

# ‘Morbid and Weak’ but Independent: Lucy’s Development in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*

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In Charlotte Brontë’s final novel *Villette* (1853),<sup>(1)</sup> we can clearly observe the protagonist Lucy Snowe’s morbid and solitary nature. While she emphasizes Lucy’s solitude as a homeless and shadowy woman, Brontë tries to create a new alternative way of life for women in *Villette*. Brontë describes Lucy as a heroine who is weaker mentally and physically than other heroines in her fiction. Basically, female characters in her novels resist being oppressed, and resist the male-dominant social customs and conventions of the nineteenth century. They grow up struggling against social irrationality, and establish their social positions and identities. Moreover they succeed in their homemaking with their families. Despite her weakness, Lucy also becomes an independent woman, an English teacher at a girls’ boarding school, in *Villette*. Unlike the other heroines, however, she cannot complete her homemaking because of her fiancé Paul Emanuel’s death, though she succeeds in her ‘schoolmaking’ as an independent woman. Brontë explores the difficulty of managing both domestic happiness and financial independence through her depiction of Lucy.

Compared with other heroines in Brontë’s fiction, there are some differences and similarities between them and Lucy. Unlike them, Lucy is morbid mentally and physically, and she cannot achieve a happy ending. It turns out that the happiness which Victorian women desired, namely to be an Angel in the House which was ‘a model for all ranks of Victorian women’,<sup>(2)</sup> evades her. For Frances Evans Henri in *The Professor* (1857)<sup>(3)</sup> and Shirley Keeldar in *Shirley* (1849),<sup>(4)</sup> a husband’s support is essential to combine marriage and a career. However, while Lucy loses domestic happiness as a wife, she goes through her own processes to try to be independent. Even if she is weak psychologically, she makes steady progress in her independence like the other Brontë heroines.

In Brontë’s most famous work *Jane Eyre* (1847), for example, while Jane Eyre is an

orphan and suffers from class and gender oppression, she has her own will and firm beliefs and bears up well under difficult circumstances. A lot of readers, especially women, have been attracted by and have sympathised with her way of life. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note that Jane is ‘the emblem of a passionate, barely disguised rebelliousness’.<sup>(5)</sup> Jane lives unflinchingly with her strong will even when facing her cruel fate. She differs from Lucy in mentality.

Yet, Jane and Lucy resemble each other in respect of repeated movement from place to place. They gradually develop self-reliance in places where they arrive, and find their ways to live as independent women. As for Jane, the more repeatedly she moves, the stronger her mentality becomes. Her indomitable spirit leads her to a happy ending in which she achieves economic and gender equality with Rochester. At the beginning of the story, Jane is under the care of her maternal uncle’s family, the Reeds. Because of her resistance to Mrs Reed, however, she is forcibly taken to Lowood, a girls’ boarding school. She spends six years there as a student and two years there as a teacher. After her experience at Lowood, she leaves for Thornfield Hall, Edward Rochester’s house, to work as a governess for his ward, Adèle Varens, a young French girl.

Jane’s life looks stable at Thornfield until the revelation on her wedding day that Bertha Mason, the daughter of a Jamaican plantation owner, is Rochester’s wife. Jane cannot bear this because she loves Rochester. She decides to leave, and wanders from place to place for several days. At last, she arrives at St John Rivers’ house. For about a year, she lives with St John and his sisters, and teaches at her own school which St John prepares for her. But one day, she suddenly hears Rochester’s voice mysteriously calling her name, and rushes back to Thornfield. Although the mansion is already burned down, she learns that Rochester lives in his manor-house, Ferndean. Jane finally finds her peace there and succeeds in homemaking with Rochester. She resolves problems of class and gender by a large inheritance from her paternal uncle, John Eyre, in Madeira, so her social mobility enables her to start her homemaking with Rochester.

In *Villette*, Lucy’s independence is ensured by movement not only within England but also beyond national boundaries. In her case, Lucy moves from place to place, eventually crossing the English Channel. She also changes her address like Jane Eyre. At first, she spends peaceful times in her godmother Louisa Bretton’s house ‘about twice a

year' (5) until she is fourteen. After she returns home, she loses her family during 'the next eight years' (35). By 'incidental rumors' (35), Lucy learns that Mrs Bretton has already left 'the clean and ancient town of Bretton' (5) for London. Therefore 'there remain[s] no possibility of [her] dependence on others' (36). She does not have 'a self-reliant or active nature' (36), but by circumstance, 'self-reliance and exertion [a]re forced upon' her. She decides to nurse Miss Marchmont, an old maid in her neighbourhood who suffers from rheumatism. She has no choice but to work regardless of her will, and this is her first employment in her life.

When Miss Marchmont dies and Lucy becomes alone again, she must 'look out for a new place' (43) to work. She moves to London from a 'country parish in the flat, rich middle of England' (44). However, even London is not a permanent residence for Lucy. Her 'state of mind, and all accompanying circumstances' (49) inspire her to cross the English Channel. Although she is very passive in England, she bravely decides to cross the Channel alone. She cannot speak other languages, and she has neither family nor friends in other countries. It seems reckless for her to go to 'a certain continental port, Boue-Marine' (50) and beyond. But this impulsive long-distance movement triggers her self-reliance.

Lucy sails from England to the Continent to 'earn a living where [she] can find' work (55). After she arrives at Boue-Marine, Lucy decides to go to Villette, 'the great capital of the great kingdom of Labassécor' (55), because Ginevra Fanshawe who befriends Lucy during their sea voyage tells Lucy about Madame Beck who 'wants an English gouvernante' (60). She somehow finds Madame Beck's 'Pensionnat de Demoiselles' (64) even though she is unfamiliar with Villette. Lucy has neither knowledge of French nor references, but she promotes herself desperately because she needs lodging and employment. Madame Beck hires Lucy because Lucy is English. Lucy narrates, '[s]he had a respect for "Angleterre"; and as to "les Anglaises," she would have the women of no other country about her own children, if she could help' (72-73). For Madame Beck, only Englishwomen are trustworthy and employable. She talks to Lucy 'about England and Englishwomen, and the reasons for what she [i]s pleased to term their superior intelligence, and more real and reliable probity' (73). Therefore Madame Beck's reliance on Englishwomen saves Lucy who has no advantage of education except

her knowledge of the English language. By crossing the English Channel, this Englishwoman, who could not find work in England, comes to a foreign country and finds a job to support herself.

In the ‘Pensionnat de Demoiselles’ (64), her first job is to take care of Madame Beck’s three children and to dress Madame Beck, so her ‘place [i]s to be a hybrid between gouvernante and lady’s-maid’ (71). One day Madame Beck asks Lucy whether she was a governess in England. For Lucy, this is her ‘first essay at teaching’ Madame Beck’s children (76). Since that day, Madame Beck carefully observes Lucy to measure Lucy’s ‘fitness for a purpose’ and weigh her ‘value in a plan’ (76). After she scrutinizes Lucy for a fortnight, she begs Lucy to give ‘a short dictation exercise’ (76) in a class where there are sixty students. She tries to refuse the offer because of her ‘usual base habit of cowardice’ and her ‘inadventurous’ nature (76). She prefers ‘sitting twenty years teaching infants the hornbook, turning silk dresses, and making children’s frocks’ (76–77). Although she is not content with her present work, her morbidity and ‘infatuated resignation’ (73) tries to prevent her from changing herself.

Lucy clearly shows her weakness, stating her opinion about her happiness. She does not desire to go through hardship to improve her living condition.

[I]t seemed to me a great thing to be without heavy anxiety, and relieved from intimate trial; the negation of severe suffering was the nearest approach to happiness I expected to know. Besides, I seemed to hold two lives—the life of thought, and that of reality; and, provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter. (77)

Lucy prefers stability without any ordeals or great change. Her morbidity prevents her from confronting new difficulties. Thus, she tries to resist the schoolmistress Madame Beck’s authority.

However, Lucy establishes her identity as an English teacher. Madame Beck asks Lucy, ‘Will you [...] go backward or forward?’ (78). Lucy chooses to go forward. Madame Beck takes Lucy to a classroom, and Lucy stands on ‘the estrade’ (80). She

successfully teaches her first English class coolly and resolutely against ‘brusque’ and ‘rebellious’ ‘Labassécourian girls’ (505). She declares that she ‘shall never forget that first class’ (79). She gives full play to her talent as an English teacher in the first class. After the lesson, Madame Beck employs Lucy as an English teacher, and raises her salary. When Lucy is a governess to Madame Beck’s children, she feels a distance between her and the school. But her life changes after the first class, and she says, ‘I was to be called down from my watch-tower of the nursery, whence I had hitherto made my observations, and was to be compelled into closer intercourse with this little world of the Rue Fossette’ (75). Because of her success in the first class, she gradually establishes her identity as an English teacher, and connects herself to an educational world. The experience of that first class leads her to more independent life.

Lucy earns her living by teaching English, and she gradually dreams of having her own school in the future. After she becomes an English teacher, she narrates:

My time was now well and profitably filled up. What with teaching others and studying closely myself, I had hardly spare moment. It was pleasant. I felt I was getting on; not lying the stagnant prey of mould and rust, but polishing my faculties and whetting them to a keen edge with constant use. (82)

Although she was content with her peaceful governess life before she becomes an English teacher, she finds fulfillment in her work in a classroom. As she teaches English, she forms a plan to manage her own school in the future. She tells Paul Emanuel about her future scheme, ‘the school-project’ when he inquires about her ‘plans of life’ (441). At this time, it seems that it will take long time to realise her dream because she does not have enough property to prepare a school yet. But the declaration of her plan to Paul leads to materialisation of her dream.

Lucy finally manages her own school which Paul Emanuel, her friend and future husband, presents to her before his leaving for Guadeloupe, a French West Indian colony. She reaches her ultimate place to live and work. During his absence, she tries to prepare a house for Emanuel, while she works harder as a schoolmistress. She receives a hundred pounds as ‘a peace-offering’ (493) from Mr. Marchmont who is an heir of Miss

Marchmont. Lucy uses the money to ‘take the house adjoining [hers]’ (493) to change her ‘externat’ to ‘a pensionnat’ (494). She declares readers, ‘Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life’ (493). She enjoys the process of her schoolmaking. She also attempts to complete her homemaking like Jane Eyre.

Her homemaking, however, is incomplete. She makes her home comfortable for M. Paul to live with him. She narrates happily before his return:

And now the three years are past: M. Emanuel’s return is fixed. It is Autumn; he is to be with me ere the mists of November come. My school flourishes, my house is ready: I have made him a little library, filled its shelves with the books he left in my care: I have cultivated out of love for him (I was naturally no florist) the plants he preferred, and some of them are yet in bloom. I thought I loved him when he went away; I love him now in another degree; he is more my own. (495)

In this passage, we expect Emanuel will return to Lucy and they will marry like the other heroines in Brontë’s fiction. Lucy enjoys the process of homemaking for their future married life. But the ending fails to come up to not only Lucy’s expectations but also that of the readers.

Lucy’s homemaking is imperfect because Paul dies in a shipwreck on his way home from the West Indies. After she talks about the happiest years of her life in the above passage, she implies that something ominous is approaching her by describing the dreadful weather.

[...] the wind takes its autumn moan; but—he is coming.

The skies hang full and dark—a rack sails from the west [...] I know some signs of the sky [...] God, watch that sail! Oh! guard it!

The wind shifts to the west. [...] It will rise—it will swell—it shrieks out long: wander as I may through the house this night, I cannot lull the blast. The advancing hours make it strong: by midnight, all sleepless watchers hear and fear a wild south-west storm. (495)

She suggests her anxiety about Paul's return home when she insists twice, 'but—he is coming' (495). Contrary to her expectation of his homecoming, the weather is getting worse and worse. In this passage, the rack and the wind from the west and the 'wild south-west storm' indicate the direction of Guadeloupe, the West Indies. The disquieting description produces an uneasiness that he will not come back to Lucy.

Lucy finally declares Paul was involved in a shipwreck, and her homemaking is discontinued by his death. She tells us, 'that storm roared frenzied for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks' (495). The shipwreck disappoints her expectation of completing her homemaking with Paul. Though Jane accomplishes homemaking with Rochester in the end, Lucy cannot achieve the completion of her homemaking because of Paul's death even though she succeeds in 'schoolmaking' as a schoolmistress. She implies it is impossible to achieve both homemaking and schoolmaking.

To manage both homemaking and a career, a husband's support is essential to women in Brontë's fiction. Brontë embodies the idea through Frances Evans Henri in *The Professor* and Shirley Keelder in *Shirley*. Both of them show an uncompromising attitude unlike Lucy's morbidity. The heroine in Brontë's first novel *The Professor*, Frances Evans Henri, an Anglo-Swiss girl, has neither relatives nor property; she resembles Jane and Lucy because of her insecure social position. In Frances' physical characteristics, her figure is the same as that of Jane and Lucy: she is '[p]ale, small, thin, and "careworn"'.<sup>(6)</sup> On the other hand, Gilbert and Gubar insist she is a 'bluestocking'<sup>(7)</sup> and becomes "Madame the Directress," the professional equal of M. le Professeur'.<sup>(8)</sup> They add that while she is '[a]' "good and dear wife" to her professor [i.e. William Crimsworth], she nevertheless exhibits barely repressed signs of a spirit'.<sup>(9)</sup> Frances always debates men on equal terms, and has the courage to state her own ideas in the same way on Jane Eyre does.

Frances is never oppressed by men, and maintains her freedom by working as a schoolmistress at home. She is a good wife and wise mother. She accomplishes not only schoolmaking with her husband but also homemaking with her family. In the nineteenth century, a Victorian woman would long to be an Angel in the House because

a woman could not live independently without a man's support. But she hopes to work 'in the right way'<sup>(10)</sup> because she is not satisfied with a lower salary than her husband's. William 'put[s] no obstacle in her way; raised no objection'.<sup>(11)</sup> He understands that 'she [i]s not one who c[an] live quiescent and inactive or even comparatively inactive'.<sup>(12)</sup> Therefore William prepares classes in his house, and allows her to work as 'Madame the Directress' who supervises not only their house but also classes during the day-time. When he comes back home, Frances changes from 'the lady-directress' to his 'little lace-mender'.<sup>(13)</sup> According to him, his home is his heaven for him because of Frances. She can be an Angel in the House as well as a business partner to William. He says, '[s]o different was she under different circumstances I seemed to possess two wives'.<sup>(14)</sup> Frances is a woman who succeeds in both her work and homemaking.

Frances' achievement in both marriage and a career is realised by William's support and understanding of her desire. Looking back on their marriage, he declares, 'Frances was [...] a good and dear wife to me, because I was to her a good, just and faithful husband'.<sup>(15)</sup> He believes that his generosity produces her success in both their marriage and her profession. In the Victorian era, it was generally thought that women should be homemakers, so women's social progress was unacceptable. Although Frances is not a native English woman, she has the makings of an Angel in the House because she acquires accomplishments such as needlework and foreign languages. But she does not desire to only stay domestic, and she asserts that 'freedom is indispensable' for women.<sup>(16)</sup> M. Jeanne Peterson notes that to be an Angel in the House has two aspects for Englishwomen: 'For some, the angel in the house is evidence of a "golden age" of family life, an era when men and women had separate roles in the social hierarchy. For others, she is a symbol of oppressed women trapped in the glided cage of Victorian male domination'.<sup>(17)</sup> For Frances, to be an Angel in the House means being suppressed and losing her freedom. Therefore, she chooses to work as a schoolmistress while married to William. In the nineteenth century, while many women aspired to be an Angel in the House, Frances fulfills herself in both homemaking and schoolmaking because of William's support.

Shirley Keeldar, one of heroines in Brontë's third novel *Shirley* (1849), also manages both marriage and a career, although unlike Frances, she is neither a teacher

nor a governess. She is the opposite of Lucy in behavioral, physical, and psychological dimensions. She is a rich and active woman, and takes interest in politics and economics. She is a Yorkshire girl, but she left for a while before returning home. She is an heiress and has her own mansion in Fieldhead, Yorkshire. The Keeldars are an old honourable family, and ‘takes the precedence of all’.<sup>(18)</sup> Fieldhead is ‘[a] property of a thousand a-year’.<sup>(19)</sup> She leases a nearby plot of land to her tenant, Robert Moore. As his landlord, she participates in his business. She clearly says, ‘[my parents] gave me a man’s name; I hold a man’s position: it is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood’.<sup>(20)</sup> She often calls herself a gentleman or esquire, and the narrator declares she is ‘glad to be independent as to property’.<sup>(21)</sup> She is the most independent woman mentally and financially in Brontë’s fiction.

Shirley thinks that once a woman marries, she will not be able to be independent. When she and Caroline converse about marriage and independence, Shirley insists, ‘[if I were married,] I could never be my own mistress more. A terrible thought!—it suffocates me!’<sup>(22)</sup> For her, to be an independent woman is the most important goal in her life. Therefore she is delighted that she has enough property to become independent. The narrator explains her pleasure:

She was glad to be independent as to property: by fits she was even elated at the notion of being lady of the manor, and having tenants and an estate: she was especially tickled with an agreeable complacency when reminded of ‘all that property’ down in the Hollow, ‘comprising an excellent cloth-mill, dyehouse, warehouse, together with the messuage, gardens, and outbuildings, termed Hollow’s cottage [...]’<sup>(23)</sup>

Shirley is quite different from the ideal Victorian woman: the Angel in the House. Her name, Shirley, represents her manliness despite her ‘fins, gracieux, spirituels’ features.<sup>(24)</sup> In the novel, the narrator elucidates the reason for her name. Although her parents wanted a boy, they had a girl. Consequently, they gave the girl the male name, Shirley. Brontë deliberately chooses the name Shirley to represent her gentleman-like independence.

However, Gilbert and Gubar doubt Shirley's independence. They criticise that 'given that Shirley's masculine name was bestowed by parents who had wished for a son, there is something not a little foreboding about the fact that independence is so closely associated with men that it confines Shirley to a kind of male mimicry'.<sup>(25)</sup> But it is an unchanging fact that a large inheritance and property from her father, Charles Cave Keeldar, enables her to be an independent woman. Moreover her active character is suited for business. Her job is different from Frances Evans Henri's teaching profession, but Shirley also achieves her independence as a woman landlord.

In addition, Shirley succeeds in managing both marriage and her career like Frances. After refusing proposals of marriage by five suitors, Shirley chooses to marry Louis Moore, Henry Sympson's tutor who also taught her French when she was young. Shirley is a 'strong yet loving' woman,<sup>(26)</sup> so she fascinates both men and women in Yorkshire. But she has her own philosophy of marriage, so she never agrees to any proposals unless a suitor satisfies the condition. She explains to Caroline that if she falls in love, she would like a man who attracts little Irish beggars, rats, small birds, and dogs.<sup>(27)</sup> In short, Shirley is fascinated by a man whose generosity little beggars and animals instinctively notice and they are tamed. Moreover she says that she desires to meet a man who is her superior. Louis Moore is the very man for her because she is 'younger, frailer, feebler, more ignorant' than he,<sup>(28)</sup> so she marries him.

The marriage between a woman landlord, Shirley, and a tutor, Louis Moore initially seems imbalanced; however, Shirley never takes a superior stand to Louis. When they confess their love to each other, she asks him:

[T]each me and help me to be good. I do not ask you to take off my shoulders all the cares and duties of property; but I ask you to share the burden, and to show me how to sustain my part well. Your judgment is well-balanced; your heart is kind; your principles are sound. I know you are wise; I feel you are benevolent; I believe you are conscientious. Be my companion through life; be my guide where I am ignorant: be my master where I am faulty; be my friend always!<sup>(29)</sup>

Even though their marriage is disproportionate financially, they do not worry about the economic disparity between them. Although she works hard before she marries, their matrimony enables her business to grow more and more prosperous. As to Shirley's character, Caroline thinks Shirley is not suited to be a good wife, so she wonders 'what Louis will make of [Shirley].'<sup>(30)</sup> But only a 'captor', Louis, can marry a 'lioness,' Shirley.<sup>(31)</sup> Caroline declares that Shirley is a mistress of all around her, but she is not her own mistress any longer. In short, Louis becomes Shirley's master.

The economic differential between Shirley and Louis is resolved in the end. According to Robert, he will halve a parish in Briarfield with Louis in ten years, so Louis will also have 'certain of power and property'.<sup>(32)</sup> Moreover, Robert forecasts that Louis will become a magistrate in the district because of 'his quiet influence' and 'his unassuming superiority,'<sup>(33)</sup> and his friends and acquaintances will depend on him. Robert has an ambition to increase Louis and Shirley's income and 'double the value of their mill-property'<sup>(34)</sup> by his future plan of reclamation in the Hollow. Fifty years later, the narrator says, 'I suppose Robert Moore's prophecies were, partially, at least, fulfilled'.<sup>(35)</sup> Brontë suggests that the financial imbalance between Louis and Shirley is solved to some extent.

We can guess that Shirley succeeds in both her homemaking and business with Louis. Fifty years later, an old housekeeper, Martha reminisces about the brothers Moore, Shirley, and Caroline to the narrator. Martha explains how happy Shirley was:

I can remember the old mill being built—the very first it was in all the district; and then, I can remember it being pulled down, and going with my lake-lasses (companions) to see the foundation-stone of the new one laid: the two Mr Moores made a great stir about it [...] and [there are] both their ladies [...] Mrs Louis smiled when she talked: she had a really happy, glad, good-natured look [...]<sup>(36)</sup>

Shirley succeeds in business as an entrepreneur and in homemaking as a wife. Unlike Lucy, she never gets depressed or becomes withdrawn from her appearance to the end. Her positiveness and good health help her to improve her life. She is the most

prosperous female character in the Brontë's fiction. She, along with Frances, also embodies Brontë's ideal life for women.

Compared to Shirley, the other heroine of *Shirley*, Caroline Helstone, is an introverted and unhealthy character not unlike Lucy. She finds it difficult to express her feelings, and she 'has nothing left but to attempt the rites and duties of the lady at her uncle's tea table and Sunday school'.<sup>(37)</sup> But the narrator says, 'At last the life she led reached the point when it seemed she could bear it no longer'<sup>(38)</sup> after she was disappointed in love for Robert. She tries to change her monotonous life because 'her heart and head would fail under the pressure which strain[s] them'.<sup>(39)</sup> She becomes conscious that she 'feel[s] weaker formerly'.<sup>(40)</sup> To change her life, she hopes to leave Briarfield and 'to take a situation, to be a governess'.<sup>(41)</sup> However, Matthewson Helstone, her uncle and a clergyman, refuses this, and calls her idea 'rather too feminine a fancy'.<sup>(42)</sup> He tries to persuade her from becoming a governess because he plans to leave her his property. But she wishes for a change rather than his fortune. Her anguish gradually makes her pale, weak, and careworn.

When a change appears in Caroline's looks, everyone thinks she will die though she considers she is 'in no dying case'.<sup>(43)</sup> Gradually, she cannot pretend to be cheerful in public, so she withdraws herself to 'complete seclusion'.<sup>(44)</sup> Her desire for change gets stronger day by day. In a conversation between Caroline and Shirley, Caroline explains why she desires to work.

'Caroline,' demanded Miss Keeldar, abruptly, 'don't you wish you had a profession – a trade?'

'I wish it fifty times a-day. As it is, I often wonder what I came into the world for. I long to have something absorbing and compulsory to fill my head and hands, and to occupy my thoughts.'

'Can labour alone make a human being happy?'

'No; but it can give varieties of pain, and prevent us from breaking our hearts with single tyrant master-torture. Besides, successful labour has its recompense; a vacant, weary, lonely, hopeless life has none.'<sup>(45)</sup>

In this passage, Caroline's word, 'single tyrant master-torture' means the agony of disappointed love toward Robert Moore. She fears that her brain is occupied only by love and marriage, and that she will become an old maid. Therefore she is desperate for a job to escape from her anxiety. She believes that working will improve her miserable life and distracts her attention from Robert. But she continues to suffer from 'her own self-restraint and submission,'<sup>(46)</sup> and unfortunately falls seriously ill, mentally and physically, when she catches a fever. While Shirley is an extroverted, brisk, and gentleman-like woman, Brontë describes Caroline as a typical woman of the Victorian era.

In Brontë's fiction, Caroline and Lucy have morbidity and weakness in common, but there are some obvious differences between them. Caroline lives in a better environment than Lucy because she is under her family's protection and has property which Matthewson Helstone will leave for her. When he and Caroline visit Fieldhead, Mr Helstone tells Shirley that Caroline used to be cheerful and 'as rosy as the reddest of flower'<sup>(47)</sup> in Shirley's hands. But her energy is weakened by her unrequited love for Robert. She begins to think that she wants to leave home and work as a governess to divert her attention from Robert to other 'varieties of pain' in business. Mr Helstone, her paternal uncle, brought her up because she does not have parents. Her father, James Helstone, died in her childhood, and her mother left home, placing Caroline in Mr Helstone's care. But her mother, now called Mrs Pryor, returns to Briarfield as a Shirley's governess. Caroline thinks that she has nothing to live for, but in fact, she definitely has her family and is under their protection of them.

When Caroline falls seriously ill, she finds family love as Mrs Pryor discloses that they are mother and daughter. In *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, Sally Shuttleworth explains that '[a]lthough Caroline might become "nervous" and even look "as one who had seen a ghost", after her veins have been kindled by the "apparition" of her lover, she is saved from the extremes of morbidity by the textual device of brain fever'.<sup>(48)</sup> She recovers from her illness because her mother, Mrs Pryor, nurses her lovingly. Caroline's escape from 'the extremes of morbidity' enables her to reach a happy ending with her husband, Robert Moore.

Although Caroline feels anxiety because she cannot work and she thinks she will be

an old maid, Robert marries her and provides her with a job teaching in Sunday-school in the end. He saves her from her distress about her future. After he apologises to her for ‘all that sickness of body and mind she owed to [him],’<sup>(49)</sup> he offers, ‘Such a Sunday-school as you will have, Cary! such collections as you will get! such a day-school as you and Shirley, and Miss Ainley, will have to manage between you! The mill shall find salaries for a master and mistress, and the Squire [i.e. Louis] or the Clothier [i.e. Robert] shall give a treat a-quarter’.<sup>(50)</sup> Because of her husband’s support, Caroline gets the job she wished for. Robert relieves her from her morbidity and anguish. Fifty years later, according to Martha’s reminiscence, Caroline looks ‘very bonnie and grand’.<sup>(51)</sup> We can feel Caroline’s self-confidence, and imagine her success in both her homemaking and her job like Frances and Shirley.

However, Lucy Snowe is tied to her morbidity till the end. Deliberately, Brontë uses negative words repeatedly like ‘sick’, ‘ill’, ‘weak’, ‘solitary’, ‘shadow’, and ‘dark’ in *Villette* to describe Lucy. In a letter to William Smith Williams, her publisher, she commented on Lucy:

You say that she may be thought *morbid and weak*, unless the history of her life be more fully given. I consider that she is both *morbid and weak* at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength, and anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid. It was no impetus of healthy feeling which urged her to the confessional, for instance; it was the semi-delirium of solitary grief and sickness.<sup>(52)</sup> (italics mine)

Lucy’s unhealthy weakness permeates the novel; as a result, readers cannot escape the narrative’s gloom and oppression. Her morbidity deprives her of the energy to strive for progress. She always avoids bustling places and crowds of lively schoolgirls. She is content to live as a shadow. Despite her morbidity and solitude, she becomes an independent woman as an English teacher at a girls’ boarding school in Villette. Brontë represents Lucy’s independence through a process which is different from that of other heroines.

In *Villette*, because she does not depict Lucy’s family and home, Brontë suggests an image of Lucy’s homelessness and morbidity. Unlike Caroline, she literally has nothing:

no family, no property, no accomplishments and no energy. In the beginning, Lucy lives with the Brettons, and her family is never described except through their deaths. About the deaths, however, Alison Hoddinott notes that '[i]t is clear that she has suffered a major bereavement, but she does not give any details of the numbers, names or suffering of the dead'.<sup>(53)</sup> Lucy narrates even those deaths ambiguously and figuratively, using a description of a shipwreck (35). In other words, *Villette* starts with an image of Lucy's homelessness. Gilbert and Gubar call this novel 'the most moving and terrifying account of female deprivation' because Lucy is 'from first to last a woman without—outside society, without parents or friends, without physical or mental attractions, without money or confidence or health'. In this way, she resembles Jane Eyre and Frances Evans Henri, in looks, social position, and family background.

However, a crucial difference between Lucy and Jane or Frances is in their mental conditions. Jane and Frances always resist social pressures and strive to be independent women. Compared to them, Lucy lives under self-restraint, and likes to be shadowy. She has no identity, at least in England and the early days in *Villette*. Ginevra Fanshawe asserts snobbishly, 'you are nobody's daughter, since you took care of little children when you first came to *Villette*: you have no relations; you can't call yourself young at twenty-three; you have no attractive accomplishments—no beauty' (146). Lucy herself agrees with Ginevra's utterance without any counterarguments, so she recognises that she has no identity.

Lucy is content with her shadowy life. While she lives 'in a house full of robust life,' she 'might have had companions, and [she] cho[oses] solitude' (126). In the girls' boarding school, there is an old garden, and she enjoys going there alone. She narrates, '[o]n summer mornings I used to rise early, to enjoy [the garden's charms] alone; to linger solitary, to keep tryste [sic] with the rising moon, or taste one kiss of evening breeze, or fancy rather than feel the freshness of dew descending' (106-7). She tends to seek places to spend her time quietly and solitarily. In the garden, she finds an alley which is called 'l'allée défendue' (107). For Lucy, 'the seclusion, the very gloom of the walk attract[s]' her, and she gradually becomes accustomed to visiting there. Her habit of wandering silent, deserted, and gloomy places suggests her depressed nature.

Brontë repeats Lucy's shadowy image through *Villette*. Lucy often withdraws

herself from light and lively places. When she escapes from ‘Etude du soir’ in the refectory (116), she declares, ‘[w]hen I vanished—it was into darkness; candles were not allowed to be carried about, and the teacher [i.e. Lucy] who forsook the refectory, had only the unlit hall, school-room, or bedroom, as a refugee’ (117-18). While she listens to ‘band-music from the park or the palace-square’ through her own open casement, she thinks her ‘own thoughts,’ and lives her ‘own life in [her] own still shadow-world’ (118).

Lucy seeks a darker place to keep away from Madame Beck’s prying eyes. When she receives a letter from Graham Bretton, the son of Mrs Bretton, she firstly goes to a classroom, but every room is being swept by candlelight. She goes out of the rooms, and she is determined to find ‘solitude somewhere’ (243). She takes a key, and she ‘mount[s] three staircases in succession, reach[es] a dark, narrow, silent landing, open[s] a worm-eaten door, and dive[s] into the deep, black, cold garret’ (242). She says she does not like the attic, but she voluntarily withdraws herself into the dark and gloomy room. The attic reminds readers of Bertha Mason, the mad wife of Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. Therefore we associate Lucy with Bertha, and Lucy impresses us as an oppressed woman. But unlike Bertha, Lucy willingly looks for dark places or goes to the attic for refuge. As for Lucy, though she is not mad like Bertha, she shuts herself in the garret to avoid the eyes of others and to keep her private space. Her behaviour produces an image of her self-restraint and depression.

Moreover, she wears dark dresses which make her resemble a shadow. Her taste for dark colours is caused by her morbidity. When Madame Beck’s ‘fête’ is held (128), she feels she is ‘a mere shadow spot on a field of light’ in ‘beholding this diaphanous and snowy mass’ (131). She has no courage to ‘put on a transparent white dress’ (131). She chooses ‘purple-gray—the colour, in short, of dum mist, lying on a moor in bloom’ (131). Even on this joyful day, ‘in this same gown of shadow,’ she ‘[feels] at home and at ease’ (131). She has a sense of inferiority, so when Mrs Bretton presents a pink dress to Lucy, she refuses it and thinks ‘no human force should avail to put [her] into it’ (207). But she finally wears it, and she feels ‘a jar of discord, a pang of regret’ (210) when she looks at herself in a mirror. Dark coloured dresses like shade relieve her from attracting people’s attention.

Lucy’s self-restraint gradually becomes more intense than when she was a child,

and she is aware that her morbidity is like catalepsy. When she looks up a crescent moon at ‘l'allée défendue’ (107), she recalls it which she saw ‘in Old England’ (109). She recollects her childhood;

Oh, my childhood! I had feelings: passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days, I could feel. About the present, it was better to be stoical; about the future—such a future as mine—to be dead. And in catalepsy and a dead trance, I studiously held the quick of my nature. (109)

She recognises that she suppresses her feelings more than before. Her energies to expose her emotions are diminished, and she is as good as dead. Hoddinott says, ‘In many ways, Lucy Snowe’s journey takes an opposite direction to that of Jane Eyre. In Lucy, she takes a heroine who seeks to escape suffering by repressing her feelings and avoiding dependence on human love’.<sup>(55)</sup> While she desires to be an independent woman, unlike the other heroines, she is self-effacing.

Moreover, Gilbert and Gubar insist that her life is almost the same as death.

Locked into herself, defeated from the start, Lucy Snowe is tormented by the realization that she has bought survival at the price of never fully existing, escaped pain by retreating behind a dull, grave camouflage. [...] she has been dispossessed not only of meaning and goals, but also of her own identity and power. [...] The heroine’s life is a kind of living death [...]<sup>(56)</sup>

Lucy’s life is ‘a hopeless desert,’ and she often feels ‘a despairing resignation to reach betimes the end of all things earthly’ (156) during a long vacation. Her mind is gradually under the control of the resignation, and she becomes weaker and weaker physically and psychologically. When her anguish reaches a limit, she thinks, ‘Motive there was none why I should try to recover or wish to live’ (160). She renounces any hopes in her life under her self-restraint. Finally she suffers from a fever and loses her senses in an unfamiliar area in Villette after she leaves a Catholic church. This is her most despairing situation physically and mentally.

However, her disappointed state does not necessarily lead Lucy to an unfortunate result. Gilbert and Gubar says, ‘she defends her creed successfully against the persuasions of Père Silas and M. Paul; she speaks out for the lovers to Polly’s father, and stands up against Madame Beck’s interference. All these advances are followed by moments of eclipse when she withdraws, but the sum progress is toward self-articulation, and self-dramatization’.<sup>(57)</sup> For example, Lucy gets seriously depressed because of news of Paul’s voyage to Basseterre, Guadalupe. When Madame Beck warns Lucy who wanders in a dark classroom to go back to her bed because the usual bedtime has passed, for the first time, Lucy resists Madame Beck, abusing her as a sensualist (447). In addition, Madame Beck vaguely perceives that Lucy and Paul love each other, and she declares, ‘You must not marry Paul’ to obstruct them (447). Lucy rebelliously calls her a ‘[d]og in the manger’ because Lucy knows ‘she d[oes] not love, but she want[s] to marry, that she might bind him to her interest’ (447). In this way, she lets her oppressed feelings loose from her self-restraint through her despair.

Moreover, Lucy advances and achieves her independent life by rebelling against Madame Beck. When Lucy and Paul meet in a classroom before his leaving for Guadalupe, Madame Beck tries to interrupt their meeting. She calls Paul to take him to another room, but Lucy resists and cries, ‘My heart will break!’ (481). Madame Beck cannot stay and leaves them. The explosion of her emotion enables her to improve her life. After her resistance against Madame Beck, Lucy gets a last chance to talk with Paul. This is when he gives her the house and school without any disturbance. Lucy not only suffers from her morbidity and weakness to the end but also is in the process of gaining her independence slowly and certainly. Compared to what she was, she is released from her own self-restraint as Gilbert and Gubar notes ‘Lucy has emerged from the park a more integrated person, able to express herself in the most threatening circumstances’.<sup>(58)</sup> Her ‘moments of eclipse’ gives readers an image of darkness and gloominess, but it is an essential element for her to become an independent woman.

In her movement from a local town, Bretton, to London, from London to a foreign city, Villette, Lucy gradually forms her own identity as an independent woman despite her morbidity. Gilbert and Gubar say that Lucy wins ‘a room of her own, indeed, a house of her home. [...] Both a home and a school, the house represents Lucy’s

independence'(59). Although I doubt whether she can have 'a home' because she cannot complete her homemaking owing to Paul's death, she undoubtedly achieves her independence by having her own school. Brontë describes the difficulty of success in both domestic happiness and financial independence through Lucy's life. This is a consistent theme in Brontë's fiction. Hence, in *Villette* also, a Victorian woman achieves her independence.

#### **Notes:**

- (1) Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, ed. by Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten, 3rd edn (2008).
- (2) M. Jeanne Peterson, 'No Angel in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women', *American Historical Review*. 89 (1984), p. 678.
- (3) Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor*, ed. by Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten, 4th edn (2008)
- (4) Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, ed. by Jessica Cox (2006).
- (5) Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1984), p. 337.
- (6) Gilbert and Gubar, p. 324.
- (7) Gilbert and Gubar, p. 326.
- (8) Gilbert and Gubar, p. 325.
- (9) Gilbert and Gubar, p. 331.
- (10) *The Professor*, p.207.
- (11) *The Professor*, p. 208.
- (12) *The Professor*, p. 208.
- (13) *The Professor*, p. 211.
- (14) *The Professor*, p. 209.
- (15) *The Professor*, p. 213.
- (16) *The Professor*, p. 213.
- (17) Peterson, p. 678.
- (18) *Shirley*, p. 188.
- (19) *Shirley*, p. 188.
- (20) *Shirley*, p. 194.
- (21) *Shirley*, p. 211.
- (22) *Shirley*, p. 204.
- (23) *Shirley*, p. 211.

- (24) *Shirley*, p. 192.
- (25) Gilbert and Gubar, p. 382.
- (26) Gilbert and Gubar, p. 382.
- (27) *Shirley*, p. 205.
- (28) *Shirley*, p. 585.
- (29) *Shirley*, p. 587.
- (30) *Shirley*, p. 601.
- (31) *Shirley*, p. 568.
- (32) *Shirley*, p. 605.
- (33) *Shirley*, p. 605.
- (34) *Shirley*, p. 605.
- (35) *Shirley*, p. 607.
- (36) *Shirley*, p. 607.
- (37) Gilbert and Gubar, p. 378.
- (38) *Shirley*, p. 180.
- (39) *Shirley*, p. 180.
- (40) *Shirley*, p. 184.
- (41) *Shirley*, p. 180.
- (42) *Shirley*, p. 185.
- (43) *Shirley*, p. 185.
- (44) *Shirley*, p. 186.
- (45) *Shirley*, p. 216.
- (46) Gilbert and Gubar, p. 382.
- (47) *Shirley*, p. 192.
- (48) Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (1996), p. 229.
- (49) *Shirley*, p. 602.
- (50) *Shirley*, p. 606.
- (51) *Shirley*, p. 607.
- (52) Clement Shorter, *The Brontës : Life and Letters*, vol. 1 (1908), p. 286.
- (53) Alison Hoddinott, ‘Perils of Biography: Charlotte Brontë and Tennyson’, *Brontë Studies*. 34 (2009), p. 53.
- (54) Gilbert and Gubar, p. 400.
- (55) Hoddinott, p. 53.
- (56) Gilbert and Gubar, p. 400.
- (57) Gilbert and Gubar, p. 434.
- (58) Gilbert and Gubar, p. 436.
- (59) Gilbert and Gubar, pp. 437-38.