then she learns that she can be strengthened by doing so.

Similarly, when Lucy thinks that Paul and Justine Marie Sauveur are going to marry, she swallows the pain of losing him and says, “Truth, you are a good mistress to your faithful servants! While a Lie pressed me, how I suffered! [. . .] Truth stripped away Falsehood, and Flattery, and Expectancy, and here I stand—free!” (*Villette* 467) By confronting the pain, Lucy becomes free. She is liberated from the obsession that she must conceal her true self with “Falsehood.” Then she becomes an artist who can express her true inner-self with her own voice. She tells Paul her love toward him:

I spoke. All leaped from my lips. I lacked not words now; fast I narrated; fluent I told my tale; it streamed on my tongue. I went back to the night in the park [. . .]. All I had encountered I detailed, all I had recognised, heard, and seen;

how I had beheld and watched himself: how I listened, how much heard, what conjectured; the whole history, in brief, summoned to his confidence, rushed thither, truthful, literal, ardent, bitter. (*Villette* 490-1)

Here, Lucy emerges from a shadowy life to stand at the centre on the stage of her life, and tells her feelings eloquently. She no longer needs to express herself through others. In the last of the novel, she just briefly summarises the lives of Ginevra, Polly, Madame Beck and Madame Walravens. Lucy can tell a story of her own and becomes an accomplished artist.

To understand Lucy's growth as an artist fully, it is useful to have a look at the image of weaving. P. B. Shelley's witch in *The Witch of Atlas* is an artist too. Her art is weaving:

Which when the lady knew, she took her spindle
And twined three threads of fleecy mist, and three
Long lines of light, such as the dawn may kindle
The clouds and waves and mountains with; and she
As many star-beams, ere their lamps could dwindle
In the belated moon, wound skilfully;
And with these threads a subtle veil she wove—
A shadow for the splendour of her love.

(*The Witch of Atlas* 45-52)

According to John Greenfield, she “weaves poetry” and her tapestry is filled with symbols of “visionary or internal journey” (Greenfield 24). That is, weaving is a metaphor of woman's art in which she expresses her

inner-self. He points that her magic is good one. He declares that Shelley's beautiful witch "demonstrates gentleness, power, and love" (Greenfield 23). It is quite different from the "stereotypes of ugly witches involved in black magic or other evil pursuits," and "[t]hus his use and transformation of the exotic witch subverts the northern European stereotype of witches as well" (Greenfield 23).

It is interesting that Brontë coincidentally uses the image of weaving to imply creative writing in her poem "Retrospection:"

We wove a web in childhood,
A web of sunny air;
We dug a spring in infancy
Of water pure and fair;
[. . .]
Faded! the web is still of air,
But how its folds are spread,
And from its tints of crimson clear
How deep a glow is shed.
The light of an Italian sky.
Where clouds of sunset lingering lie
Is not more ruby-red. ("Retrospection" 1-19)

The "web" suggests Brontë's literary world in which she releases her "fantasies of desire" (Maynard 13). As we can see in Shelley's *The Witch of Atlas* and in Brontë's "Retrospection," weaving is traditionally connected with literary art, and it is a white magic of female self-expression. The image of weaving can be seen in *Villette* also. At the

climactic scene of the novel, Lucy says that she spins her story “from the homely web of truth” (*Villette* 464). This expression shows that Lucy is also an artist who weaves the web of her story.

Thus, the three witches teach her how women should attain power and how to use it. At the end of the novel, Lucy succeeds in directing a school and expressing her inner-self. Freed from a conventional femininity, she becomes a powerful and creative woman.

Chapter 3

Images of Food and Hunger

“I had feared wine and sweets, which I did not like”—*Villette*

Sidney Mintz states that food preferences of human beings “are close to the center of their self-definition” (Mintz 3). He goes on explaining this as follows: “What we like, what we eat, how we eat it, and how we feel about it are phenomenologically interrelated matters; together, they speak eloquently to the question of how we perceive ourselves in relation to others” (Mintz 4). In Brontë’s works, “what heroines like” or “what heroine eat” is concerned with their relation to men in patriarchal society. There are many references to diet in her works. Now we will see Lucy Snowe as an example. She is the heartiest and choosiest heroine with regard to food and drink in Brontë’s novels. She feels hungry while she is confined in the attic by Paul to practice her part in the school-play:

In this exercise the afternoon passed: day began to glide into evening; and I, who had eaten nothing since breakfast, grew excessively hungry. Now I thought of the collation, which doubtless they were just then devouring in the garden far below. (I had seen in the vestibule a basketful of small *pâtés à la crème*, than which nothing in the whole range of cookery

seemed to me better). A *pâté*, or a square of cake, it seemed to me would come very *àpropos*; and as my relish for those dainties increased, it began to appear somewhat hard that I should pass my holiday, fasting and in prison. (*Villette* 136)

When Paul takes her to the kitchen to give her meal, she says, “To my great joy this food was limited to coffee and cake: I had feared wine and sweets, which I did not like” (*Villette* 137). If Mintz is right in his claim, then what does her preference have to do with her self-definition?

Her preference for diet is concerned with sugar. She likes coffee and cake while she hates wine and sweets. Firstly we focus on the connection of the beverages, coffee and wine, with sugar. Considering the dietary habit in Britain at that time, we can say that Brontë may have had in mind the sugared one when she referred to wine. According to Mintz, sweetened wine has been very popular from the time of Shakespeare, for example, Falstaff’s favourite sugar and suck, or hippocras, a candied wine flavoured with spice and sugar. He comments, “the English habit of adding sugar to wine was much remarked” (Mintz 136-37). Sugar and wine were inseparable for the British. On the other hand, coffee is emphasised its bitterness in *Villette*. Lucy’s friend, Ginevra Fanshaw does not like coffee because it is not “strong or sweet enough to suit her palate” (*Villette* 233).

Cake is, like coffee, not always sweet. Today “a cake” reminds us of sweet confectionery but as John Ayto suggests, early cakes in England were also essentially bread. The most obvious differences between a “cake” and “bread” are not whether they are sweet or not, but how they

are shaped: the round, flat shape of the cakes, and the cooking method, which turned cakes over once while cooking, while bread was left upright throughout the baking process (Ayto 45). Indeed, Brontë uses the word “sweetmeats” or “sweet cake” to mention sweets. Lucy likes the diet which does not contain sugar.

Sweets and wine are diets which appear most frequently in Brontë’s works. She often uses them as images of indulgence with sweet but empty dreams. For instance, Jane Eyre feels special intimacy with Mr. Rochester, but when she learns about the probability of his marriage with Blanche Ingram, she says to herself: “That a greater fool than Jane Eyre had never breathed the breath of life; that a more fantastic idiot had never surfeited herself on sweet lies, and swallowed poison as if it were nectar” (*Jane Eyre* 136). However, there is another, disturbing meaning lurking behind them: sugar or sweetness implies patriarchal oppression. In *Jane Eyre*, it is the favourite food of John Reed, the young patriarch of the Reeds, whom Jane hates for his tyrannical attitude toward her:

He gorged himself habitually at table, which made him bilious, and gave him a dim and bleared eye and flabby cheeks. He ought now to have been at school; but his mama had taken him home for a month or two, “on account of his delicate health.” Mr. Miles, the master, affirmed that he would do very well if he had fewer cakes and sweetmeats sent him from home. (*Jane Eyre* 7)

Sugar was produced in the plantations of the West Indies at that time. In the seventeenth century, European countries vied with each other

to establish colonies there and build up plantations. The most important product was sugar, because a great number and range of consumers needed it. Plantation management was inseparable from the slave system. Slaves were kidnapped from Africa, and taken to the Caribbean sugar plantations. After a long, dangerous voyage, they were forced to labour in wretched conditions. British sugar merchants succeeded in a business, but their wealth was based on such inhuman exploitation.

Thus, sugar reminds us of the control and exploitation by the British Empire, and Brontë draws a parallel between colonial domination and patriarchal control over women in her works. Lucy's dislike of sweets and wine shows her uncomfortableness about being ruled. The next section will explain that colonial diets imply heroines' alienation from patriarchal culture, focusing on the act of serving and sharing food.

3-1. Serving Sweets and Sharing Chocolate

In Brontë's novels, there are a lot of scenes where women serve or share food with men. Serving food to men is traditionally supposed to be a women's role. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve prepares meals for Adam and Raphael. Gathering all kinds of fruit, making a drink from grapes, tempering sweet creams, she thinks of "What choice to choose for delicacy best,/What order, so contrived as not to mix/Tastes, not well joined, inelegant, but bring/Taste after taste upheld with kindest change" (*Paradise Lost* 5:331-5). Then, she "[ministers] naked, and their flowing cups/With pleasant liquours crowned" (*Paradise Lost* 5:443-4) at a table. Brontë was dissatisfied with such a depiction of a serving woman

as we can see in *Shirley*. Shirley complains about Milton's Eve to Caroline:

“Milton tried to see the first woman; but, Cary, he saw her not. [. . .] It was his cook that he saw; or it was Mrs. Gill, as I have seen her, making custards, in the heat of summer, in the cool dairy, with rose-trees and nasturtiums about the latticed window, preparing a cold collation for the rectors—preserves and ‘dulcet creams;’ [. . .].” (*Shirley* 270)

Shirley recognises that serving is the symbol of the women's inferior state to men.

On the other hand, if the heroine shares food with men, it means that they establish a relationship of equality. Jane Eyre has refused to dine with Mr. Rochester when she is engaged to him, because she has felt humiliated by his condescending attitude. Contrastingly, when she meets him again at Ferndean, she shares meals with him for she loves him better than “when [he] disdained every part but that of the giver and protector” (*Jane Eyre* 379). According to R. B. Martin, sharing meals suggests “an indication of personal harmony” (Martin 226). This act is the symbol of their “perfect concord” (*Jane Eyre* 384). If it has such a symbolic significance, we can say that these acts are greatly concerned with heroines' self-assertion in the patriarchal society. It is shown in what kind of diet they serve to or share with men.

Shirley opens with the depiction of a distressed woman who prepares meals for curates. They consume enormous quantity of beef, cheese, vegetable, wine and spice-cake. They demand more bread and

order their hostess to “Cut it, woman” (*Shirley* 8). She does so but “[h]ad she followed her inclinations, she would cut the parson also” (*Shirley* 8). By depicting woman’s unpleasant duty of serving, Brontë introduces anger of the oppressed in the very beginning of the story, which is the main theme of the novel.

Especially, the colonial products imply patriarchal oppression of women. At the feast of Whitsuntide, many guests visit the rectory and Caroline receives them as a hostess. Dr. Boulton is one of them. When she comes near him “with a glass of wine and a plate of macaroons” (*Shirley* 252), he takes no notice of her:

He did not see her—he never did see her; he hardly knew that such a person existed. He saw the macaroons, however, and being fond of sweets, possessed himself of a small handful thereof. The wine Mrs. Boulton insisted on mingling with hot water, and qualifying with sugar and nutmeg. (*Shirley* 253)

Mr. Boulton’s arrogance is in common with the curates’ rudeness. Both of them are only interested in what a woman serves and never pay attention to the server’s anger and sufferings. Likewise, the British people consume the colonial products like sugar, tea and spice without thinking of how they are produced or who are engaged in their production. Pleasure and prosperity in Britain lie under the sufferings of invisible people in the colonies. The same situation obtains in patriarchal system as well. Men’s comforts are founded on women’s silent anger. Mr. Boulton’s favourites, sweet macaroons and spiced wine are transformed

into metaphors for Caroline's hidden distress toward male oppression.

Here Brontë repeats the image of colonial diet to imply the social structure of men's domination and women's submission, but Shirley's case is slightly different. Shirley often entertains men:

“I rather like to entertain a circle of gentlemen,” said she. “It is amusing to observe how they enjoy a judiciously concocted repast. For ourselves, you see, these choice wines and these scientific dishes are of no importance to us; but gentlemen seem to retain something of the *naïveté* of children about food, and one likes to please them [. . .].”

(*Shirley* 231)

Choice wines and contracted dishes imply power, and men's appetite means their desire for economic and dominative power. However, Shirley says they “are of no importance” to women. Her tone is apparently charged with irony and ridicule in it. She does not share such meals with men. It is her declaration that she would not join their empty power struggle. She does not show overtly her anger with patriarchy, but she gives a glimpse of it to Louis Moore. She doodles “little leaves, fragments of pillars, broken crosses” in Louis' book (*Shirley* 410). They are all symbols of anti-patriarchy; nature, destroyed phallic figures and destroyed emblems of patriarchal religion. For Shirley, Louis is the only man to whom she can open her heart.

Despite this fact, there is a strange coolness between them. It is produced by the walls of gender and class. Louis says to Shirley that “I am a dependant; I know my place,” and Shirley replies, “I am a woman; I

know mine. [. . .] I have received ordinances, and own obligations stringent as yours” (*Shirley* 517). Because of these walls, Shirley is “cool and lofty” (*Shirley* 390) to Louis, and Louis always seems to be sad and “silence seals his mind” (*Shirley* 382). Their incompatibility is shown in the scene of Louis’ sickroom. When Louis catches the fever, Shirley visits him with a basket of grapes, but he rejects to eat them. Grape, which can grow only in plantations in Southern regions, symbolise their discord.

However, when they share a meal, they become equal. What they share is not the colonial food but the traditional diet of Yorkshire; fresh milk and oat-cake. Shirley kneels before the fire and toasts the cake. She appears to be “unconscious of the humility of her present position” (*Shirley* 390) as a server, and she hands the bread and milk to Louis without embarrassment. Also, he “[takes] his portion from her hand as calmly as if he [has] been her equal” (*Shirley* 390). When the products of colonies disappear from the table, a personal harmony arises and the walls between them vanish. Thus, colonial food suggests the disproportion in power while the domestic diet means equality in mind.

In *Villette*, how men and women are related to each other can be understood more clearly by analysing women’s serving and sharing of food. The first striking image of serving is shown in little Polly’s act. During the tea, she sits next to her father to wait on him and Lucy thinks her “a little busy-body” (*Villette* 15). After her father has left, Polly finds another object to wait on; Graham Bretton. Here, the image of the sweets appears again:

It was sufficiently comical to observe her as she sat beside Graham, while he took that meal. [. . .]. [Graham] could not be sufficiently well waited on, nor carefully enough looked after; he was more than the Grand Turk in her estimation. She would gradually assemble the various plates before him, and, when one would suppose all he could possibly desire was within his reach, she would find out something else: “Ma’am,” she would whisper to Mrs. Bretton,—“perhaps your son would like a little cake—sweet cake, you know—there is some in there” (pointing to the sideboard cupboard). Mrs. Bretton, as a rule, disapproved of sweet cake at tea, but still the request was urged,—“One little piece—only for him—as he goes to school: girls—such as me and Miss Snowe—don’t need treats, but *he* would like it.” (*Villette* 15)

Polly’s serving to Graham is more slavish than devoted as we know from the fact that Graham is compared with “the Grand Turk.” Moreover, her slavish act is extended to every woman’s experience by her words that “girls—such as me and Miss Snowe—don’t need treats.”

Graham is a milder version of John Reed. He is the only male in Bretton’s house and a young patriarch. All women in the Bretton household find pleasure in taking care of and satisfying him. Little Polly serves him and Mrs. Bretton readily delivers her own chair up to her son as soon as he comes back home, and allows him to “[possess] himself irreverently of the abdicated throne” (*Villette* 195). He is in authority in

the house and Lucy also comes to be caught in this structure. During her stay with the Brettons after her nervous breakdown, she “[has] learned how severe for [her] [is] the pain of crossing, or grieving or disappointing him” and “[in] a strange and new sense, [she] [grows] most selfish, and quite powerless to deny [herself] the delight of indulging his mood, and being pliant to his will” (*Villette* 214-5). Lucy, who has looked at Polly’s slavish devotion as irritating, has become a server now.

On the contrary, she often shares meals with Paul Emanuel. Their act of sharing meals is a proof of their close relationship. More importantly, we can see the process of her spiritual development by analysing what kind of diet they share. Indeed, they are all “foreign” to her, but not “colonial.” Contrary to sugar and wine, they are not connected with the image of domination. As we have discussed, Brontë projects the heroine’s Byronic desire, discordant with Victorian convention, upon foreign images. “Foreign” food in *Villette* reveals Lucy’s hidden Byronism, and by sharing them with Paul, she achieves the men-women relationship freed from patriarchal structure. By analysing these images, we can understand how she fulfils her Byronic desire and surmounts the wall of culture and conventional femininity.

The most impressive scene of food sharing is the supper at Faubourg Clotilde:

Our meal was simple: the chocolate, the rolls, the plate of fresh summer fruit, cherries and strawberries bedded in green leaves formed the whole: but it was what we both liked better than a feast, and I took a delight inexpressible in

tending M. Paul. (*Villette* 488)

There are two symbolical foods; the fruit and the chocolate. Fruits of this scene have two implications. Firstly, they often imply women's desire to release themselves from the conventional gender role and sexual repression. For example, Milton's Eve eats a forbidden fruit and thinks:

[S]hall I to him make known
 As yet my change, and give him to partake
 Full happiness with me, or rather not,
 But keeps the odds of knowledge in my power
 Without copartner? so to add what wants
 In female sex, the more to draw his love,
 And render me more equal; and perhaps,
 A thing not undesirable, sometime
 Superiour; for, inferiour, who is free
 This may be well: (*Paradise Lost* 9:816-26)

Adam tells Eve that "nothing lovelier can be found/In woman, than to study household good,/And good works in her husband to promote" (*Paradise Lost* 9:231-3) because God assigns them so. However, after she has eaten the fruit, Eve shows that she wants to be independent and superior to men. Fruit is the symbol of her aspiration for "intellectual divinity, equality with or superiority to Adam (and God), pure self-assertion" (Gilbert and Gubar 568).

Likewise, fruits in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" signify Laura's desire for self-assertion. Gilbert and Gubar point out that "Goblin Market's fruit-eating scene parallels the *Paradise Lost* scene"

and explain:

Certainly Eve, devouring the garden's "intellectual food," acts just like her descendant Laura. [. . .] Given this Miltonic context, it seems quite possible that Laura too—sucking on the goblin fruit, asserting and indulging her own desires "without restraint"—is enacting an affirmation of intellectual (or poetical) as well as sexual selfhood. (Gilbert and Gubar 568)

Taking into consideration the context in which fruit is represented, we can say that the fruit in *Villette* implies Lucy's Byronic desire for equality and self-assertion. Eating and sharing them with her, Paul accepts it.

Also, these fruits, cherries and strawberries are symbolically "foreign" food for Lucy because they are connected with Catholicism. Cherry and strawberry are associated with the faith of Virgin Mary. The old ballad called "The Cherry-Tree Carol" is based on the legend of miracle in the New Testament. It says that when Mary and Joseph passed by an orchard of cherries and berries, Mary asks her husband to pick cherries for her but Joseph rejects her request. Then the tree lowers a branch down to her in order that she could take it by herself. Needless to say, the Catholic church attaches great importance to the adoration of the Virgin Mary (as Paul prays to "Marie, Reine du Ciel"). Paul tries to convert Lucy to Catholicism, but she declares, "I thought Romanism wrong, a great mixed image of gold and clay" (*Villette* 419). The difference of religion stands as a cold stone wall between them. However,

by eating these symbolical fruits, she overcomes this cultural gap. Alan Bewell argues about eating foreign food that “You become what you eat in more than a biological sense, for food are ingestible signs” and “through eating, people assimilate culture into themselves and in turn become part of a culture” (Bewell 131). Sharing these fruits suggest that Lucy’s sense of alienation from the society fades away and harmonise with it.

Chocolate is also the diet which is strongly connected with Catholicism. We have referred to Lucy’s fondness of coffee at the beginning of this chapter. Why, then, do she and Paul share not coffee but chocolate? There is a very interesting comparison between coffee and chocolate by Wolfgang Schivelbusch. According to his *Das Paradies, der Geschmack und die Vernunft* [*the Paradise, the Palate and the Reason*], coffee was popular among the Puritans in North-Western Europe while chocolate flourished in Southern Europe such as Spain and Italy, that is, the Catholic nations. The reason why chocolate was important for the Catholics was the fact that chocolate was a helpful nutrient drink during the fasting.

Moreover, chocolate had been believed to have medical benefits as aphrodisiac through the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Coffee, which was called “drink of reason” is supposed to have a precisely opposite effect and it was said to be an anti-erotic drink. It nourished the mind but starved the body⁵. Embodying the Baroque-Catholic physicality, chocolate is something totally alien to Protestant asceticism (Schivelbusch 90-4). By taking chocolate instead of coffee, Lucy ceases

to fear Paul's attachment to her and accepts her own sexual desire. John Maynard explains that sexuality plays an important role in her formation of personality:

Lucy's emergence from the frozen, unpleasant girl of the opening to possession of her humanity is presented as essentially one of sexual growth. And sexual growth itself is seen as ramifying in every aspect of her personality, feelings, attitude toward her body, communication with others, maturity, and self-reliance. Accepting her sexual feelings, Lucy accepts every other aspect of her life as a human.
(Maynard 211)

Acceptance of sexuality is essential for her to form warm relationships with others. Sharing chocolate with Paul, she overcomes the religious bias and subverts the convention of sexual morality to build a harmonious relationship with him as a woman of independent state. Their relationship is symbolised by the image of the moon and a star in this scene. From the balcony where they are having meal, the moon and a star can be viewed:

Above the poplars, the laurels, the cypresses, and roses,
looked up a moon so lovely and so halcyon, the heart
trembled under her smile; a star shone subject beside her,
with the unemulous ray of pure love. (*Villette* 488)

Brontë compares Lucy and Paul with the moon and a star. It is interesting that she uses the article "a" for the moon. Usually, "moon" has the article "the," but she intentionally put "a" for the moon and replacing "the" with

“a,” she emphasises their equality. Their lights are “unemulous” of each other. Thus foreign diets reveal Lucy’s Byronism and she achieves equality with men by sharing them with Paul.

3-2. Hunger in “Britishness” and “Foreign” Fulfilment

We have discussed the question “what do they eat?” However, there is another important question about eating: “Can they eat or not?” Colonial trade brought extraordinary changes and richness to the British table, but not all classes could enjoy the benefit. Working class people starved under the prosperity of the Empire. An example is a passage from *Shirley*. It is the scene of the dinner at the Farrens, the mill-worker:

On his entrance his wife served out, in orderly sort, such dinner as she had to give him and the bairns. It was only porridge, and too little of that. Some of the younger children asked for more when they had done their portion — an application which disturbed William much. (*Shirley* 119)

Interestingly, this depiction of the table of the poor working-class family follows soon after the famous chapter about female hunger:

A lover masculine so disappointed can speak and urge explanation, a lover feminine can say nothing; if she did, the result would be shame and anguish, inward remorse for self-treachery. [. . .] Take the matter as you find it ask no questions, utter no remonstrances; it is your best wisdom. You expected bread and you have got a stone: break your teeth on it, and don’t shriek because the nerves are

martyrised; do not doubt that your mental stomach—if you have such a thing—is strong as an ostrich’s; the stone will digest. You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion. (*Shirley* 89-90)

In this chapter, women’s unfulfilled Byronic desire is explicitly told. Women want to have passion, real femininity and equality in the relationship with men, but they are forbidden even to express their desire. The image of hunger implies the frustration caused by a conflict between Byronism and Victorian convention. Paralleling female hunger with starvation of the working-class, Brontë tried to declare that women’s hidden suffering was not a personal problem but a social one. Women’s suffering was thought to be trivial at that time, as Brontë made an ironical remark about men’s indifference to women’s agony. Mr. Helstone, who is “ignorant as the table supporting his coffee-cup of all his niece had undergone and was undergoing,” (*Shirley* 162) turns down Caroline’s request to leave home to be a governess, and says:

“These women are incomprehensible. They have the strangest knack of startling you with unpleasant surprises. To-day you see them bouncing, buxom, red as cherries, and round as apples; to-morrow they exhibit themselves effete as dead weeds, blanched and broken down. And the reason of it all? that’s the puzzle. She has her meals, her liberty, a good house to live in, and good clothes to wear, as usual.” (*Shirley* 162)

He can not understand the reason for female suffering because he

believes that women must be happy as long as they have meals, clothes and houses to live in. Hearing her uncle's comment, Caroline desperately cries in her heart:

Men of England! look at your poor girls, many of them fading around you, dropping off in consumption or decline; or, what is worse, degenerating to sour old maids—envious, back-biting, wretched, because life is a desert to them; or, what is worst of all, reduced to strive, by scarce modest coquetry and debasing artifice, to gain that position and consideration by marriage which to celibacy is denied.

(*Shirley* 330)

Caroline appeals to “Men of England” because women’s problem is a social and national question. In the previous section of this chapter, we explain that woman’s question is projected onto the colonial image, but these images of hunger, the Farrens’ and Caroline’s, reveal that a disturbing factor lies under British social structure.

In order to explain it, we are going to analyse the image of opium, which was very popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Opium is one of the most influential diets brought to Britain from the East. Thomas De Quincey’s *The Confession of an English Opium Eater* gives us an insight into opium’s influences upon British society at that time. Allan Bewell says that “De Quincey was not simply describing a unique dietary and cultural problem but was also suggesting [. . .] that opium is a disease that is transforming English society”(Bewell 158). He points out that this disease originates in De Quincey’s primal experience

of hunger. De Quincey tells us that he took opium “not for the purpose of creating pleasure, but of mitigating pain in the severest degree” (De Quincey “PRELIMINARY CONFESSIONS”). When he was twenty-eight years old, he was attacked by “a most painful affection of the stomach,” which has “originally been caused by extremities of hunger, suffered in my boyish days” when he wandered the Welsh mountains (De Quincey “PRELIMINARY CONFESSIONS”):

From the keen appetite produced by constant exercise and mountain air, acting on a youthful stomach, I soon began to suffer greatly on this slender regimen, for the single meal which I could venture to order was coffee or tea. Even this, however, was at length withdrawn; and afterwards, so long as I remained in Wales, I subsisted either on blackberries, hips, haws, &c., or on the casual hospitalities which I now and then received in return for such little services as I had an opportunity of rendering. (De Quincey “PRELIMINARY CONFESSIONS”)

Opium is directly connected with his memory of hunger and Bewell declares, “a healthful British regimen—of good air and frequent exercise—combines with poverty and perhaps a ‘Hindoo’ vegetarian diet to produce his illness” (Bewell 155). For the British, poverty is “Eastern” factor which should be excluded from their society, but De Quincey’s narrative shows that it is found in “a healthful British regimen.” Thus, the belief in the British superiority gradually crumbles in De Quincey’s text. Later, the border between the East and the West

becomes more ambiguous. One beautiful morning of May, he is standing outside his cottage. The typical view of English countryside stretches before him: “the air is cool and still, and the hills are high and stretch away to heaven; and the forest glades are as quiet as the churchyard” and he thinks, “with the dew I can wash the fever from my forehead, and then I shall be unhappy no longer” (De Quincey “June 1819”). He opens the garden gate, and suddenly, sees an illusion:

I saw upon the left a scene far different, but which yet the power of dreams had reconciled into harmony with the other. The scene was an Oriental one, and there also it was Easter Sunday, and very early in the morning. And at a vast distance were visible, as a stain upon the horizon, the domes and cupolas of a great city—an image or faint abstraction, caught perhaps in childhood from some picture of Jerusalem. And not a bow-shot from me, upon a stone and shaded by Judean palms, there sat a woman, and I looked, and it was—Ann! She fixed her eyes upon me earnestly, and I said to her at length: “So, then, I have found you at last.” I waited, but she answered me not a word. (De Quincey “June 1819”)

Here, a British pastoral scene of beautiful Easter morning and an Eastern dream are mixed together. The Eastern image is linked up to the “foreign” factor of poverty, that is an illusion of the orphan girl whom he met in London, where he wandered in penury. This passage reveals the fact that “hunger” which Victorians conceived to be “foreign” to them is

always lurking under the Britishness as oppose to foreignness. He criticises the British social structure:

[T]he stream of London charity flows in a channel which, though deep and mighty, is yet noiseless and underground; not obvious or readily accessible to poor houseless wanderers; and it cannot be denied that the outside air and framework of London society is harsh, cruel, and repulsive. (De Quincey "PRELIMINARY CONFESSIONS")

In his text, the image of opium is a tool for disclosing the disturbing factor such as poverty in the British society. Returning to Brontë's text, we can also find the heroine's extreme hunger in "Britishness." For example, Jane Eyre refuses Rochester's proposal for retreat in his villa in South-Europe, and escapes from Thornfield to suffer hunger in the heath, just like De Quincey in Wales. However, a more striking image of hunger can be seen in *Villette*. By analysing the meaning of Lucy's hunger, we can understand her relationship with her two lovers, regarding the social ideology of "romantic love."

Merryn Williams points out that Brontë's heroines seek "masters" whom they willingly obey:

While Charlotte did not want a woman to become a Mina Laury, she still felt that the man-woman relationship was enormously important. And it was not quite an equal relationship, for all her heroines want not just a husband but a 'master.' First found in the Anglian stories, this is a key word in all her novels. Her women normally call their lovers

or husbands ‘master,’ ‘sir,’ ‘monsieur.’ [. . .] It is worth remembering Mrs. Gaskell’s comment that Charlotte ‘would never have been happy but with an exacting, rigid, law-giving, passionate man.’ (Williams 92-3)

Villette is not an exception, but it is distinguished from her other novels because there are two masters: John Graham Bretton and Paul Emanuel. William Makepeace Thackeray wrote to his friend as follows: “*Villette* is rather vulgar—I don’t make my *good* women ready to fall in love with two men at once”(Thackerey 198). He criticised the heroine for her fickleness, but in fact, we can see Lucy’s mental growth in the switching of her master, from Graham to Paul. John Maynard defines such growth as “the development from romantic feeling to sexual passion” and points that it is the “repeated theme” in her novels (Maynard 214).

It is interesting that Maynard compares romantic feeling with sexual passion because romance is in opposition to sexuality in the Victorian era. David Notter sketches out the history of “romantic love.” The origin of romantic love is courtly love in the twelfth to sixteenth centuries. Then courtly love shaded into “amour passion” in seventeenth-century France. These forms of love were sensual and had no relation to matrimony at this point. However, the romantic love which appeared in the middle of the nineteenth century is completely different from courtly love or amour passion in which it excluded sensuality from a man-woman relationship and emphasised sexual purity, especially woman’s innocence. Romantic love is one of the ideas which caused the tendency in society to confine women in the wrong image of a “pure

angel.” Also, it promoted discrimination in gender-roles because it is connected with patriarchy. Notter explains that it produced the ideology of the “sacred home” (Notter 3-4). A couple tied with an asexual, spiritual bond of romantic love consummate in marriage. They make up a morally and sexually pure home, and it becomes a kind of sanctuary which is detached from the immoral, dangerous world outside. Victorian people believed that purity was woman’s virtue, so women were given the role of a guardian of home as a sanctuary. The “romantic love ideology” is the sociological technical term which explains the relativity of romantic love and the development of family system in modern society. This ideology confined women in the home under the name of “the angel in the house” and encouraged them to serve their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons. The romantic love ideology denied women’s Byronism: sexual passion, real femininity and equality with men.

Anthony Giddens, however, suggests there is another side to romantic love:

The ethos of romantic love has had a double impact upon women’s situation. On one hand it has helped to put women ‘in their place’—the home. On the other hand, however, romantic love can be seen as an active, and radical, engagement with the ‘maleness’ of modern society. Romantic love presumes that a durable emotional tie can be established with the other on the basis of qualities intrinsic to that tie itself. It is harbinger of the pure relationship, although it also stands in tension with it. (Giddens 2)

The romantic love discards sexuality, and consequently exaggerates a spiritual link. Every heroine in Brontë's novels needs to balance sexuality with spirituality. Lucy gradually awakes from the illusion of romantic love and balances spiritual connection with sexual reality. To understand how she achieves sexual and spiritual fulfilment, we will compare her "British" master Graham and her "foreign" master Paul.

Brontë indicates that Graham is a typical romantic hero through his relation to Ginevra Fanshawe, and his romantic love is depicted as a foolish illusion. In the early part of the story, he devotes himself to Ginevra, but she "[feels] so very cold to" (*Villette* 100) him. She confides to Lucy:

"[T]he man is too romantic and devoted, and he expects something more of me than I find it convenient to be. He thinks I am perfect: furnished with all sorts of sterling qualities and solid virtues, such as I never had, nor intend to have. Now, one can't help, in his presence, rather trying to justify his good opinion; and it does so tire one to be goody, and to talk sense,—for he really thinks I am sensible. [. . .]."

(*Villette* 100)

As we have discussed before, romantic love excludes the sexual relation between men and women: Graham denies woman's sexuality. He idealises woman as a "pure angel" (*Villette* 224) and does not see what she really is.

Nevertheless, Lucy is fascinated by him and by his romantic love. She feels both fascination and danger in it. When she sees his portrait,

she thinks that “[a]ny romantic little school-girl might almost have loved it in its frame” while she is also perplexed with the question “[h]ow it [is] that what charmed so much, could at the same time so keenly pain”(Villette 191). Although she knows that he forces a woman to be an unrealistic pure angel, she cannot help but be attracted to him. While she teases and criticises his illusionary romantic love, she herself is obsessed with this illusion.

She is attracted by a purely spiritual relationship in romantic love, elevates it to the height of exaggerated ideal. Her illusion about romantic love grows into morbidity when she spends a solitary summer vacation at the dormitory:

By True Love was Ginevra followed: never could she be alone. [. . .] I pictured her faithful hero half conscious of her coy fondness, and comforted by that consciousness: I conceived an electric chord of sympathy between them, a fine chain of mutual understanding, sustaining union through a separation of a hundred leagues—carrying, across mound and hollow, communication by prayer and wish. Ginevra gradually became with me a sort of heroine. (Villette 175)

Because Lucy knows Ginevra is a “coquettish, and ignorant, [. . .] and silly and selfish”(Villette 100) girl, she ought to notice the preposterousness of this illusion. However, “an electric chord of sympathy [. . .], a fine chain of mutual understanding, sustaining union through a separation of a hundred leagues—carrying, across mound and hollow, communication by prayer and wish” is very attractive to her, and

she is so eager to find it in Graham that she is unable to form a sound judgment.

Lucy obeys him and tries to become his ideal pure angel; consequently her Byronism is repressed. The scene of the theatre is worth noticing to clarify her inner-conflict. Lucy and Graham go to the theatre and see the performance of the great actress whom Lucy calls Vashti. Maynard states that she is “a kind of demon of unleashed female sexual energy, cognate to Bertha”(Maynard 180). Her performance awakens Lucy’s sexuality from the state of deadly repression:

The strong magnetism of genius drew my heart out of its wonted orbit; the sunflower turned from the south to a fierce light, not solar—a rushing, red, cometary light—hot on vision and to sensation. I had seen acting before, but never anything like this: never anything which astonished Hope and hushed Desire; which outstripped Impulse and paled Conception; which, instead of merely irritating imagination with the thought of what *might* be done, at the same time fevering the nerves because it was *not* done, disclosed power like a deep, swollen winter river, thundering in cataract, and bearing the soul, like a leaf, on the steep and steelly sweep of its descent. (*Villette* 287-88)

This passage is filled with Brontë’s favourite symbols of sexuality like the colour “red” or the “cataract.” Lucy’s frozen river of passion is melted by Vashti’s performance and starts to flow. Just then, during the performance, the fire breaks out in the theatre. We cannot read this

without thinking of the pyromania of Bertha, who awakens the heroine's hidden Byronic desire in *Jane Eyre*. The fire symbolises Lucy's awakening sexual instinct.

When he notices the fire at the theatre, Graham orders Lucy to sit still. That is, he forbids Lucy to respond to her sexual instinct. He tries to repress her sexuality. She tells us as follows:

Yes, thus adjured, I think I would have sat still under a rocking crag: but, indeed, to sit still in actual circumstances was my instinct; and at the price of my very life, I would not have moved to give him trouble, thwart his will, or make demands on his attention. (*Villette* 290)

Here, the romantic love ideology conditions her to repress her own sexuality. Her words "at the price of my very life" are not merely a figurative phrase. As Maynard suggests, Brontë sees sexuality as "a quality of entire self and body" rather than "a simple genital appetite" (Maynard 212). For Brontë, spirituality is essential to developing the self, but sexuality is also a vital element. They should be totally balanced. An angel, purely spiritual and bodiless, can never hope to attain a fully developed self. The legendary nun buried alive and Justine Marie, who died young in a convent, are symbols of repressed sexuality in *Villette*. A woman who is denied her sexuality is represented with an image of death. Although the spiritual bond of romantic love is important for Lucy, its ideology drives her to destruction, because a romantic hero as a patriarchal master thrusts women into the frame of angelic purity and forces them to be conditioned by it. Lucy must throw off the illusion of

romantic love to get the “entire self and body.”

Her other master, Paul Emanuel, belongs to a type of character opposite to Graham. He is a Catholic and a “foreigner” for her. She compares gentle and good-looking Graham with dark, irritable, passionate Paul. She says they are as different “as the fruit of Hesperides might be unlike the sloe in the wild thicket; as the high-couraged but tractable Arabian is unlike the rude and stubborn ‘sheltie’” (*Villette* 229). Maynard, commenting on this metaphorical comparison, suggests that Lucy might like the sloe and the sheltie better than the fruit of Hesperides and Arabian horse (Maynard 195). This is very interesting, because it means that Lucy comes to prefer the real sloe to the golden apple which has never existed except in a legend. In other words, this description suggests that Lucy is on the point of getting rid of the illusion of romantic love.

The difference between Graham and Paul is clearly shown in their view of woman’s sexuality. In Chapter 14, Lucy sees the picture of voluptuous Cleopatra in the gallery. As we have discussed before, while Victorians created the ideal of a spiritual, angel-like woman, they also had the notion that a woman was a devilish, fallen creature: and consequently, in their view women were polarised into spiritual angels and sensual demons. The picture of Cleopatra is the representation of the woman as a sensual creature. Lucy hears the opinion about this picture from both Graham and Paul. When Graham gazes at it, “his mouth [looks] fastidious, his eyes cool” (*Villette* 229) and he says, “ ‘le volptueux’ is little to my liking” (*Villette* 230). It is a natural response of

a romantic hero who rejects woman's sexuality and admires purity. On the other hand, Paul says she is "not a woman [he] would want as a wife, a daughter, or a sister" but he finds "a superb woman—a figure of an empress, the form of Juno" (*Villette* 228) in it. He hates the woman image which emphasises sensuality, but never shows a cold reaction to her sexuality. He can see the "real" femininity in women, instead of seeing them simply as spiritual angels or sensual demons.

Paul is the only person who perceives Lucy's sexuality. He calls her a "coquette" and says "Your soul is on fire, lightning in your eyes" (*Villette* 352), whereas other people see her as "a creature inoffensive as a shadow" (*Villette* 370). He discloses Lucy's hidden Byronism. He worries that her sexual passion and desire for power are ready to spurt out recklessly, and tells Lucy, "You want so much checking, regulating, and keeping down" (*Villette* 402). As far as these words suggest, Paul seems to be a tyrannical, patriarchal master. However, Brontë does not form his character so simply. Elaine Showalter offers a clear explanation about this. She comments on "the appeal of the rough lover" that "the brutal brute flattered the heroine's spirit by treating her as an equal rather than as a sensitive, fragile fool who must be sheltered and protected" (Showalter 143). Paul tries to keep down Lucy because he can find power in her. The romantic love ideology makes a man and a woman into a master and a servant, but the relationship which is based on sexual reality will make them equals. Through the relation with Paul as equals, Lucy gradually liberates her own sexuality and awakens from the illusion of romantic love. It is the

process of how Lucy combats and gratifies hunger. We can follow it through various images of food.

In the convent-like school, Lucy's sexuality is released only in the imaginative world. However, she calls these dreams and fancy as "a mess of that manna [. . .] which, indeed, at first melts on lips with an unspeakable and preternatural sweetness, but which, in the end, our souls fully surely loath" and she "[longs] deliriously for the natural and earth-grown food" (*Villette* 266). The "natural and earth-grown food" means fulfilment of Byronic desire which is rooted in sexual reality. She needs the natural, fresh food of sexual fulfillment, not an over-sensual feast nor the sweet but poisonous product of the imagination.

She tries to find it in the interaction with Graham at first. After her mental breakdown, she begins to correspond with him in letters. When she receives a letter from him for the first time, she compares it to a wholesome food of the forest:

I held in my hand a morsel of real solid joy: [. . .] It was neither sweet hail nor small coriander-seed—neither slight wafer, nor luscious honey, I had lighted on; it was the wild, savoury mess of the hunter, nourishing and salubrious meat, forest-fed or desert-reared, fresh, healthful, and life-sustaining. (*Villette* 266)

However, his attention shifts to the beautiful angel-like girl, Paulina and his letters are cut off. She waits for the letter like "animals kept in cages, and so scantily fed as to be always upon the verge of famine, awaits their food" (*Villette* 298), and re-reads the letters which she has received again

and again:

In the very extremity of want, I had recourse again, and yet again, to the little packet in the case—the five letters. [. . .] It was always at night I visited them, and not daring to ask every evening for a candle in the kitchen, I bought a wax taper and matches to light it, and at the study-hour stole up to the dormitory and feasted on my crust from the Barmecide's loaf. It did not nourish me: I pined on it, and got as thin as a shadow: otherwise I was not ill. (*Villette* 297)

Barmecide is a character in the *Arabian Nights* who entertains his guest with empty dishes. When she realises that Graham cannot fulfil her desire, “a morsel of real solid joy” has changed into the empty feast in the Eastern fable. She calls his letters “the Barmicide loaf” because she realises that the fulfillment which she has imagined she can find in her relation with him is only a sham. The British value of romantic love ideology that is presented by Graham causes her hunger.

It is worth considering that she clings onto letters in the interaction with Graham. According to David Notter, romantic love is sustained by ritual acts, and writing, reading or exchanging letters is one of the important ceremonies (Notter 29). Based on this fact, Lucy's burial of the letters is very meaningful. She gives up the love for Graham, burying the letters under the old pear tree in the school garden. This act suggests that she has sealed up her yearning for romantic love and begins to look for something more solid and substantial than an empty Barmicide feast.

The romantic interaction with Graham which lacks sexual reality leads Lucy to starving. While Graham starves her and her relation with him suggests an empty dish, Paul often gives and shares the meal with her. For example, he locks her up in the attic to prepare for the school-play, but when he knows that she is hungry, he gives a lot of food. He “[superintends] [her] repast, and almost forced upon [her] more than [she] could swallow” (*Villette* 137):

“A la bonne heure [That’s the spirit],” he cried, when I signified that I really could take no more, and, with uplifted hands, implored to be spared the additional roll on which he had just spread butter. “You will set me down as a species of tyrant and Bluebeard, starving women in a garret; whereas, after all, I am no such thing. Now, Mademoiselle, do you feel courage and strength to appear?” (*Villette* 137)

Here Brontë ensures that he is not a patriarchal tyrant who starves women. Subsequently, his generosity about food is often described. These images of food suggest their satisfying relationship. Lucy’s appetite has “needed no more than the tiny messes served for the invalid” (*Villette* 42) but when she meets Paul, it increases, so much so that is she is even laughed at by him: “Petite gourmande [Little glutton]!” (*Villette* 394) Instead of the British hero Graham, Paul, the foreign anti-romantic hero gives her physical surfeit which is a spiritual fulfilment also.

We have seen Lucy’s awakening from romantic love to sexual reality, but strangely, she fears and tries to evade admitting that she is

sexually attached to Paul. The strangest scene is the evening of the excursion day. Lucy is alone in the school room and sees Paul, who is looking for her. She is suddenly caught by an inconsequent terror. “[T]he coward within [Lucy] [grows] pale, [shrinks] and she [is] gone on the wings of panic” (*Villette* 384), so she hides herself from him. Maynard connects Paul’s passionate impulsive nature with his sexual vigour (Maynard 195), and the depictions of his impetuous act as “[h]e [turns] so suddenly, he [strides] so fast, he [looks] so strange” and “the shrubs crush and the gravels crunch to his advance” (*Villette* 426) show Paul’s strong sexual aggressiveness. Brontë does not clearly explain why Lucy is suddenly afraid, but considering the conflict between passion and reason, a theme seen in all her novels from the juvenilia to the masterpieces, it is easy to suppose that the origin of the fear is the dread for the loss of self caused by indulging herself in passion. Sexuality is indeed the indispensable element for the achievement of “entire self and body” (Maynard 212), but sexual involvement also threatens woman’s independence. Slavish mistresses in “The Tales of Angria” like Mina Laury and Caroline Vernon represent such a situation for a woman.

Since Lucy has the fear of her own sexuality, she values something that is opposite to it: the spiritual connection brought about by romantic love. She does not give up the yearning for Graham and romantic love even after she establishes a harmonious relationship with Paul:

[Graham] proved to me that he kept one little closet, over the door of which was written “Lucy’s Room.” I kept a place for him, too—a place of which I never took the measure, either

by rule or compass: I think it was like the tent of Peri-Banou. All my life long I carried it folded in the hollow of my hand yet, released from that hold and constriction, I know not but its innate capacity for expanse might have magnified it into a tabernacle for a host. (*Villette* 505)

It seems to be strange that she has a secret room for Graham in her heart, but now she is mature enough to judge that romantic love is only an illusion because she accepts her own sexuality and develops the relationship which is based on sexual reality with Paul. When she is asked by Paulina whether she admires Graham or not, she answers:

“I’ll tell you what I do, Paulina,” was once my answer to her many questions. “*I never see him*. I looked at him twice or thrice about a year ago, before he recognised me, and then I shut my eyes; and if he were to cross their balls twelve times between each day’s sunset and sunrise, except from memory, I should hardly know what shape had gone by.”

“Lucy, what do you mean?” said she, under her breath.

“I mean that I value vision, and dread being struck stone blind.” (*Villette* 424-25)

The spiritual bond of romantic love is ideal and she respects it, but she no longer commits the error of longing for real sexual fulfilment in the visionary love. She can totally curb her feeling and balance sexual passion with reason.

Such a balance between sexuality and spirituality is shown in her correspondence with Paul. During the three years while Paul is in

Guadeloupe, she exchanges letters with him. As we have mentioned before, correspondence is a typical ritual act in romantic love relations, but here the correspondence is beyond the mere ritual:

By every vessel he wrote; he wrote as he gave and as he loved, in full-handed, full-hearted plenitude. He wrote because he liked to write; [. . .] There was no sham and no cheat, and no hollow unreal in him. Apology never dropped her slippery oil on his lips—never proffered, by his pen, her coward feints and paltry nullities: he would give neither a stone, nor an excuse—neither a scorpion; nor a disappointment; his letters were real food that nourished, living water that refreshed. (*Villette* 544)

In contrast to the correspondence with Graham which is described with the image of hunger and an empty feast, she says Paul's letters are "real food nourished, living water that refreshed," that is, wholesome sexual fulfillment. She finds it even in the romantic act, correspondence in letters devoid of physical contact, she gains both sexual and spiritual satisfaction. The image of hunger in *Villette* shows us that the problem which causes female hunger lies in romantic love ideology in Victorian society, but Lucy, who greatly suffers from it, is fulfilled with nourished food and living water in the romantic act. The fact means that she can totally balance the British value and her "foreign" desire for Byronism.

Chapter 4

Dressing for Self-Expression

“I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester, or sitting like a second Danae with the golden shower falling daily round me.”—*Jane Eyre*

Juliet Barker introduces a very interesting episode about a dress in Charlotte Brontë’s life. When she studied at Belgium, Brontë learned not only French but also “how to dress:”

It was evidently in Brussels that Charlotte learnt to adapt her dress to suit her tiny figure. She abandoned her old-fashioned dresses with their high waists and large sleeves and collars and began to wear plainer clothes, neatly waisted with narrow sleeves and small, contrasting, embroidered collars. In this she was clearly imitating the Belgian girls and her future heroines, from Frances Henri to Lucy Snowe, would all win approval for the neatness and plain simplicity of their dress even if they lacked the advantages of personal beauty. (Barker 393)

Like the creator, Brontë’s heroines are careful about her appearance. The following remark of Jane Eyre about dressing seems to be the author’s own:

I dressed myself with care: obliged to be plain—for I had no article of attire that was not made with extreme simplicity—I was still by nature solicitous to be neat. It was not my habit to be disregardful of appearance or careless of the impression I made: on the contrary, I ever wished to look as well as I could, and to please as much as my want of beauty would permit. (*Jane Eyre* 83-4)

Brontë sometimes uses dress to express the heroines' personality, and at other times to conceal their secret inner-selves. This chapter examines how the dress and accessories function as a tool for representing the heroines' Byronism. We will show it by a research into the colonial fabric trade and labours of working classes.

4-1. The Image of the Eastern Costume

In "The Tales of Angria," Marian Hume as a new wife of Zamorna wears "a white robe of the finest texture the Indian loom can produce" ("The Bridal" 80). Before she marries him, her dress has been simple and "almost Quaker-like" ("Albion and Marina" 57), but now she puts on the robe made of costly material from India. Her Indian dress has an underlying meaning. As the British Empire expanded, the textile made in the East became very popular in Britain. People were attracted to splendid silk, satin, muslin, calico and cassimere brought from the Eastern countries. As a result, the great fashion culture flourished in Victorian Britain. New textiles and styles are accompanied by exotic and romantic images. The interest in the Oriental culture of Western people

was aroused by the Grand Tour and stimulated by the Great Exhibition. Romantic writers were especially fascinated with exoticism and Brontë inherited it from her literary predecessors. Especially, she was fascinated with exotic dresses. According to Christine Alexander, she “loved to describe not only the dress of her regal characters but also their splendid possessions, which in themselves became indications of characters” (C. Alexander 115), and her juvenile stories were filled with depictions of Eastern attire.

We can observe how these fabrics appealed to the British people in the contemporary literature. In *Northanger Abbey* Jane Austen presents the conversation between Henry Tilney and Mrs. Allen’s about “a true Indian muslin” (*Northanger Abbey* 25). In Gaskell’s *Cranford*, a parcel for Mrs. Jenkyns arrives from her son in India the day after she has died. It is “a large, soft, white Indian shawl, with just a little narrow border all round.” Her husband says, “It is just such a shawl as she wished for when she was married, and her mother did not give it her. I did not know of it till after, or she should have had it—she should; but she shall have it now.” (*Cranford* 70) Also, Lucy Audley in Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* “[wraps] herself in an Indian shawl; a shawl that had cost Sir Michael a hundred guineas” when she is brought to an asylum:

I think she had an idea that it would be well to wear this costly garment; so that if hustled suddenly away, she might carry at least one of her possessions with her. Remember how much she had periled for a fine house and gorgeous furniture, for carriages and horses, jewels and laces; and do

not wonder if she clings with a desperate tenacity to gauds and gew-gaws, in the hour of her despair. (*Lady Audley's Secret* 373-4)

The last example is very interesting because in this passage, the Indian shawl is not only a marker of the writer's interest in exotic attire but also a device which reveals Lady Audley's black-heartedness. Such implications can be shown in Brontë's works too.

In her text, the textiles from the colonies were connected with fortune and luxury, which often hide negative connotations behind them. The explicit example is shown in *Jane Eyre*. Dogmatic and pompous Lady Ingram puts on "a shawl turban of some gold-wrought Indian fabric" and it "invested her with a truly imperial dignity" (*Jane Eyre* 146). Her Indian shawl turban, connected with the word "imperial" reminds the readers of colonial exploitation. Lady Ingram's attitude and the colonial trade system share something in common. Her Indian shawl shows Lady Ingram's haughtiness with its association of British colonialism.

Now we return to Marian Hume's case. Her Indian robe is also related with her husband's fortune. That is, it is the embodiment of Zamorna's financial power and Brontë connects it with patriarchal despotism. At the beginning of "The Secret," Zamorna shows off his generosity at a jeweller's shop, but soon after, his despotic side is revealed. He addresses Marian in a condescending tone as a patriarch. Other Angrian novelettes report Marian's later life: she is neglected by her husband and dies of broken heart. Her Indian robe is a symbol of the

tragedy of the oppressed.

Furthermore, luxurious dresses of Eastern texture are often connected with harem slaves. Luxurious appearance reminded Victorian people of the seraglio. Beautiful dress suggests woman's slavery. Mina Laury, Zamorna's mistress is disgraced because her identity is revealed by her luxurious costume. One winter night, a lady injured in a carriage accident (readers know that she is Mary Percy, Zamorna's wife) is carried into Mina's house. The lady learns Mina's status from her costume:

The lady surveyed Miss Laury with another furtive side-glance of her large, majestic eyes. Those eyes lingered upon the diamond ear-rings, the bandeau of brilliants that flashed from between the clusters of raven curls [. . .] and finally were reverted to the wall with an expression that spoke volumes. Miss Laury could have torn the dazzling pendants from her ears. She was bitterly stung. 'Every body knows me,' she said to herself. "'Mistress', I suppose, is branded on my brow." ("Mina Laury" 51)

Mina's jewellery is directly connected with her disgraceful situation as a mistress. Also, Brontë states that she is Zamorna's "property:"

Miss Laury belonged to the Duke of Zamorna. She was indisputably his property, as much as the lodge of Rivaulx or the stately woods of Hawkscliffe, and in that light she considered herself. ("Mina Laury" 27-8)

She is a slave of Zamorna. Her costume reminds us of a harem and it is

the symbol of her slavery.

Harem slaves were traded like goods or products and forced to be under the control of a male. Brontë saw the similarity between the Eastern custom and the marriage market in Britain. This is why her heroines excessively hate to be showily dressed. Jane Eyre says that when Rochester has bought her dresses and jewellery, her face “[burns] with a sense of annoyance and degradation:”

“I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester, or sitting like a second Danae with the golden shower falling daily round me. I will write to Madeira the moment I get home, and tell my uncle John I am going to be married, and to whom: if I had but a prospect of one day bringing Mr. Rochester an accession of fortune, I could better endure to be kept by him now.” And somewhat relieved by this idea (which I failed not to execute that day), I ventured once more to meet my master’s and lover’s eye, which most pertinaciously sought mine, though I averted both face and gaze. He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched: [. . .]. (*Jane Eyre* 229)

Rochester’s financial power (supposedly originated in Jamaica) is associated with a Sultan’s. His fortune is doubly coloured by the image of enslavement; slaves in the colonies and those in a harem. Sexual control and colonial domination correspond to each other.

Jane refuses to be involved in the power structure of domination.

After he has bought dresses for Jane, Rochester says, “I would not exchange this one little English girl for the Grand Turk’s whole seraglio, gazelle-eyes, houri forms, and all” (*Jane Eyre* 229). The Eastern allusion disgusts her. She cannot stand with “being bought” like slaves with dresses and she declares, “I’ll wear nothing but my old Lowood frocks to the end of the chapter. I’ll be married in this lilac gingham” (*Jane Eyre* 229). Her rejection of costly dresses which Rochester buys for her means that she would not submit to male control. Her Quakerish appearance is a strategy of protecting herself from the dangers of the controlling system.

4-2. Cotton and History of Exploitations

Since Eastern costumes and textures are associated with patriarchal control, Brontë’s heroines rarely put them on. However, there is an exception: cotton, above all, muslin. Cotton had a wide range of quality and price, from low-priced print to delicate muslin. Especially, muslin attracted fashionable upper-class ladies. According to Clare Hughes, up to the eighteenth century, “formal clothing for both men and women [. . .] was silk, satin or velvet. Wool or fustian (a coarse linen and cotton mixture) was worn further down the social scale, or for informal, country-wear” (Hughes 36). However, muslin became enormously popular because of the trend of a neo-classical style dress. Influenced by Rousseau’s opinion “Retour à la nature,” women in Europe at that time came to favour a dress which naturally covered the lines of their bodies. They wore a loose dress with gathers and drapes which reminded them of the garment of ancient Rome and Greece. Consequently that kind of dress

was called a “Roman style” or a “Diana style.” It was an elegant long tunic made of soft, thin material such as gauze, lawn and muslin. Women were clad in these thin dresses without petticoats or drawers, not only in summer but also in winter. It inevitably led to the result that many fashionable young women caught deadly cold and pneumonia. People termed this phenomenon “the muslin disease.” It testifies to the tremendous popularity of cotton texture.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, Indian cotton texture called “calico” became the major import goods of the East India Company. By 1667, it had accounted for 66.4 percent of the British imports. Throughout the eighteenth century, calico sales exploded. In 1701 only 1,985,868 pounds (900,775 kg) of cotton was imported into England but the number leapt up to 3,870,392 pounds (1,755,580 kg) by 1764 (Espinasse). The “calico fever” dealt a serious blow to the British domestic industry, the woollen and silk manufacturers. They petitioned the government to forbid the import of calico. Manufacturers and the East India Company were fiercely opposed to each other, but the Company was at an advantage because the executives had a considerable influence on Parliament. In 1700, the law against importing calico was established but it was only nominal. There were many loopholes in the legislation, so manufacturers’ petition was virtually turned down and the import of calico increased. In 1719, manufacturers’ frustration exploded at last. They attacked people who were dressed in calico and broke into houses to destroy the cotton products. In a reaction to it, Parliament banned cotton textile in 1720. Although calico was banned, popularity of

cotton did not decline. Eventually, the Calico Acts were abolished in 1774 and woollen industry declined.

Ironically, the Calico Acts promoted domestic production of cotton textile as a result. Many new machines for the industry were invented. At first, John Kay contrived a flying shuttle in 1733. It made it possible to weave twice faster than before. Subsequently, James Hargreaves and Richard Arkwright innovated new spinning machines. Then, James Watt's steam engine greatly expanded productive capacity ("Industrial Revolution"). Owing to the Industrial Revolution, British cotton textile manufacturers succeeded in mass-producing clean, strong and low-priced calico. Cotton became very familiar not only to upper-class people but also to lower-class workers. Jules Michelet wrote in his *The People*:

Every woman formerly wore a blue or black gown, which she kept ten years without washing, for fear of its going to pieces. Now-a-days her husband, a poor workman, can, at the cost of a day's labor, array her in a robe of flowers.

(Michelet 49)

Even a poor worker can afford printed cotton. Also, he argues, "moral worth often keeps pace with the outward appearance" (Michelet 49). Victorian reformers believed that clean, new clothes improved the moral state of the working-class people.

We have to notice that, however, there was a dark side to the Industrial Revolution. It cast shadows both on domestic and foreign affairs. Firstly, the gap between the rich and the poor widened.

Workers—men, women and even children—had to labour in a dark, dirty mill. They worked long hours with low wages. Mill workers were forced to lead a life of extreme poverty while the owners became rich. Elizabeth Gaskell depicted details of workers' miserable lives and their anger against the owner in *Mary Barton*:

At all times it is a bewildering thing to the poor weaver to see his employer removing from house to house, each one grander than the last, till he ends in building one more magnificent than all, or withdraws his money from the concern, or sells his mill, to buy an estate in the country, while all the time the weaver, who thinks he and his fellows are the real makers of this wealth, is struggling on for bread for his children, through the vicissitudes of lowered wages, short hours, fewer hands employed, etc. (*Mary Barton* 23)

Then she contrasts the lives of weavers with that of employers. Employers live in large houses, “while spinners’ and weavers’ cottages stand empty, because the families that once filled them are obliged to live in rooms or cellars.” Employers enjoy their life of affluence, even at the time of recession. “Carriages still roll along the streets, concerts are still crowded by subscribers, the shops for expensive luxuries still find daily customers,” while the jobless person have nothing to do but think “of the pale, uncomplaining wife at home, and the wailing children asking in vain for enough of food—of the sinking health, of the dying life of those near and dear to him” (*Mary Barton* 23). John Barton, who is absorbed in activities of a trade union compares workers with slaves and

says that their world is completely different from employers’:

“We’re their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat of our brows, and yet we are to live as separate as if we were in two worlds; ay, as separate as Dives and Lazarus, with a great gulf betwixt us: but I know who was best off then,” and he wound up his speech with a low chuckle that had no mirth in it. (*Mary Barton* 11)

His complaint grows into a vengeful feeling which drives him to commit murder. Using the colonial image of slavery, Gaskell shows that there are worker’s hidden anger and oppression behind the prosperity of the British Empire.

Secondly, the British cotton texture trade drove the colonial countries into a difficult situation. As the production of cotton textile increased, Britain began to export it. In 1800, cotton fabric came to account for a quarter of all British exports, and by 1850 the proportion had risen to 50 percent. Britain imported raw cotton from India and North America, and exported mass-produced cotton textile not only to Europe, but also to Asian countries. Britain insisted on free trade and trading partners were compelled to accept the condition. Derek S. Linton writes about the imbalance in trade between Britain and India:

By the 1820s Bengal was an exporter of agricultural raw materials and an importer of English manufactured goods. Its textile export sector was already distressed and dying. Similar trends were apparent along the Coromandel Coast, too. [. . .] British traders commanded those commodities,

namely, cotton textiles, that Indians wished to purchase, as a result, Indian piece goods no longer competed with European fabrics, whether in Europe or on third markets. Moreover, Indian raw materials were increasingly being substituted for silver to balance the China trade. (Linton)

India was a major country which produced and exported high-quality calico in the world, but “aided by low tariffs of 2.5 percent ad valorem on British imports, English fabrics and yarn soon invaded the Bengali market” (Linton) and in the 1810s, the amount of imports of cotton textile from Britain surpassed the exports. Because of the Company’s exaction, indigenous cotton industry in India decayed as Nick Robins argued:

The rapid influx of mill-made cloth shattered the village economy based on an integration of agriculture and domestic spinning, and the great textile capitals of Bengal. Between 1814 and 1835, British cotton cloth exported to India rose 51 times, while imports from India fell to a quarter. [. . .] Even the Governor-General, William Bentinck, was forced to report that “the misery hardly finds parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton-weavers are bleaching the plains of India.” (Robins)

British free trade destroyed not only Indian domestic industry but also the economic base of the country.

Thus, the British cotton industry was established on the exploitation of mill workers and the colonies. Then, what is the meaning

of the fact that Brontë's heroines are willingly clad in cotton? We take up Caroline in *Shirley* for example: on the festival of Whitsuntide, she dresses in "her freshest and fairest attire of white muslin:"

When ready she formed a picture, not bright enough to dazzle, but fair enough to interest; not brilliantly striking, but very delicately pleasing—a picture in which sweetness of tint, purity of air, and grace of mien atoned for the absence of rich colouring and magnificent contour. What her brown eye and clear forehead showed of her mind was in keeping with her dress and face—modest, gentle, and, though pensive, harmonious. (*Shirley* 247-48)

A white muslin dress generally suggests spotless and innocent character and here it represents Caroline's modest and gentle character, in spite of its dark background. It is true, indeed, the growth of demand for cotton texture relieved the millworkers' extreme poverty as a worker in *Mary Barton* testifies:

"[. . .] My mother comed out o' Oxfordshire, and were under-laundry-maid in Sir Francis Dashwood's family; and when we were little ones, she'd tell us stories of their grandeur: and one thing she named were, that Sir Francis wore two shirts a day. Now he were all as one as a Parliament man; and many on'em, I han no doubt, are like extravagant. Just tell'em, John, do, that they'd be doing the Lancashire weavers a great kindness, if they'd ha' their shirts a' made o' calico; 't would make trade brisk, that

would, wi' the power o' shirts they wear." (*Mary Barton* 86)

However, it seems that there is another reason why the heroines wear muslin dresses. The key to solving this question can be found by examining the situation of dressmakers and laundresses.

According to Lynn Alexander, a governess and a seamstress were the only two occupations which were available for middle-class women who had to support themselves in the mid-nineteenth century. A governess was expected to be good at singing, painting and speaking foreign languages. Consequently, a woman who did not have such a high qualification had to be a dressmaker and a milliner (L. Alexander 4). A dressmaker was "respectable" occupation because it was closely associated with domesticity as Beth Harris comments:

Sewing was, in many ways, the ultimate sign of femininity. It was sedentary and passive, and it was traditionally done by women only for the care and maintenance of the family and home. In the literature of the period the needle itself often stood for women's "natural" place in the home, and carried powerful associations of domestic bliss and maternal devotion. (Harris)

Sewing is traditionally a female work. Women and needlework were entirely consistent with the notion of ideal femininity and home.

Although it was thought to be "a way for a woman to maintain herself without having to 'sacrifice [her] gentility or [come] to term with a coarse and vulgar way of life'" (L. Alexander 4), their working conditions were very bad. In 1843, *The Second Report of the Children's*

Employment Commission reported a shocking fact about dressmaker's situation:

The evidence of all parties establishes the fact that there is no class of persons in this country, living by their labour, whose happiness, health and lives, are so unscrupulously sacrificed as those of the young dress-makers. They are, in a particular degree, unprotected and helpless [. . .]. There are no occupations (other than exceptionally dangerous ones such as needle grinding) in which so much disease is produced as in dressmaking, or which present so fearful a catalogue of distressing and frequently fatal maladies. (qtd. in L. Alexander 7)

Dressmakers (girls of about fourteen to nineteen years old) were forced to work long hours without sleep in dark, badly ventilated rooms. Also they hardly had enough food. Therefore, many dressmaker girls suffered from and were killed by consumption. Jenny, the dressmaker in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* contracts the disease and is taken to her home.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a dressmaker and a seamstress became a popular figure among painters such as Richard Redgrave and John Everett Millais. Supposedly the most famous of the paintings is Redgrave's "The Sempstress," which was exhibited at the Royal Academy. He portrayed a young woman working alone in a shabby attic with a little candlelight. Lynn Alexander says, "the pathos evoked by Redgrave's picture was so great that it became the dominant image of the seamstress" (L. Alexander 2). Subsequently, a needlewoman often

appears in paintings as:

an isolated figure of sorrow and suffering, with only background details—the late hour as indicated by a clock and guttering candles, the ill health indicated by the medicine bottles with hospital labels, or the lack of food indicated by empty cupboards and dirty teacups but no plates—linking the artistic symbol to the worldly referent. (L. Alexander 11)

Then, how was a dressmaker represented in literary works?

According to Lynn Alexander, “Dickens presented Victorians with the first indications of the harsh conditions faced by dressmakers and milliners” through the depiction of Kate Nickleby’s circumstances in *Nicholas Nickleby* (L. Alexander 24). From the 1840s, the distress of a dressmaker became a popular theme of periodicals and novels. We will see Gaskell’s *Ruth* for example:

And yet more than a dozen girls still sat in the room into which Ruth entered, stitching away as if for very life, not daring to gape, or show any outward manifestation of sleepiness. They only sighed a little when Ruth told Mrs Mason the hour of the night, as the result of her errand; for they knew that, stay up as late as they might, the work-hours of the next day must begin at eight, and their young limbs were very weary. (*Ruth* 3)

Gaskell mournfully deplores the fact that such a terrible condition saps the dressmaker’s spirit. She writes that girls’ “sense of life” has been

deadened “consequent upon their unnatural mode of existence, their sedentary days, and their frequent nights of late watching” (*Ruth* 9-10). Dressmakers’ hard labour destroyed them both physically and mentally. Barbara Burman makes an explanation of dressmakers’ situation as follows:

While these [Victorian novels and paintings] representations of the plight of such women [dressmakers] and their vulnerability to eventual prostitution were arguably exaggerated or skewed for middle-class audiences, nevertheless plenty of middle-class as well as working-class women did trade and live by needle in a precarious, exploited and unregulated way. (Burman 82)

Further, it is interesting that writers often show the comparison between a dressmaker and an upper-class lady. In *Ruth*, some girls were picked up to attend the ball with their workboxes to be ready to repair accidental damage of ladies’ dresses. When Ruth is waiting at the anteroom, a young lady leaves the dancing crowd and comes into the room to repair her dress. She talks to her partner sweetly, but she addresses Ruth, “Make haste. Don’t keep me an hour” in a “cold and authoritative” voice (*Ruth* 15). Ruth’s humble figure “formed such a contrast to the flippant, bright, artificial girl who sat to be served with an air as haughty as a queen on her throne” (*Ruth* 15). Dressmakers had to bear not only hard work but also the arrogant attitude of the customers. As Lynn Alexander points out, dressmakers came from the middle-class family, but their situation was as miserable as that of working class. She concludes that a

dressmaker girl is “simultaneously a child of the upper, ruling classes and a part of the poor exploited classes” (L. Alexander 20). Their class identity was very ambiguous. It is a very strange situation. Ruskin stated that workers “are not the nation” (*Sesame and Lilies* 170). Working-class people are defined as “foreigners” in his *Sesame and Lilies*. A dressmaker embodies British middle-class femininity and “foreignness” at the same time.

Brontë’s heroines are not dressmakers, but they often make dresses for themselves or for others. We take up Caroline’s dressmaking in *Shirley* for example:

She did sew. She plied her needle continuously, ceaselessly, but her brain worked faster than her fingers. [. . .] Her head laboured to frame projects as diligently as her hands to plait and stitch the thin texture of the muslin summer dress spread on the little white couch at the foot of which she sat. (*Shirley* 201)

She makes a dress with muslin. Clare Hughes points that muslin is texture which is easy to work with. Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* comments about it that “muslin always turns to some account or other. [. . .] Muslin can never be said to be wasted” (*Northanger Abbey* 21). The property of muslin would have been highly likely to have promoted women’s home dressmaking. Burman points out the act of home sewing has “an uneasy cluster of meanings.” It has connotations of exploitation, thrift and housewifely work as well as being signal of feminine refinement (Burman 82). Muslin associates heroines with dressmakers’

situation alienated from Victorian society.

The other image, the laundress reveals how heroines accept their consciousness of being alienated. The profession belonged to the poor-working class. A laundress is, in Ruskinian expression, a “foreigner” in Victorian middle-class society. Indeed Brontë’s heroines are not laundresses, but muslin mediates between them. Clare Hughes emphasises that muslin is washable (Hughes 38) and the heroines often refer to washing. Lucy in *Villette* says about her pink cotton dress that it is “cheap, and washes better than any other color” (*Villette* 380). Also, in *Shirley*, when Mrs. Pryor scolds Shirley for spoiling her dress, she answers, “Oh, it is only muslin. I can put a clean one on to-morrow” (*Shirley* 325). They know about the washability of cotton. A muslin, or cotton dress is a device for connecting middle-class heroines and washing as a working-class job. Furthermore, Shirley’s knowledge about washing is told in the scene where she speaks about her uncle to Louis:

“[. . .] His ideas are not clean, Mr. Moore; they want scouring with soft soap and fuller’s earth. I think, if he could add his imagination to the contents of Mrs. Gill’s bucking-basket, and let her boil it in her copper, with rain-water and bleaching-powder (I hope you think me a tolerable laundress), it would do him incalculable good.”

(*Shirley* 524)

She knows about washing as she thinks herself to be “a tolerable laundress.” She thinks so because she cannot agree with her uncle’s conventional way of thinking that a woman should marry a rich man and

feels that she is alienated from his race. Identified with a working-class woman, she accepts “foreignness” inside her.

4-3. Lucy’s Three Dresses

Dressing—a choice of clothes—is a kind of strategy. Dressing strategy is, in other words, a role-playing; a performance to veil the wearer’s true nature, thoughts and desires. For example, Caroline in *Shirley* carefully dresses herself to hide her depression:

Caroline, as she quitted the couch, which had been but a thorny one to her, felt that revival of spirits which the return of day, of action, gives to all but the wholly despairing or actually dying. She dressed herself, as usual, carefully, trying so to arrange her hair and attire that nothing of the forlornness she felt at heart should be visible externally.
(*Shirley* 295)

She conceals her passion for Robert and plays the role of a Victorian gentlewoman. Brontë’s heroines wear a neat, plain dress to conform to her society. Their dress functions as a wall which hides their unfeminine desire from male gaze, but it simultaneously encloses and suppresses their Byronism. As a result, a deep gulf opens between her interior and her appearance. The dichotomy causes the division of the self. If they were to avoid disintegration, it is obvious that they must learn to use a dress not for hiding her true self, but for self-representation.

Lucy Snowe, the heroine of *Villette* is a woman with a divided self. She firstly puts a sober dress on to hide her Byronism, but gradually

learns to put a dress on to express her inner self. In *Villette*, the function of dressing changes from a role-playing strategy to a device for self-assertion. We will analyse the image of Lucy's three dresses to show how she gets over the division of the self. Coming to terms with of her own desire for passion, "real" femininity and equality with men, and its fulfilment brings about the spiritual growth in Lucy.

In the early part of the story, she buys the shadow-like dress of gray crape for the school festival. Madame Beck is satisfied with her sober dress and she is admitted to be appropriate for a teacher of the school. However, surrounded by girls in white dresses, she feels herself "to be a mere shadowy spot on the field of light" (*Villette* 145). The dusty colour of this dress suggests that her life is shadowy and it is regarded as a mere "spot" among the brilliant girls. Also, the crape reminds us of death because it is often used for mourning clothes. This dress implies that Lucy's life is placed in a situation where her Byronism severely suppressed. However, Lucy says, "[I]n this same gown of shadow, I felt at home and at ease; an advantage I should not have enjoyed in anything more brilliant or striking" (*Villette* 145). She is content with her life as a shadow because she thinks that it is suitable for a plain, unmarried woman. When she goes to the theatre with Graham, she thinks "[t]he present was no occasion of showy array; my dun-mist crape would suffice" (*Villette* 284). As long as she is with Graham who would not accept woman's sexuality and selfhood, she never feels the urge to emerge from the shadow.

On another occasion, Mrs. Bretton buys a pink dress for Lucy and

she thinks, “I thought no human force should avail to put me into it. A pink dress! I knew it not. It knew not me. I had not proved it” (*Villette* 208). Interestingly, as in *Jane Eyre*, the Eastern image is accompanied with the showy dress here. Lucy says that she “[feels] that [she] would as soon clothe [herself] in the costume of a Chinese lady of rank” (*Villette* 207). The Chinese lady clearly means a mistress; a woman in the same situation as a harem slave. She tries not to deviate from the Victorian feminine norm, so she rejects the “foreign” dress. In addition, she is afraid of deviating from Graham’s criterion of an ideal woman, so she worries about his estimation. However, he “[takes] no further notice of [her] dress than [is] conveyed in a kind smile and satisfied nod” (*Villette* 208) and she “[consents] soon to become reconciled” (*Villette* 208). She is robbed of the sense of judgement by him. The dress shows that she is controlled by the patriarchal sense of value.

Although she is averse to doing it, Mrs. Bretton tells her to put the pink dress on to the concert with “her resistless division” (*Villette* 207), and at last, Lucy is forced to wear it. When Lucy in the dress enters into the concert hall with the Brettons, she sees another group coming from the opposite direction:

I just now see that group, as it flashed—upon me for one moment. A handsome middle-aged lady in dark velvet; a gentleman who might be her son—the best face, the finest figure, I thought, I had ever seen; a third person in a pink dress and black lace mantle. I noted them all—the third person as well as the other two—and for the fraction of a

moment believed them all strangers, thus receiving an impartial impression of their appearance. But the impression was hardly felt and not fixed, before the consciousness that I faced a great mirror, filling a compartment between two pillars, dispelled it: the party was our own party. (*Villette* 209-10)

She cannot identify herself with the girl in a pink dress in the mirror. There is a deep gulf between her appearance and her self-image. Lucy's self is torn into the internal and the external. The figure causes "a jar of discord, a pang of regret" (*Villette* 210) to her. The pink dress is a symbol of her suffering from the division of the self. She adheres to Victorian feminine norm too strictly to accept the Byronism in her.

In comparison to Graham, Paul sharply reacts to her pink dress when he sees Lucy at the concert hall. He looks at her "or rather at [her] pink dress—sardonic comment on which gleamed in his eye" (*Villette* 221). He blames her for floridness of her costume. They quarrel about dressing and after the argument, she says to herself:

"Well done, Lucy Snowe!" cried I to myself; "you have come in for a pretty lecture—brought on yourself a 'rude savant,' and all through your wicked fondness for worldly vanities! Who would have thought it? You deemed yourself a melancholy sober-sides enough! [. . .] [A]nd behold! there starts up a little man, differing diametrically from all these, roundly charging you with being too airy and cheery—too volatile and versatile—too flowery and coloury. This harsh

little man—this pitiless censor—gathers up all your poor scattered sins of vanity, your luckless chiffon of rose-colour, your small fringe of a wreath, your small scrap of ribbon, your silly bit of lace, and calls you to account for the lot, and for each item. You are well habituated to be passed by as a shadow in Life's sunshine: it is a new thing to see one testily lifting his hand to screen his eyes, because you tease him with an obtrusive ray." (*Villette* 333-34)

Not like other people, Paul does not treat Lucy as "a shadow in Life's sunshine," and she is glad of it. It means that her psychological state attains to an awakening from deadly suppression. Paul arouses the Byronism in her. Through the relationship with him, she comes to think, "Whatever my powers—feminine or the contrary—God had given them, and I felt resolute to be ashamed of no faculty of his bestowal" (*Villette* 352). Freed from Victorian conventional femininity, she acknowledges her "unfeminine" desire.

Her new sense of selfhood is represented by her dress worn for the excursion which Paul has planned. It is a pink dress made of cotton. Once she has associated a pink dress with foreign image and rejected to wear it. However, she gradually accepts her "foreign" desire through the relationship with Paul, so she puts on a new pink dress by her choice now. Here the role of dressing has changed. It is no longer a device of hiding sexuality but a means of expression of the Byronism in her. This pink cotton dress suggests that she has become an autonomous and self-assertive woman.

Chapter 5

Infection and Nervous Disease

“The yellow taint of pestilence, covering white Western isles with the poisoned exhalations of the East, dimming the lattices of English homes with the breath of Indian plague” —*Shirley*

This chapter will focus on disease; especially the “female malady.” This expression is borrowed from Elaine Showalter’s study about women’s mental disorder:

These dual images of female insanity—madness as one of the wrongs of woman; madness as the essential feminine nature unveiling itself before scientific male rationality—suggest the two ways that the relationship between women and madness has been perceived. In the most obvious sense, madness is a female malady because it is experienced by more women than men. (Showalter 3)

Then she explains how a patriarchal social structure drives women into madness. She uses the term “a female malady” to indicate a mental disease, but we are going to give a broader scope to it. We use it to suggest not only mental but also physical morbidity of women which is caused by patriarchal oppression. Disease represents deviation from the Victorian norm of femininity in Brontë’s texts. The deviation is, actually,

desire for Byronism. There are two kinds of “the female malady” in Brontë’s text; infection and nervous disease.

Firstly, infection is the symbol of heterogeneity, of being an alien element in the Victorian middle-class society. Women feel that they are out of place when they recognise their own desire for self-assertion. Gilbert and Gubar have pointed out that women’s writings are filled with “anxiety of authorship” (Gilbert and Gubar 51) because writing is a creative and self-assertive act forbidden to women. They explain it by the word “infection in the sentence” that is quoted from Emily Dickinson’s poem. They say that women writers “were evidently infected or sickened by just the feelings of self-doubt, inadequacy, and inferiority that their education in ‘femininity’ almost seems to have been designed to induce” (Gilbert and Gubar 60). The infection was caused by “complex and often only barely conscious fears of that authority which seems to the female artist to be by definition inappropriate to her sex” (Gilbert and Gubar 51) and it was “[h]anded down not from one woman to another but from the stern literary ‘fathers’ of patriarchy to all their ‘inferiorized’ female descendants” (Gilbert and Gubar 51). Women writers are always infected and struggle with the patriarchal judgement about female inferiority which has been internalised in themselves.

Why is the deviation from the feminine norm associated with infection? We can make an additional explanation by exploring the historical context of infection. Infection is connected with the colonial image, because Victorian people metaphorically paralleled infections and filthy conditions engendering unhealthy air, which was thought to bring

disease, with the colonies in the East. For the European, colonies were the plague-infested places. Hardt and Negri write, “from the European perspective, the primary danger of colonialism is disease—or really contagion” and “the darkness of the colonial territories and populations is contagious, and Europeans are always at risk” (Hardt and Negri 135). What is more important is the fact that the Eastern plague is connected with moral inferiority. They define disease as “a sign of physical and moral corruption, a sign of a lack of civilization” (Hardt and Negri 135). Colonial disease is a synonym of immorality and barbarousness for Europeans. Simultaneously, the notion of “cleanliness” distinguishes the civilised from the savage and it has become a virtue for the British people. The following passage from Charles Kingsley’s sermon shows the fact that Christian morality and cleanliness have been firmly united:

Yes, my friends, as surely and naturally as drunkenness punishes itself by a shaking hand and a bloated body, so does filth avenge itself by pestilence. Fever and cholera, as you would expect them to be, are the expression of God’s judgment, God’s opinion, God’s handwriting on the wall against us for our sins of filth and laziness, foul air, foul food, foul drains, foul bedrooms. Where they are, there is cholera. Where they are not, there is none, and will be none, because they who do not break God’s laws, God’s laws will not break them. (Kingsley 141)

In view of this historical context, it is interesting that a woman’s creative writing as a form of self-assertion is associated with infection. Women’s

desire was regarded to be as dangerous and barbarous as infection is. Women writers feel that their “unfeminine” desire for self-assertion should be excluded from British civilised society. Infection suggests woman’s sense of alienation.

Infection is a foreign image which represents a deviation from the Victorian moral code. On the other hand, nervous disease is a quite British one. George Cheyne, the eighteenth-century physician who became famous for his study about nervous disease, termed it “English Malady” in his book *The English Malady; or, A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of All Kinds, as Spleen, Vapours, Lowness of Spirits, Hypochondriacal and Hysterical Distempers:*

The Title I have chosen for this Treatise, is a Reproach universally thrown on this Island by Foreigners, and all our Neighbours on the Continent, by whom Nervous Distempers, Spleen, Vapours, and Lowness of Spirits, are, in Derision, call’d the ENGLISH MALADY. And I wish there were not so good grounds for this Reflection. The Moisture of our Air, the Variableness of our Weather, (from our Situation amidst the Ocean) the Rankness and Fertility of our Soil, the Richness and Heaviness of our Food, the Wealth and Abundance of the Inhabitants (from their universal Trade), [. . .] have brought forth a Class and Set of Distempers, with atrocious and frightful Symptoms, scarce known to our Ancestors, and never rising to such fatal Heights, nor afflicting such Numbers in any other known Nation. These

nervous Disorders being computed to make almost one third of the Complaints of the People of Condition in England.

(Cheyne i-ii)

Through the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, it was universally believed that the British people tended to be affected with nervous disorder due to the luxury which was brought by the Industrial Revolution. Nervous disease was believed to be a sign of civilisation.

Until the time of Cheyne, there had not been a differentiation in the notion of nervous disease between men and women, but it gradually appeared in the end of the eighteenth century. People called men's neuroses "hypochondria" and women's "hysteria." Hypochondria was "associated with the intellectual and economic pressures on highly civilized men" while hysteria was connected with women's sexuality because they were "believed to be more vulnerable to insanity than men, to experience it in specifically feminine ways, and to be differently affected by it in conduct of their lives" (Showalter 7). This notion is one of the examples of the prejudiced sexual biology of those days, but it is true that women writers believed that women's limited sphere of activity led them to a nervous disease.

Then how does Brontë depict nervous disease in her novels? The heroines become nervously morbid when they suppress their Byronism. It often takes the form of fever caused by a nervous breakdown. In those days, it was believed that nervous fragility caused various symptoms both in the mind and in the body. According to Liz Deangelo, "various disorders of the nervous system were combined through the umbrella

term of nervous disease” and this term “encompassed a broad range of distempers, including melancholy, hysteria and anxiety” in Victorian Britain (Deangelo par. 2). For example, Jane Eyre comes down with fever because “every nerve [has] been overstrained” (*Jane Eyre* 289) after she has run away from Thornfield, and Caroline in *Shirley* becomes ill because of broken heart. Also, Lucy Snowe “[lies] in a strange fever of the nerves and blood” (*Villette* 159) during the long, weary vacation.

Interestingly, Brontë associates nervous disease with the image of infection. In *Shirley*, Caroline’s nervous fever is triggered by “some sweet, poisoned breeze, redolent of honey-dew and miasma” and “a languor of long conflict and habitual sadness” and she becomes ill as if “the yellow taint of pestilence” dims “the lattices of English homes with the breath of Indian plague” (*Shirley* 351). The images of “foreign” infection and “British” nervous disease are closely associated in Brontë’s novels. This fact means that “foreign” desire for Byronism and Victorian sense of value are related to each other. We are going to study the ways of self-assertion for Brontë’s heroines through the images of disease.

5-1. Image of Cholera in *Jane Eyre*

In the discussion about *Jane Eyre* in Chapter 2, we have argued that Jane in the red-room defines herself as “other” and is identified with Bertha. However, it must be noted that Rochester declares that they are completely dissimilar:

“That is *my wife*,” said he. “Such is the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know—such are the endearments which

are to solace my leisure hours! And *this* is what I wished to have” (laying his hand on my shoulder): “this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon, I wanted her just as a change after that fierce ragout. Wood and Briggs, look at the difference! Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder—this face with that mask—this form with that bulk; [. . .].” (*Jane Eyre* 251)

Why has Jane, who once has been termed a “mad cat” and a “rebel slave,” become so different from Bertha? To answer this question, it will be very helpful to focus on the image of infection, especially cholera in the novel. As we have seen, Gilbert and Gubar compare infection with female anxiety for infringing patriarchal authority. However, the historical background of cholera offers a new point of view about the image of infection in literary works of women: It can be seen as a defiance against patriarchy.

A brief survey of the epidemic is required before we proceed to a discussion of its representation in literature. The expansion of the British Empire brought about a spread of the Indian endemic disease cholera worldwide. It first broke out in Bengal in 1817. The terrible plague was brought to Britain from India via Russia in 1831 and continued to rage. According to the record, in London only, about forty thousand people died from the disease during the nineteenth century. Beth Torgerson states that “cholera had a real presence in the Brontës’ life” (Torgerson 148) because some acquaintances of the Brontës were killed by it:

William Weightman, a curate whom Anne secretly loved, contracted cholera in mid-August 1842 and died in September. Also, Martha Taylor, the sister of Charlotte's friend died of it in October of the same year. Furthermore, the epidemic struck Yorkshire where the Brontës had lived and Charlotte wrote about the cholera epidemic in her letters⁶.

Although other diseases such as typhoid fever, smallpox and influenza were far more infectious, the cholera epidemic gave a tremendous shock to the British. Lancaster wrote, comparing it with typhoid fever:

There is a disease very common in this country, known as gastric or typhoid fever, [. . .]. This disease in the mode of its propagation, and the nature of its poison, greatly resembles cholera, but the action of its poison is not so sudden or fatal as that of cholera; and constantly amongst us, we give it much less attention than we do to the stranger from the East, who stalks in upon us occasionally and alarms us so much, although in the last twenty-five years it has done us infinitely more harm. (Lancaster 27)

The allegory of "the stranger from the East" indicates the root of the fear for this plague. Cholera was horrible because it came from a colony.

Susan Sontag analyses Europeans' fear of the disease in detail:

At the end of *Crime and Punishment* Raskolnikov dreams of plague: [. . .] Dostoevsky's model is undoubtedly cholera, called Asiatic cholera, long endemic in Bengal, which had rapidly become and remained through most of the nineteenth

century a worldwide epidemic disease. Part of the centuries-old conception of Europe as a privileged cultural entity is that it is a place which is colonized by lethal disease coming from elsewhere. Europe is assumed to be by rights free of disease. [. . .]. The tenacity of the connection of exotic origin with dreaded disease is one reason why cholera, of which there were four great outbreaks in Europe in nineteenth century, each with a lower death toll than the preceding one, has continued to be more memorable than smallpox, whose ravages increased as the century went on [. . .] but which could not be construed as, plague-like, a disease with a non-European origin. (Sontag 137-38)

The expression that Europe “is colonized by lethal disease coming from elsewhere” is very interesting. From this, we realise that the positions of a colony and the suzerain have been reversed. A critic explains that cholera is the metaphor of European anxiety that they were being invaded by some wild force, referring to the idea of “reverse colonisation” (Tanji 177). This term is quoted from Stephen Arata’s study: he says that in the narratives of reverse colonisation:

What has been represented as the “civilized” world is on the point of being overturned by “primitive” forces. These forces can be originated outside the civilized world (as in *She*) or they can inhere in the civilized world itself (as in Kurtz’s emblematic heart of darkness). In each case a fearful reversal occurs: the colonizer finds himself in the position of

the colonized, the exploiter is exploited, the victimizer victimized. The reversals are in turn linked to perceived problems—racial, moral, spiritual—within Great Britain itself. (Arata 108)

“Reverse colonisation” is one of the forms of vengeance of the subjugated. When the expansion of colonies brought the Eastern plague to Europe, the people considered infections to be retaliation emanating from the colonised. Cholera can be seen as a metaphor of the rebellion against despotism. Then, how should we interpret cholera when it is associated with woman in the text? It seems possible to say that it suggests female defiance of patriarchal authority. That is, Brontë parallels the revolt of colonised people against the suzerain with a woman’s resistance against the male domination. To clarify the connection between infection and woman’s rebellion, we will analyse the epidemic in Lowood and Bertha’s choleraic features.

After the event in the red room, Jane is sent to Lowood School. The education there is described in terms of a different race. Brocklehurst calls her “an interloper and an alien” who is “worse than many a little heathen who says its prayers to Brahma and kneels before Juggernaut” and says she has been sent here “to be healed, even as the Jews of old sent their diseased to the troubled pool of Bethesda” (*Jane Eyre* 56-57). Heathenism is manifestly associated with Jane’s alienation. She is alienated because of her Byronism: unrestrained passion and defiance of patriarchal value. The experience in Lowood “converts” her to conform to Victorian feminine norm. The process of Jane’s

deracialisation is shown through the metaphor of infection. It is not cholera but the typhus epidemic that she experiences at Lowood, but the “forest-dell, where Lowood lay” as “the cradle of fog and fog-bred pestilence” (*Jane Eyre* 64) and “[t]he unhealthy nature of the site; the quantity and quality of children’s food; the brackish, fetid water used in its preparation; the pupils’ wretched clothing and accommodations” (*Jane Eyre* 70) may have evoked colonial pathogenic environment in the minds of readers at that time.

Before explaining it, we must refer to the miasma theory. Miasma is “a poisonous vapour in which were suspended particles of decaying matter that was characterised by its foul smell” (“miasma theory”). According to Jahangir Satti, “Europeans considered miasma as some form of obnoxious gas emanating from soil that was responsible for infectious diseases” and “miasma, as a cause and spread of epidemic diseases, was the most popular theory in the nineteenth century Europe” (Satti 1). As people believed that miasma was produced in humid and foggy area, so sanitarians insisted on the importance of marsh reclamation and waterworks improvement.

What was important about the miasma theory is that Victorians often metaphorically paralleled such filthy conditions, engendering unhealthy air and plague, with Eastern countries. Bewell explains it, quoting from a Victorian physician Thomas Southwood Smith, who compared the conditions of London with those of the colonies:

Smith comes to the extraordinary conclusion that the miasmatic environments produced by London poverty are

equivalent to those of the tropics: [. . .] Smith was discovering that in “process and product” the “fever-nests” of urban England were not fundamentally different from the pathogenic “nature” of the tropics. Yet here the assumed relation between European and colonial environments is reversed, as the English “fever-nest”—socially produced by “poverty” and “ignorance”—is now seen as a mimic double of colonial nature. (Bewell 49-50)

There was a preconceived formula of “miasmatic environment=East” in the minds of Victorian people. They imposed the status of pathogenic spaces upon the colonial countries and tried to distinguish themselves from such dirty, uncivilised conditions.

Thus, the epidemic in Lowood can be interpreted in the context of the Eastern plague because of its miasmatic image. Simultaneously, it is the indication of defiance against the patriarchy. Before the epidemic, Mr. Brocklehurst, who is represented by a phallic symbol as Jane compares him with “a black pillar” (*Jane Eyre* 26), strictly regulates the girls’ sexuality by starving them and cutting their hairs. Fearing of infection, he never comes near Lowood, and ironically, Jane is released from his patriarchal oppression:

But I, and the rest who continued well, enjoyed fully the beauties of the scene and season; they let us ramble in the wood, like gipsies, from morning till night; we did what we liked, went where we liked: we lived better too. (*Jane Eyre* 65-66)

It is notable that Jane compares herself with gipsies. They were seen as “foreigners” in the Victorian society. So far the foreign image has implied her sense of alienation, but here it means something positive. The allusion suggests that she is freed from the Victorian convention.

However, Jane’s “gipsy-like” life does not last long. Lowood undergoes sanitary improvement as a result of the epidemic. It can be seen as a campaign, which tried to distinguish “Eastern filthiness” from “British cleanliness.” It means that the school changes to a cultural/European locality as distinct from the savage East. At the same time, Jane as a “racial other” is also sanitised into a young “respectable” Victorian lady. Bessie, who visits Lowood to see Jane, says “[Y]ou are genteel enough; you look like a lady [. . .].” (*Jane Eyre* 78) when she learns that Jane has achieved proficiency in accomplishments such as music, painting and needlework. However, this comes at a price; Jane loses her Byronism. She recovers it when she meets Bertha in Thornfield.

Here, we would like to propose a theory that Bertha is a metaphor of cholera. There is no explicit reference to the disease in *Jane Eyre*, but Bertha’s appearance coincides with those of cholera patients in symptomatic terms. Dr. Thomas Shapter wrote in his *The History of the Cholera in Exeter in 1832* that cholera patients have “the purple contracted lip; the sunken eye, sharp, wild, and terrified stare” and their “countenance [becomes] dusky,” “the skin [assumes] a shrunk, purplish, or leaden hue.” Also, they sometimes have “a general nervous agitation and uneasiness, attended by an excitement and irritability of mind, amounting at times to incoherency, supervened” (Shapter 210-1). These

characteristics can be seen in the features of Bertha. Jane explains to Rochester how she looks:

“Fearful and ghastly to me—oh, sir, I never saw a face like it! It was a discoloured face—it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!”

“Ghosts are usually pale, Jane.”

“This, sir, was purple: the lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed: the black eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes. Shall I tell you of what it reminded me?”

“You may.”

“Of the foul German spectre—the Vampyre.” (*Jane Eyre* 242)

A purple countenance, bloodshot eyes and evidence of mental disorder such as agitation and wildness are typical symptoms of cholera. A relevant fact in this connection is that Victorians sometimes believed that cholera was a punishment for intemperance (Miichi 241). This commonly held view can be linked to Rochester’s comment of Bertha’s propensities: he says that she is “at once intemperate and unchaste” and “her excesses [have] prematurely developed the germs of insanity” (*Jane Eyre* 261).

Also, Bertha’s association with the vampire is significant because it can be an allegorical figure of the plague. Legends of vampires originate in people’s terror of incomprehensible calamities: as Mary Hallab says, “Natural evils—pollution, disease and death—are the venue of vampires in folklore and literature” (Hallab 27). Above all, a plague

has been the most mysterious and terrible thing, so its trail can be seen in many vampire myths. According to Matthew Beresford, a “great deal of the characteristics relating to the vampire epidemics have been linked to the symptoms of plague and disease” (Beresford 103). Also, Laurence Rickels points out the connection between vampire and plague, referring the miasma theory in his study of vampire:

By the eighteenth century vampirism had become synonymous with contagious disease. [. . .] A certain vampire stench had been sniffed out for centuries as the whiff of contaminant that would be spreading soon as the plague. (Rickels 18)

People has connected vampires with infectious diseases such as the Black Death, cholera and rabies. Although Plasa states that Jane’s reference to the German spectre Vampyre is “a Eurocentric association” (Plasa 91), there is arguably the image of the East as the plague-cursed place behind it.

As Mr. Brocklehurst avoids Lowood because of an epidemic, Rochester keeps away from Thornfield owing to his mad wife hidden in the attic, calling there “a great plague-house” (*Jane Eyre* 121). As a result, the house is freed from male domination. When he comes back, she tries to kill him. Bertha’s choleraic feature implies defiance against patriarchy. The experience of seeing her brings Jane back to the girl before she was “sanitised.” The story seems to end up in a Victorian conventional marriage, and in fact, Gilbert and Gubar ask, “Does Brontë’s rebellious feminism—that ‘irreligious’ dissatisfaction with

social order noted by Miss Rigby and *Jane Eyre*'s other Victorian critics—compromise itself in this withdrawal?" (Gilbert and Gubar 369)

However, we must note that an image of the East is lurking in the Victorian happy ending and it undermines the compromise. Ferndean Manor, where Jane and Rochester live is located in "ineligible and insalubrious site" (*Jane Eyre* 366) and importantly, its dampness connected with Eastern unhealthy condition is emphasised. Even Rochester hesitated to conceal his mad wife in the house because of its "unhealthiness of the situation, in the heart of a wood" though he thinks "[p]robably those damp walls would soon have eased me of her charge" (*Jane Eyre* 256). These references to unhealthy dampness reminds us inevitably of the miasmatic environment associated with the Eastern colonies. Gilbert and Gubar make a comment on the ending of this novel: Brontë "was unable clearly to envision viable solutions to the problem of patriarchal oppression" but "what Brontë could not logically define, however, she could embody in tenuous but suggestive imagery" (Gilbert and Gubar 369-70). Infection is one of the imagery suggesting the possibility of freedom from male domination. Considering the fact, we can point that miasma associated with Ferndean implies that Jane's defiance against patriarchal authority is sustained to the last.

5-2. Accepting "Foreignness"

By the cholera epidemic, British people were led to the discovery that "the pathogenic East" is located in their own country:

Let us not forget that the cholera of 1817, whatever may

have been the history of its birth and parentage, had a swamp for its cradle, and poor Indian serfs, earning twopence halfpenny a-day, broiling under a vertical sun, and living, doubtless, as poor workmen live in more favoured lands, after a very miserable and squalid fashion, for its first victims. If we had conned this first lesson well in 1832, we should not have had to record so many thousand deaths in 1849. We should have recognized in every part of England worse swamps than those of Bengal, and more likely victims than the Pariahs of Jessore. (“Cholera Gossip”)

The epidemic made the British open their eyes to the social problems such as poverty and unhealthy environment. It means that the stereotypical polarity of the Eastern inferiority and the Western superiority has been disrupted. “The pathogenic space” which British people believed to be “foreign” existed in their own country.

Brontë also noticed that “disease” lurked in Victorian Britain, as Alan Bewell explains:

Born into a family of Irish immigrants, a group frequently singled out as the purveyors of disease in England, Brontë would have had no difficulty recognizing that colonialism was not “over there, somewhere else” but was fundamental to the very being of Great Britain. *Jane Eyre* seems to suggest that England, in colonizing world, had succeeded in transforming itself into a colonial environment, as much in need of curing as any other region of the world. (Bewell 294)

The border between “foreignness” and “Britishness” gradually fades away in her novels and as we have discussed, the ambiguity is represented in the depiction of nervous disease. It is caused by a conflict between Byronism and consciousness of Victorian femininity. Recovery from it means that heroines settle the conflict and harmonise themselves with the world around them. We are going to study the image of nervous disease in *Shirley* and *Villette*.

At first, Brontë adopted the imperial medical geography in *Shirley*. Faced with Robert’s cold reaction against her affection, Caroline gives up her hope of marrying him and thinks:

“I shall not be married, it appears,” she continued. “I suppose, as Robert does not care for me, I shall never have a husband to love, nor little children to take care of. Till lately I had reckoned securely on the duties and affections of wife and mother to occupy my existence. I considered, somehow, as a matter of course, that I was growing up to the ordinary destiny, and never troubled myself to seek any other; but now I perceive plainly I may have been mistaken. Probably I shall be an old maid. I shall live to see Robert married to some one else, some rich lady. I shall never marry. What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world?”

(*Shirley* 149)

She becomes sick because she realises that she cannot be a Victorian ideal angel in the house and looks for another way of living. The sign of her disease is depicted as follows:

The future sometimes seems to sob a low warning of the events it is bringing us, [. . .] or commissioned to bring in fog the yellow taint of pestilence, covering white Western isles with the poisoned exhalations of the East, dimming the lattices of English homes with the breath of Indian plague. (*Shirley* 351)

Caroline's sickness is associated with the Eastern plague. In other words, her disease is a "foreign" one. Seeking another way of self-assertion without fulfilling the prescribed roles of wife and mother, she becomes ill. The plague image suggests her deviation from the Victorian norm of femininity.

While her decline in health is described in the terms of the Eastern plague, her recovery is implied in the image of the West:

So long as the breath of Asiatic deserts parched Caroline's lips and fevered her veins, her physical convalescence could not keep pace with her returning mental tranquillity; but there came a day when the wind ceased to sob at the eastern gable of the rectory, and at the oriel window of the church. A little cloud like a man's hand arose in the west; gusts from the same quarter drove it on and spread it wide; wet and tempest prevailed a while. When that was over the sun broke out genially, heaven regained its azure, and earth its green; the livid cholera-tint had vanished from the face of nature; the hills rose clear round the horizon, absolved from that pale malaria-haze. (*Shirley* 370-71)

We can see a strong influence of the imperial medical geography in this passage. As the title of this chapter “The West Wind Blows” suggests, the Western climate removes the contamination such as cholera and malaria, and brings recovery for Caroline. Soon after that, her love for Robert is reciprocated and she becomes his wife. The remedy for Caroline is the Victorian conventional marriage and it is symbolised by the west wind.

As we have seen, Brontë connected Caroline’s disease with the Eastern environment and recovery with the Western image. This fact seems to imply that she shared the imperialists’ “patriotic belief in the essential healthiness of England” (Bewell 295). However, this reading is a superficial one. After the west wind blows away the plague and Caroline gets well, Shirley, Caroline’s another self, declines in turn. Shirley’s state as a woman is quite different from Caroline’s because she has money and business. She is free from the worry about becoming a poor old maid and her independent status is suggested by her “perfect health” (*Shirley* 294). However, this account is questionable: while her healthiness is emphasised, the narrator also says that she is always pale and “never florid” (*Shirley* 282). Her unstable health condition suggests that she cannot escape from constraints of conventional femininity while she is an independent woman.

Shirley becomes sick under the threat of rabies. The image of rabies is very significant: it has been linked to “the English malady,” hysteria. K. Codell Carter says in his study of rabies in the nineteenth century, “some physicians connected hydrophobia with hysteria either because of symptomatic similarities or because both diseases seemed to

involve sexual abnormalities” (Carter 70). Shirley’s ailment is connected with the domestic factor as compared with a foreign. Her situation reminds us of Victorian women who were forced to be silenced. Owing to the fear about rabies, her face “[shows] thin, and her large eye looked hollow, there was something in the darkening of that face and kindling of that eye which touched as well as alarmed” (*Shirley* 416), but she keeps silent. At last, she confesses her fear to Louis and says, “if I give trouble, with your own hand administer to me a strong narcotic—such a sure dose of laudanum as shall leave no mistake” (*Shirley* 429). She confides her hidden anguish to Louis Moore:

“‘I [Louis] am a dependant; I know my place.’

“‘I [Shirley] am a woman; I know mine.’

“‘I am poor; I must be proud.’

“‘I have received ordinances, and own obligations stringent as yours.’ (*Shirley* 517)

Even though she is an independent woman, she cannot be freed from the suffocating code of Victorian conventional femininity and the cure for her anxiety is not marriage but a strong narcotic. Beth Torgerson asserts, “Shirley’s ill-health enlarges Brontë’s focus to encompass not only the lack of options for single women but also the lack of options for women even within marriage” (Torgerson 52). She also says:

Through the contrasting impact of marriage on her two heroines, Brontë indicates that marriage is not necessarily ideal: while it may bring health and happiness to Caroline, it may not necessarily bring it Shirley. (Torgerson 52)

In Caroline's case, Western values heal her, but they cannot save Shirley. The Victorian medical geography of the Eastern pathogenicity and British healthiness is deconstructed. She must seek her remedy outside of Victorian convention to overcome her nervous disease.

Shirley needs to create an imaginary world to liberate herself from the fetters of Victorian norm. It is the world of "The First Blue-Stocking." This is the title of her French composition. In this imaginary world, there is only an orphan girl named Eva and she receives God's will. Shirley revises Eve's character as a "weaker sex," and it means a blasphemous challenge to the contemporary morals of Christianity. She rebels against the patriarchal religion. Separated from the Victorian social order, the world is filled with the image of "foreignness." She obscures the time and place of it:

The epoch is so remote, the mists and dewy gray of matin twilight veil it with so vague an obscurity, that all distinct feature of custom, all clear line of locality, evade perception and baffle research. [. . .] A certain tribe colonized a certain spot on the globe; of what race this tribe—unknown; in what region that spot—untold. We usually think of the East when we refer to transactions of that date; but who shall declare that there was no life in the West, the South, the North? What is to disprove that this tribe, instead of camping under palm groves in Asia, wandered beneath island oak woods rooted in our own seas of Europe? (*Shirley* 405)

It is freed from the Western values. This is the place where Shirley can

liberate her Byronism. At first she cannot accept her own “foreignness.” She says to Louis, “I never could correct that composition, [. . .]. Your censor-pencil scored it with condemnatory lines, whose signification I strove vainly to fathom” and asks, “Tell me what were the faults of that *devoir*?” She believes that the substance is wrong though Louis never draws the lines to indicate faults. She knows her thoughts are so “wrong” that they should be alienated from society. The conflict between Byronism and consciousness of Victorian values makes her ill.

She recovers from the disease by revealing her hidden self to Louis. She accepts her own “foreignness” in the process of construction of relationship with him. She decides to marry him, and quarrel with Mr. Sympson about this matter. He asks her “Are you a young lady?” and she answers, “I am a thousand times better: I am an honest woman, and as such I will be treated” (*Shirley* 465). She is a woman who is true to her Byronism. Overcoming the conflict between her desire and Victorian convention, she can assert herself as she is “a thousand times better” than a stereotypical Victorian lady.

Both Shirley and Caroline regain health, but their later lives are different. At the end of the novel, the relation of Caroline and Robert is symbolised by the improvement of the Hollow planed by him. In the scene of their engagement, they talk about the future of the Hollow.

“The copse shall be firewood ere five years elapse. The beautiful wild ravine shall be a smooth descent; the green natural terrace shall be a paved street. There shall be cottages in the dark ravine, and cottages on the lonely slopes.

The rough pebbled track shall be an even, firm, broad, black, sooty road, bedded with the cinders from my mill; and my mill, Caroline—my mill shall fill its present yard.”

“Horrible! You will change our blue hill-country air into the Stilbro’ smoke atmosphere.”

“I will pour the waters of Pactolus through the valley of Briarfield.”

“I like the beck a thousand times better.”

“I will get an Act for enclosing Nunnely Common, and parcelling it out into farms.”

“Stilbro’ Moor, however, defies you, thank Heaven! What can you grow in Bilberry Moss? What will flourish on Rushedge?” (*Shirley* 540)

In spite of Caroline’s wish to preserve the beautiful natural scenery, what the narrator sees later is “the manufacturer’s day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes” such as “the cinder-black highway,” “a mighty mill, and a chimney, ambitious as the tower of Babel” (*Shirley* 541). It is needless to say that the binary opposition of nature versus industry can be replaced by that of women versus men.

Caroline’s cure is temporally and she submits herself to patriarchal control. However Shirley’s imaginary world, different from it, never loses its potency. So she can have “a real happy, glad, good-natured look” even when she sees the foundation-stone of the mill laid (*Shirley* 541). This fact means that she can get on with patriarchal society. Brontë said in a letter to the publisher that the reason why she

changed the title of the novel from *Hollow's Mill* to *Shirley* was that Shirley was the most prominent character in the novel. Her prominence consists not in her property and position, but in creating a world of her own. She harmonise with the society by accepting her own "foreignness." In the next novel *Villette*, Brontë made a further analysis on this issue. The heroine Lucy Snowe struggles to overcome her nervous disease to accommodate herself with the society.

Lucy suffers from a nervous fever during the vacation. All teachers and pupils have gone, and left alone in the gloomy empty house, she thinks about her friend Ginevra, whom she believes "[b]y True Love was Ginevra followed: never could she be alone" (*Villette* 158). Lucy's fancy about Ginevra reveals her secret desire: she hides passion under outward self-abnegation. Like other Brontë heroines, she curbs her "foreign" desire with "Victorian" reason. The conflict between them causes her nervous disease. She says herself, "I really believe my nerves are getting overstretched: my mind has suffered somewhat too much a malady is growing upon it—what shall I do? How shall I keep well?" (*Villette* 159) *Villette* is a story of female quest for health. She can achieve it by accepting her own "foreignness."

As in *Shirley*'s case, the "British" remedy has not been effective for Lucy. She is saved by Graham and taken care of by him and his mother, Mrs. Bretton. As the name "Bretton" suggests, they embody British moral values. Although she has been physically recovered in Bretton's house, she continues to suffer from the illusion of a nun after that. The nun is said to have been buried alive in the garden for some

amatory affairs. The ghost of the nun is the symbol of tragedy of a woman who is divided between Byronism and social mores. We try to see the process of Lucy's recovery from the female malady through her reaction against it. In discussing this matter, we should take notice of Robert Heilman's essay about Gothic in *Villette*. He argues that there are three types of Gothic.

Of the four novels, *Villette* is most heavily saturated with Gothic—with certain of its traditional manifestations (old Gothic), with the under-cutting of these that is for Charlotte no less instinctive than the use of them (anti-Gothic), and with an original, intense exploration of feeling that increases the range and depth of fiction (new Gothic). (Heilman 199)

Then, he focuses on “Charlotte's use of the legend of the nun supposedly buried alive and of the appearance of a visitant taken to be the ghost of the nun,” and he considers it to be “new Gothic” (Heilman 200).

According to his view, the ghostly nun reflects Lucy's feelings and mental growth.

Lucy first encounters it in the attic when she is reading a letter from Graham there. No sooner she sees the nun, she cries and runs away. She tells what she has seen only to Graham. Soothed by him, she is satisfied and happy. From this time, she comes to depend totally on him. His letters are “all of sweetness in life” (*Villette* 268), and she cannot live without him. During the seven weeks when he has forgotten to write to her, she pines, and gets thin as if she has become a shadow. She realises that he cannot cure her. She questions his opinion as a physician

when she sees the second illusion.

He was so obstinate, I thought it better to tell him what I really *had* seen. Of course with him it was held to be another effect of the same cause: it was all optical illusion—nervous malady, and so on. Not one bit did I believe him; but I dared not contradict: doctors are so self-opinionated, so immovable in their dry, materialist views. (*Villette* 257)

She criticises not only Graham's personality but also the "dry, materialist views" of Victorian medical discourse. Torgerson considers that his diagnosis "has validity once we connect the Victorian concept that the need for self-control, taken to its extreme, resulted in the manifestation of hysteric symptoms" (Torgerson 69-70). However, she also points out that Graham's materialist reading "reduces her experience to being simply a result of her nervous system" (Torgerson 69-70). His dry materialism cannot cure Lucy's female malady. She has to get over not only the cause of the disease but also its diagnosis.

She is gradually ready to confront the nun to overcome both the Victorian medical discourse and the fate which the nun symbolises: a life "of the only socially acceptable life available to single women—a life of service, self-abnegation, and chastity" (Gilbert and Gubar 426). She puts Graham's letters in a bottle and buries it under the old pear tree which stands at the end of "l'allée défendue" where the legendary nun is supposed to be buried. Standing besides the grave, she meditates:

If life be a war, it seemed my destiny to conduct it single-handed. I pondered now how to break up my

winter-quarters—to leave an encampment where food and forage failed. Perhaps, to effect this change, another pitched battle must be fought with fortune; if so, I had a mind to encounter: too poor to lose, God might destine me to gain.
(*Villette* 296-97)

She chooses to fight with the Victorian convention rather than to stay in a paralysed state. She feels, “not happy, far otherwise, but strong with reinforced strength” (*Villette* 296). In the meantime, she sees the nun again but she neither flees nor shrieks. In fact, she talks to and draws nearer to her. As Heilman points, such an act indicates her maturing personality (Heilman 200). After the nun has receded, she thinks, “This time there was no Dr. John to whom to have recourse: there was no one to whom I dared whisper the words, ‘I have again seen the nun’” (*Villette* 297). Now she quits seeking her remedy in the Victorian values.

After the burial, she gradually develops a friendly affection for Paul Emanuel. Gilbert and Gubar point that “[t]heir relationship, we soon realize, is combative because they are equals, because they are so much alike” (Gilbert and Gubar 428). He awakens her Byronism and stimulates her to overcome conventional femininity. Through the relationship with him, she is released from it. One evening, Lucy wanders in the garden and whispers under the old pear tree, “Good-night, Dr. John; you are good, you are beautiful; but you are not mine. Good-night, and God bless you!” (*Villette* 362) This is a farewell address to Victorian values that Graham represents. Then she begins to think about her new life as an independent woman. She considers “how [she] should make some

advance in life, take another step towards an independent position” (*Villette* 360). Just at the moment, she encounters the nun yet again. It passes close to her and she sees it clearly. She asks, “Who are you? and why do you come to me?” and says “If you have any errand to men, come back and deliver it” (*Villette* 362) to it. She is willing to confront to what torments her. She finally reaches the heart of the problem.

The last visit of the nun is on the festival night. Lucy wanders around the park in a half-dreaming state brought about by the effect of a strong opiate which Madame Beck has given her. She sees Paul and his ward, Justine Marie Souveur there. Lucy sees a singular intimacy between them and it hurts her greatly, but she never thinks about “temporary evasion of the actual” or “coward fleeing from the dread” (*Villette* 467). She accepts the pain and overcomes it.

I hastened to accept the whole plan [the marriage of Paul and Justine Marie]. I extended my grasp and took it all in. I gathered it to me with a sort of rage of haste, and folded it round me, as the soldier struck on the field folds his colours about his breast. I invoked Conviction to nail upon me the certainty, abhorred while embraced, to fix it with the strongest spikes her strongest strokes could drive; and when the iron had entered well my soul, I stood up, as I thought renovated. (*Villette* 467)

She feels jealousy, and it is closely connected with sexuality as John Maynard has pointed out, “jealousy, as always in Brontë, is a sign of mature sexual engagement” (Maynard 206). Through the relation with

Paul, she is free from Victorian morality prescribing female sexual purity and it enables her to be matured. Realising her own sexual emotion, she feels to be “renovated.” Torgerson says that “Lucy’s jealousy is also instrumental in her exposure and destruction of the nun, another sign of her increased health” (Torgerson 85). She comes back to the dormitory, and sees the nun lying on her bed. Her reaction against it is more aggressive than before.

A cry at this moment might have ruined me. Be the spectacle what it might, I could afford neither consternation, scream, nor swoon. Besides, I was not overcome. Tempered by late incidents, my nerves disdained hysteria. Warm from illuminations, and music, and thronging thousands, thoroughly lashed up by a new scourge, I defined spectra. 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, the force; as my instinct felt. 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.

(*Villette* 470)

Then she finds that the ghost is “a long bolster dressed in a long black stole, and artfully invested with a white veil” (*Villette* 470) and she is “relieved from all sense of the spectral and unearthly” (*Villette* 470). At last, she defeats the nun. This incident shows Lucy’s recovery from the

nervous disease: her nerves “[disdains] hysteria” and after that, she sleeps deeply. In Brontë’s works, sound sleep suggests perfect health. She overcomes her female malady by accepting her own “foreign” desire.

As we have seen, Brontë’s depiction of female malady is compound. It affects her heroines both physically and mentally. It is sometimes a symbol of women’s rebellion, and sometimes that of the fate of submission. The recovery is followed by another morbidity. It is firstly presented with Eastern images, but they gradually faded into the British. Thus, the borders dividing body and spirit, disease and health, the East and the West have disappeared in Brontë’s novels. The resulting ambiguity is very important because she is reconstructing the relation of self and other, trying to create a new self which is free from the stereotypes by overturning the existing order of the world. Realising their Byronic desire, the heroines become ill but by accepting their “foreignness,” they overcome diseases and come to terms with the world.

Conclusion

This thesis has analysed the foreign images in Charlotte Brontë's works. We define the things or ideas that deviate from the Victorian middle-class criterion as "foreign." There are a number of images that are not integrated into the society, such as non-British countries, different races and classes. They are closely connected with the heroines' sense of alienation. They feel themselves being alienated when they realise the "unfeminine" desire which is not unacceptable in Victorian society. Foreignness exists in heroines' psychology. The various foreign images reveal their secret desire and true selves.

In Chapter 1, we have studied the heroines' conflict between commitment to Byronism and devotion to Victorian values. Their sense of alienation is caused by the conflict. Many critics have discussed Byron's influence on Brontë, but they have focused only on "Byronic hero" and failed to notice the effect of female characters on her heroines. Victorian people believed that Western women were morally and intellectually superior to Oriental women, but Byron's heroines of Greece, Turkey, Spain and the southern island which constitute his idea of the Oriental are outstandingly honest and autonomous. These tendencies of Byron's Oriental heroines are clearly reflected in Brontë's. We have discussed the "female Byronism" from the following three points: passion, "real" femininity and the reversal of gender roles.

Brontë creates Byronic heroines who are passionate and often challenge the conventions. However, they are also rational enough to respect the moral code of society. Passionate involvement sometimes leads women to destruction, so they must curb their Byronic desire by rational and moral judgement. The conflict between passion and reason is one of the most important themes in Brontë's works. To represent it, she uses the geographic image. She was influenced by two ideas: imperial conception that Britain was morally superior to Southern or Eastern countries and Byron's idea that foreign women were more honest and attractive than the British ladies. These conflicting ideas are coexistent in Brontë's heroines. They hide "foreign" passion behind "British" reason, but foreign images expose their Byronic desire hidden under the mask of Victorian ladies.

Chapter 2 has discussed how foreign images function as devices for disclosing the heroines' Byronism. This chapter has focused especially on foreign women who unsettle the heroines' subjectivity as a middle-class English woman in Brontë's three major novels. Here we take up Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, Hortense in *Shirley* and Madame Beck, Madame Walravens and Vashti in *Villette*. Firstly, we have dealt with *Jane Eyre* and elucidated that Bertha uncovers the heroine's secret Byronism lurking under a mask of meek gentleness thought to be appropriate for a British woman by focusing on the image of suttee. Next, we have studied *Shirley*. We state that the sickroom is represented as a "foreign" world freed from the patriarchal system, analysing Hortense's act of nursing. Lastly, the image of a witch in *Villette* has been studied. A

witch is a symbol of a woman deviated from the feminine norm. Madame Beck, Madame Walravens and Vashti in *Villette* are all described with the image of a witch, and they teach Lucy the way of female self-assertion.

Chapter 3 has examined the image of diet. Sidney Mintz explains that “What we like, what we eat, how we eat it, and how we feel about it are phenomenologically interrelated matters; together, they speak eloquently to the question of how we perceive ourselves in relation to others” (Mintz 4). In Brontë’s works, “what the heroines like” or “what the heroines eat” is concerned with their relation to men in patriarchal society. First, we have analysed the women’s acts of serving and sharing food. Serving is traditionally a woman’s role and it suggests the Victorian idea of women’s inferiority to men. The heroines serve colonial products such as sugar, wine and spice to men but they never take them in. Looking into the historical background, we can see that there was inhumane exploitation of colonies behind these products. Brontë uses the image of colonial food to compare the British control over colonies and men’s rule over women. The heroines turn them down because they reject to be involved in the patriarchal power structure. On the other hand, when men and women share food, personal harmony arises. What Lucy Snowe, the heroine of *Villette* shares with Paul is not “colonial” but “foreign” food; the diet implying equality and sexuality between them. The image of “foreign” food reveals the Byronism in her. Eating and sharing them, she accepts her “foreignness” and achieves equality with Paul. We have also discussed the image of hunger. It is the symbol of female frustration caused by a conflict between the Byronic desire and

Victorian conventions. The fulfilment of hunger means that the heroines overcome the conflict and accommodate herself with the society.

The image of dress has been analysed in Chapter 4. The heroines use dressing for role-playing and self-representation. Rich texture or garments of the East imply male domination because they are often associated with patriarchal economic power and harem slave. However, muslin is an exception. It was popular because it was easy to work with and wash. Due to the easiness of handling, muslin mediates between middle-class heroines and working-class women such as dressmakers and laundresses. Identifying themselves with those “foreign” women, the heroines realise their Byronism.

Also, we have explored how the dress is used as the heroines’ means of representation and construction of selfhood. They put on sober dresses to conceal their Byronic desire. Their plain dresses make it possible for them to conform to Victorian society, but they simultaneously cause the division of self. The heroines must learn to use dresses not only for role-playing but also for self-representation. We will analyse the image of Lucy’s three sets of dresses in *Villette* to show how she gets over self-disruption. An acceptance of “foreign” desire and its fulfilment brings about spiritual growth to her.

Chapter 5 have focused on the image of disease. In Brontë’s works, disease represents deviation from the Victorian norm of femininity. The deviation is directed towards desire for Byronism. We have specifically taken up infectious and nervous diseases for examination. Gilbert and Gubar compare women’s anxiety for creative acts as a form of

self-assertion with the image of infection and miasma, which causes plagues (Gilbert and Gubar 60). They are connected with the foreign image, because Victorian people metaphorically paralleled infections and filthy conditions engendering unhealthy air with foreign countries. On the contrary, healthiness and cleanliness become symbols of their “civilised” society. The reason why women’s self-assertion are associated with the infection is that their “unfeminine” desire has been thought to be excluded from Victorian society.

As we mentioned above, Gilbert and Gubar claim that infection implies woman’s anxiety about self-assertion, but the historical background of cholera offers a new point of view about the image of infection in literary works of women: It can be seen as a defiance against patriarchy. Victorian people believed that cholera is a retaliation from the colonies and Brontë parallels the revolt of colonised people against a suzerain with a woman’s defiance of male domination. We have studied this through Bertha’s choleraic feature in *Jane Eyre*.

While infection was associated with foreign images, nervous disease was called “the English Malady” and thought that it was caused by the luxury which was brought by domestic prosperity. Interestingly, the images of these two diseases were twisted together. Nervous disease suggests the heroines’ conflict between “foreign” desire and “Victorian” conventions. They achieve a harmonious relationship with the world by overcoming the disease.

The heroines’ sense of “foreignness” originates in their Byronism. It has a double meanings: it enables them to be independent women freed

from the convention, but it causes alienation from society. They achieve self-assertion through the conflict between Byronism and conventional femininity. They come to terms with the world by accepting the “foreignness.”

¹ The term “Imperial feminism” is used in Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar’s “Challenging Imperial Feminism.” They discuss that liberal feminism emerged from the imperial countries and inherited racial discriminative point of view. Amos and Parmar take up the fact that the Third World are neglected, but here we define the imperial feminism in Britain as the concept of English women’s supremacy based on the belief of moral inferiority of women in other countries, not only the colonies but also other European nations.

² Caroline Franklin says, “Byron’s use of the passionate heroine to endorse an anti-authoritarian stance in those poems [Byron’s verse tales] was a crucial factor in the genesis of feminism of *Jane Eyre*.” (Franklin 15)

³ In her *Alternative Femininity*, Samantha Holland calls patriarchal assumption of woman as “traditional femininity” and insists that woman should create “alternative” femininity by herself. This thesis basically agrees with her but we use the word “real” femininity to emphasise that Jane and Bertha resist the “false” femininity which is made by patriarchal authority.

⁴ Suvendrini Perera analyses the image of suttee in *Jane Eyre* more intimately. Also Peter Childs and Laura Donaldson refer to this matter.

⁵ This opinion is verified by the fact that coffee is served to students of the Lowood school in *Jane Eyre*, where their sexuality is severely oppressed.

⁶ Refer to Brontë’s letters of August 23, 1849 and June 4, 1850.

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