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The Dark Continent: Europe's Encroachment Upon English Identity in Jane Eyre and Vilette

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THE DARK CONTINENT: EUROPE'S ENCROACHMENT UPON ENGLISH
IDENTITY IN JANE EYRE AND VILLETTE

A Thesis
Presented to
The Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

Although there has been a deafening critical silence regarding Charlotte Brontë's representation of Continental identity in *Jane Eyre* (1847), this thesis argues that the Continental identity, as it appears in *Jane Eyre*, is a collection of negative cultural traits stereotypical of the Latinate countries and Germany. By creating associations between characters that embody English national identity and those that are an emblem of Continental identity, Brontë de-legitimizes the notion of national identity. Furthermore, her novels, specifically *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* (1853) highlight the fact that both France and Germany, elements of the Continental identity, are a central presence in the culture and history of England. This thesis argues that the same Continental-English connection can be traced in *Villette*. In addition, Brontë gives new form to the Continental identity in *Villette*. Instead of it being an ubiquitous presence, Brontë presents it as a poisonous, cultural attitude that values the external observance of rules, laws, and liturgy over all things internal, like the cultivation of virtues. By drawing from numerous references to the Latinate cultures, and by comparing Brontë's two representations of the Continental identity and the overlap between these identities and certain characters, this thesis argues that Brontë builds a case against the notion of national identity, and more specifically against the notion of English identity as it is popularly conceived. Brontë serves to demonstrate that the creation of Continental identity and English identity is England's denial of its cultural constitution.

DEDICATION

For Marcus, Wanda, and Quentin. My precious family.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In *Jane Eyre*¹ (1847) and *Villette*² (1853), Charlotte Brontë brings to the fore a seldom acknowledged detail surrounding the national identity of England by bringing Continental Europe to the center of focus. In addition to elevating Europe's importance, Brontë shapes her Continent in a manner that distinguishes it considerably from the portrayals of Europe her literary contemporaries offer up. For example, in *The Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens paints France in as a climate of oppression and disorder, using a poisonous Continental family (the Evremondes) as his brush and as an exemplar of the rot he sees in the French state. Dickens' France, his Continent, is purely degenerative and possesses not one redeeming attribute. On the other end of the national identity spectrum sits Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The Continent that Browning fashions in her novel *Aurora Leigh* is entirely positive. The Continent, its cultural heritage and its scholarly treasures, is the cradle Aurora's father uses to rear his daughter. In Browning's pages, the Continent is wholly constructive and life-giving. Brontë's Continent would best be described as an impressive medium between Dickens' plot of land wholly defined by a deficit of basic human decency and Browning's land promising nurture and the liberty to pursue all manner of knowledge. Brontë's Continent is unique in that it gives Europe (a long-used stereotype of English literature) a more rounded character, two additional dimensions of character to be precise. One dimension being the fact that

¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. George Stade.

² Brontë, *Villette*, ed. George Stade.

Brontë's Continent is a mixture of positive and negative. The other dimension being that her Continent is a sizeable fraction of England's genetic material. She reveals that two cultures the Continental identity represents, France and Germany, are an integral part of England's culture and history. Unfortunately, despite Brontë's efforts, literary critics engage in Brontë's national identity discussion in only three narrow ways: with Labassecour/Belgium in *Villette*³, with Belgium in *The Professor*⁴, and with the West Indies and India in *Jane Eyre*⁵.

Along with their failure to have a more myriad engagement with national identity, critics until now have failed to acknowledge the rightful place Germany and France have in Brontë's discussion of England's national identity. Furthermore, until this moment, the fact that the interplay of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, and especially the interplay of the various cultures represented in the two novels, substantiates France and Germany's centrality to both English culture and the national identity discussion has gone completely unaddressed. It cannot and will not remain so. This thesis lays bare Brontë's presentation of England as a composite nation (a nation made up of various cultural parts)

³ See Lawson and Shakinovsky, *Fantasies of National Identification in Villette*. For an investigation of national identity situated in a religious context, see Lawson, *Reading Desire: Villette as Heretic Narrative*. Also see Armitage, Melting Miss Snowe: Charlotte's Message to the English Church.

⁴ Longmuir, "Reader, perhaps you were never in Belgium?": *Negotiating British Identity in Charlotte Brontë's The Professor and Villette*. Most criticism of *Villette* that deals with national identity keys in on culturally motivated behaviors. For a national identity discussion focusing mainly on the stereotypes and symbolisms that come from physical appearance, see Elliot, *Phrenology and the Visual Stereotype in Charlotte Brontë's Villette*. For more on physical representation, see Bernstein, 'In This Same Gown of Shadow': *Functions of Fashion in Villette*.

⁵ Beaty, "Jane Eyre" *Cubed: The Three Dimensions of the Text*. For more on the Orient and its effect on the *Jane Eyre*, see Franklin, *The Merging of Spiritualities: Jane Eyre as Missionary of Love*. To explore the Orient's specific effect on Brontë's domestic sphere, see Zonana, *The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of Jane Eyre*. There is even criticism arguing that the Orient was a favorite literary device of Victorian writers, like Brontë, and they focused in on the oppressed state of lands like India, Turkey, and China to indirectly criticize the oppression happening next door in Ireland. For more detail see Michie, *From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester, and Racial Difference*.

by intentionally representing two foreign cultures in the two novels more than all other foreign cultures: the French and the German; which happen to be the two cultures that most animate English culture and history. The author uses this textual interplay to illustrate the fallacy of English identity and Continental identity being conceived as separate entities and the overall fallacy of national identity. Through England's intimate history with Germany⁶, through its intimate history with the French language and Napoleonic France, and through character development, Brontë unearths the nationalist ambivalence (a celebration of the German and an aversion to the French), which serves as a factor in the simultaneous construction of the Continental and English identities, England's ideological denial that the Continent is a central element of its cultural composition. All this she uncovers so that the audience may enrich their reading of English texts with the phenomenon that is England's ideological self-denial.

One of the bigger crumbs leading to the truth of this ambivalence is a pattern Brontë enacts regarding the German language. By establishing the pattern of there being a wedding and an ultimately happy marriage soon after a character takes German language lessons, Brontë, in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, makes reference to England's royal ties to the German kingdom of Hanover, which due to the Salic law has a prominent connection with Victorian England. Brontë marries off nearly every character studying the German language, not all, because Lucy Snowe serves as the one glaring exception. Aside from Lucy, it becomes clear to the reader that this is a pattern with Brontë. For example, when a road-weary Jane first meets Mary and Diana Rivers, they are studying German in the hearth room of the home they share with St. John. They read to one

⁶ At the time of Brontë's work, present-day Germany did not exist. The independent German states did not unify until 1871. See "Germany." U.S. Department of State. 10 November 2010.

another an act from Friedrich Schiller's play *The Robbers* as a part of their German studies. The next scene in which the reader encounters Mary and Diana is the mass cleaning of the Morton house that Jane undertakes after she has inherited her deceased uncle's fortune. The next time the Rivers sisters appear in *Jane Eyre* is when a now married Jane informs the reader that

Diana and Mary Rivers are both married. Alternately, once every year, they come to see us, and we go to see them. Diana's husband is a captain in the navy, a gallant officer and a good man. Mary's is a clergyman, a college friend of her brother's, and, from his attainments and principles, worthy of the connection. Both Captain Fitzjames and Mr. Wharton love their wives, and are loved by them (Brontë 523).

When Brontë introduces to the story a German-studying female, she follows that character's introduction with the ringing of wedding bells.

This pattern continues with Paulina Home de Bassompierre in *Villette*. In the "Vashti" chapter, Brontë brings the adult Polly into frame. As a way to acquaint herself with Lucy, Polly takes up German lessons with her. "As I would not be Paulina's nominal and paid companion, . . . she persuaded me to join her in some study, as a regular and settled means of sustaining communication: she proposed the German language . . . We agreed to take our lessons in the Rue Crécy of the same mistress" (Brontë 339). Just a few appearances later, Polly and Dr. John "Graham" Bretton are married and enjoy a prosperous marriage. "Graham Bretton and Paulina de Bassompierre were married, and such an agent did prove. He did not with time degenerate, his faults decayed, his virtues

ripened...Bright too was the destiny of his sweet wife...This pair was blessed indeed..." (Brontë 492).

The married pair, consisting of Jane and Rochester, perpetuates Brontë's link between England and Germany. Jane studies German while in Morton. Rosamond Oliver finds a "German grammar" and a "volume of Schiller" when she rifles through Jane's desk on one occasion (Brontë 427). When her longing becomes unbearable, Jane returns to Thornfield and reconciles with Rochester at Ferndean. "Reader, I married him...I have been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth" (Brontë 520, 522). Jane's example is yet another happy marriage that follows the seemingly unreasonable study of German. This is the third instance where Brontë draws a curious link between German language study and thriving marriage. Once is happenstance, twice is coincidental, but three times is intentional.

Brontë's intention is to demonstrate that the German culture⁷ is a prominent element in the essence of England, by using marriage and the German language to direct the reader to England's history with the German royal house of Hanover and the Salic Law's denial of Queen Victoria because of her German marriage. In 1837, German culture directly impacts Victorian-era England when the Salic Law (circa 509), which governs German kingdoms and territories, denies Queen Victoria the Hanover throne upon her marriage to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg, because the law prohibits female accession to a German throne (Packard 14-5). Upholders of this law tell Victoria, Queen of England, Great Britain and Ireland that she has no right to the Hanover throne. She

⁷ The German culture has enjoyed a place of prominence in English civilization ever since the 9th century, when the Danes conquered England and established the Danelaw, a cluster of kingdoms that was located in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country and that was observant of the Germanic laws belonging to the Danes. See Jones, *A History of the Vikings*. Revised ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984:221.

can be the Empress of India, but the throne to diminutive Hanover is unavailable to her. Why such audacity towards her Highness? The Hanoverians boldly deny Victoria, because English monarchs have either descended from the House of Hanover or routinely married into it since England and Hanover started sharing a monarch in 1714 (Packard 14-5). Not only has the Salic Law been the standard in Hanover, it was the standard that governed the English royals more than a century before Victoria took the throne. Queen Victoria's episode concerning the Salic Law is illustrative of how entrenched German culture is in English history and culture.

With the German-wedding link, Brontë favorably separates Germany from the remaining negatively portrayed and stereotyped nations of the Continental identity in order to emphasize, for the reader, the history and the warm kinship that England and Germany share.

The only conceivable exception to the German favoritism Brontë presents is her unflattering caricature Fräulein Anna Braun, Lucy and Polly's German mistress in *Villette*. Brontë fashions her as a walking stereotype. There is no attribute of her character that speaks to individuality. "She ought, perhaps, to have lived in the days of Queen Elizabeth, as she habitually consumed, for her first and second breakfast, beer and beef: also, her direct and downright Deutsch nature seemed to suffer a sensation of cruel restraint from what she called our English reserve" (Brontë 341). Though she does rely heavily on stereotype in the construction of Fräulein Braun, Brontë is not malicious with her characterization, and in a way, redeems her reliance on stereotype with Lucy and Polly's overall opinion of Fräulein Braun. Brontë writes it to where both harbor nothing

but warm feelings for the German mistress, despite her bluntness and stereotypical manner (Brontë 341).

While Brontë again turns to stereotype with the French, she ultimately reinforces, in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, the fact that France is a deeply-engrained element of English culture by appealing to England's relationship with the French language.

In *Villette*, Brontë has Lucy witness the great value the English home assigns to the French language when she learns about the high demand there is for French nurses and governesses to come and simply speak to the children. After Miss Marchmont dies, Lucy seeks out her old friend Miss Barrett who works at a stately English manor. Barrett tells Lucy that many English homes seek out nurses and governesses from the Continent who do nothing "but walk out with the baby and chatter French" with the other children (Brontë 49). From Miss Barrett's insight, Brontë shows Lucy that the French language is and traditionally has been a prized commodity in England.

Brontë shows the reader the value the French language has historically maintained in England. The French language has been a prominent fixture of English culture and history ever since much of the language seeped into the English language in the generations following the Norman Conquest (1066). In speaking to the Norman presence in England, Professor David Trotter of Aberystwyth University states "More than 50% of the vocabulary of modern English comes from this source. The amount of French which has become part of English far outweighs the amount of 'Franglais' in French" (Norman Invasion Word Impact Study). The sheer size of this percentage clearly demonstrates the degree to which the French language transformed the English language and culture.

In *Villette*, Brontë bejewels one of Lucy's internal statements with irony concerning the well-known Norman impact on the English language. When Lucy first meets Madame Beck, there exists a language barrier between them. Lucy cannot speak French, and Madame Beck can barely speak English. To remedy this, Madame Beck calls into the room a maîtresse who "was esteemed a perfect adept in the English language" (Brontë 72). Lucy does her best to communicate with the woman, but she cannot understand the woman's English. "A bluff little personage this maîtresse was—Labassecourienne from top to toe: and how she did slaughter the speech of Albion!" (Brontë 72). Lucy's thought is ironic, because French-speaking people just like this maîtresse were responsible for the construction of the modern English language. The French language is at the very heart of the English language.

Brontë similarly shows the reader of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* that France is at the heart of England's national ideal by having Jane and Lucy forge national identities for themselves out of their fight to diminish French cultural dominance in Adèle's character and in Madame Beck's pensionnat, just as the English, during the Napoleonic wars (1803-1815), forged their identity out of their conception of Napoleonic France and its Continental Catholic minions (Spain, Italy, etc.). In *Britons: Forging the Nation (1701-1837)*, Linda Colley asserts that England's participation in the Napoleonic wars marked the birth of the English identity construct. Colley further claims that the Napoleonic threat spurred the English people "into confrontation with an obviously hostile Other and encouraged them to define themselves collectively against it. They defined themselves as Protestants struggling for survival against the world's foremost Catholic power. They defined themselves against the French as they imagined them to be, superstitious,

militarist, decadent and unfree” (Colley 5). Early on in *Villette*, the author makes Lucy see a nationalist rival in M. Paul Emanuel. “I used to think, as I sat looking at M. Paul...that he had points of resemblance to Napoleon Bonaparte” (Brontë 394). Lucy, in imagining the shrewd M. Paul as the despotic Napoleon, fashions for herself a Wellingtonian, English savior identity. Longmuir soundly argues that Lucy’s new, self-constructed national identity emboldens her to put in place her “strategy of counter-colonization,” that she believes will “replace French cultural dominance with British cultural dominance” (Longmuir 180). Brontë has Jane similarly build her national identity off of her perceived correction of Adèle’s Continental character. “As she grew up, a sound English education corrected in a great measure her French defects...I found in her a pleasing and obliging companion; docile, good-tempered, and well-principled” (Brontë 522). Jane’s recollection of Adèle’s former, defective self by contrast reawakens Jane to her self-conceived English identity. In beholding the newly corrected Adèle, Jane cannot help but see the English identity she has superimposed on Adèle’s Continental identity.

As Brontë demonstrates in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* with the German-related weddings and the Napoleonic references and the irony surrounding the French language, the Continental identity’s parts, the nations it is comprised of, France and Germany are central fixtures in the culture and history of England, so if national identity were an element of reality, it would follow that the Continental identity would be a central part of English national identity. It is nonsensical and a complete unreality for partially French, partially German England to be able to proudly and legitimately claim, through the

construction of the Continental and English identities, cultural distance from the Continent.

In the two novels, Brontë showcases how English identity claims this cultural distance out of ambivalence, because it reveres the German element of its being while it ashamedly denies the French element of its being. The reader sees this dynamic at work in the tone that surrounds the German-related weddings, Lucy's exchange with the *maîtresse*, and the references to Napoleon and Adèle's defects. The weddings that proceed from the German language lessons are nothing but rapturous occasions, and even after the weddings, all the couples experience happy and fulfilling marriages. Brontë places the German language in the orbit of marriage's jubilant tone in order to emphasize England's joy at having the German culture as an aspect of its being. Brontë explores the French aspect with a decidedly negative tone. The author has her English protagonists portray the French as a corrupting influence. Brontë has the *maîtresse*'s butcher the English language, in Lucy's mind. Brontë has Lucy see M. Paul as a Napoleon, imposing his influence on everyone at the pensionnat. The author then makes Jane describe the French aspects of little Adèle's character as defective. In all this, the author illuminates how England cannot accept its culturally composite nature, and though it feels pride in its shared heritage with Germany, it feels the need to separate the non-English aspects from its cultural conscience, through the simultaneous construction of the Continental and English identities.

The English identity subsequently gains popularity and then trickles into literature as writers like Brontë address whether or not real-life individuals and/or characters of fiction can possibly embody a nation's character. In engagement with this conundrum

that national identity presents, Brontë chooses to develop characters that, in varying degrees, embody the English national identity, but Brontë sees through the façade that is English identity and develops characters, in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, that embody the real, composite England, which is partly French and partly German.

Jane is one such character. *Jane Eyre* embodies the real, composite England, because she is a native Englishwoman, she speaks French, learns the German language, and applies the principles of German writer Friedrich Schiller to her life choices. Throughout most of her journey, Brontë characterizes Jane as a young English girl who exhibits English reserve. It is Jane who balks at the prospect of receiving Rochester's nuptial jewelry. "Do you remember what you said of Céline Varens?—of the diamonds, the cashmeres you gave her? I will not be your English Céline Varens. I shall continue to act as Adèle's governess...I'll furnish my own wardrobe out of that money, and you shall give me nothing but... your regard" (Brontë 315). Then, Brontë has Jane take an interest in German literature, particularly Schiller (Brontë 427). From the choice that Jane soon makes, the reader can certainly tell that the spirit of Schiller, "individual over the state," colors Jane's actions. Jane rejects the upright, noble marriage to St. John that society would approve of in favor of reconciliation with a man she still imagines to be married. The longings of her heart trump the Victorian social norms: the individual over the state. Additionally, there is a shade of French in her character. She obtains fluency in French at Lowood School and throughout the rest of the novel, Jane engages with French culture, particularly the language, while also serving to diminish the impression of that culture on Adèle (Brontë 120). She brings about this French cultural erosion by acting as Adèle's governess and by gradually replacing Adèle's French defects with an English

education. In investigating Jane's characterization, the reader sees that she has an English, a French, and a German dimension to her character.

Still there is one character who represents the three-cultured England more than Jane does: Polly. Paulina Home de Bassompierre stands as the one character of Brontë's, in either *Jane Eyre* or *Villette*, that most vividly embodies the real England, the composite England that is partially French and partially German. Polly is a young English girl, and in her Englishness, Polly re-affirms a signature aspect of England's being. Through her bizarre loyalty and love for her father, Polly re-affirms and honors England's being a patriarchal society. Furthermore, Polly is French, in part. Her deceased mother Ginevra Home, Mr. Home's "butterfly wife," was French (Brontë 9). She of course speaks French and unlike Jane, who is ashamed of the French aspect and commits herself to diminishing that aspect in Adèle as much as possible, Polly wears the French dimension of her character with immense pride. One night, to dinner guests, Polly trumpets "We are Home and De Bassompierre, Caledonian and Gallic" (Brontë 316). Another source of pride for Polly is the German lessons she takes with Lucy. Polly's ease with and passion in learning the German language takes Lucy by surprise. Lucy remarks on how Polly speaks it "with a facile flow of language, and in a strain of kindred and poetic fervour: her cheek would flush, her lips tremblingly smile, her beauteous eyes kindle or melt as she went on" (Brontë 342). Each cultural aspect, the English, the French, the German, Polly is in harmony with. Polly stands as Brontë's clearest personification of England as it is: a partially French, partially German, composite nation.

Brontë, through the interplay of her novels *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, highlights French and German prominence in and centrality to English culture. In illustrating England's glorification of German culture and repugnance of French culture, Brontë brings out England's nationalist ambivalence, which plays as a factor in the simultaneous construction of the Continental and English identities. In *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, the author illuminates England's close ties with Germany, England's close ties with the French language and Napoleonic France, all for the purpose of bringing light to the fact that England is a composite nation that turns to national identity as a way of denying and escaping its deep association with the Continent, specifically France and Germany. With this light, with this truth of England's ideological denial of self, the audience is able to dramatically inform their reading of Brontë's work, and of English texts in general.

CHAPTER TWO

Jane Eyre: Charlotte Brontë's Introduction of the Continental Presence and its Influence on the Modern English "Heroine"

A fresh concern presents itself in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1849). Brontë expresses the Victorian theme of national identity mainly through the character Edward Rochester and through three divergent paths: the West Indies, the East, and Continental Europe. Literary critics have a history of examining the first two. For instance, in "Jane Eyre and Victorian Medical Geography," Alan Bewell re-images India and the Caribbean through a medical prism. He calls these two locations "diseased landscapes" and asserts that Brontë arranges a compelling pattern where an outlying pestilence sweeps through and purifies the landscape, much like the typhus that devastates and eventually revives Lowood. He points out that Brontë, in lockstep with the common geographic knowledge of her time, executes this portrayal of the West Indies and the dispositions of the characters associated with the West Indies through abundant use of storm imagery. To likewise address the East, Brontë has St. John write Jane a letter from India. It reveals that the missionary is soon expecting his final hour (Brontë 524). Bewell argues that St. John's admission highlights a faceless danger and suggests either a violence that is closing in on him or, most likely, a fatal disease that has infected him. Just as Bewell has done, many critics and writers, such as Gayatri Spivak⁸, Susan Meyer⁹, and John Kucich¹⁰ explore the degree of effect the West Indies and the East have on the novel. However, exploring Continental Europe's impact on the novel will prove more enriching.

⁸ See Spivak, *Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism*.

⁹ See Meyer, *Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of "Jane Eyre"*.

¹⁰ Kucich, *Jane Eyre and Imperialism*.

Until now, readers have been offered a critical reading of *Jane Eyre* where the influence of Continental Europe is barely there and therefore has little effect on the story. As familiar as it is, Continental Europe remains unmapped in *Jane Eyre*. Similar to the map-makers of antiquity, generations of critics have been through Jane's story and have charted it, writing endlessly about it, while they have yet to experience the full complexion of her journey because they overlook the story's Continental dimension. What cannot be overlooked, what is pivotal to recognize is that Continental Europe's presence affects the national identity discussion in *Jane Eyre*. This presence is a collection of cultural and stereotypical snippets from the Latinate countries of the peripheral Continent in the West (Portugal, Spain, France) to the countries in the East, ending in Germany and stretching no further. In using this construct, Brontë exposes the fact that England is in fact a culturally composite nation that falsely presents itself as a state that is at complete variance with the nations of Continental Europe. This construct serves as an evidence to the unreality of national identity. Because of Rochester's characterization, he is at the heart of what makes the British Empire all that it is. Despite his integral role in the construction of the empire, Rochester demonstrates little alignment with English national identity because of his secret rejection of Victorian social mores and his strong association with both the literal Continent and Brontë's/England's stereotype of the Continent. Rochester's inability to cleanly fit inside a category of national identity acts as a contagion in Jane's life, blurring her national identity, and discrediting national identity as an element of reality.

Initially, the Continent-inspired signs that Brontë sprinkles throughout the text appear to pull the notion of national identity into reality. Brontë gives the first sign of the

Continental presence, “dark skin,” by providing multiple characters with skin tones that trigger thoughts of people native to lands beyond the borders of England. In the novel’s opening, the author writes of how John Reed “reviles” his mother, Aunt Reed, for “her dark skin,” because her color is “similar to his own” (Brontë 20). Brontë re-emphasizes dark skin during Jane’s first encounter with Rochester. “He had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow” (Brontë 135). During Jane’s first encounter with Blanche Ingram, the author again turns to the dark skin trait by describing her as “dark as a Spaniard” (Brontë 205). Brontë’s numerous descriptions of dark skin take the reader’s mind to places far outside of England, but her singular mention of a Spanish skin complexion narrows the reader’s imaginings from the full expanse of the exotic world to the confines of Continental Europe.

Inside these confines, Brontë documents the many appearances of another sign. Alongside the dark skin trait, sexual license acts as a sign of the Continental presence in *Jane Eyre*, because the author writes it to where all acknowledged instances of sexual looseness take place on the Continent. For example, Rochester carries on an affair with the French opera singer Céline Varens in Paris, only to find out in time that Céline is seeing another man. One night, anxiously awaiting her return, Rochester stands on the balcony of the hotel room that he and Céline share. Her carriage eventually comes, and an exhilarated Rochester watches as she “alights.” “Bending over the balcony, I was about to murmur ‘Mon Ange’... when a figure jumped from the carriage after her, cloaked also; but that was a spurred heel which had rung on the pavement, and that was a hatted head which now passed under the arched *porte cochère* of the hotel” (Brontë 169). Rochester, who has association with the Continent, finds the sexual exclusivity he

thought he had with the Continental Céline to be an illusion. With a stereotypical eye, Brontë designs Céline as a literal representative of a vain and immoral Continent who can only greet Rochester's affectionate show of romance and connectedness with the asymmetrical behavior of promiscuity. But taking a step back sharpens the reader's view of the situation and recalls the fact that Rochester, who is married, also has a part in the sexual immorality that partially defines Brontë's stereotypical Continent. In further illustration of the point, consider the moment where an apologetic Rochester, just having revealed his wife Bertha Mason, divulges the entirety of his stormy past to Jane. He reveals to her his list of former mistresses throughout Europe: "I could not live alone; so I tried the companionship of mistresses. The first I chose was Céline Varens ... She had two successors; an Italian, Giacinta, and a German, Clara, both considered singularly handsome" (Brontë 363). Examples such as these make clear the marriage Brontë establishes between sexual immorality and the Continent.

An additional marriage, this time between a cosmopolitan nature¹¹ and the Continent, acts as one of the signs most central to the Continental presence, and this cosmopolitan nature shows up mostly in conversations Jane has with Rochester but also in communication she has with others. These talks with Rochester are cosmopolitan in content when he attempts to establish his superiority over Jane, explain his failings to Jane, impress Jane, spoil Jane, or when he teasingly expresses his affection for Jane.

But one of the clearest expressions of this cosmopolitan tendency comes from the stormy exchange Jane and Rochester have one stormy night in the Thornfield grove. At the beginning, their conversation is anything but fluid. To enliven their awkward and

¹¹ See Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*. Also see Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*.

sluggish chat, Rochester makes small talk about an insect, saying, “Jane, come and look at this fellow...he reminds me rather of a West Indian insect; one does not often see so large and gay a night-rover in England” (Brontë 291-2). Evidently, Rochester feels he can employ a single statement to both diffuse the unsaid tension and remind the object of his eye that he is a prominent figure who’s seen the world. This is nothing new though. He does the same thing during one of their earlier encounters. To describe his new hardened temperament to Jane, Rochester compares himself to an “India-rubber ball” (Brontë 158). As Jane and Rochester’s talk endures, Rochester rubs Jane the wrong way with some of his joking and excites emotions of love and longing in Jane. He subjects her to one of his affectionate ruses by pretending that he is to marry Blanche soon and that he plans to advertise Jane for a governess position in another household: “In about a month I hope to be a bridegroom...and in the interim, I shall myself look out for employment and an asylum for you...I have already, through my future mother-in-law, heard of a place that I think will suit; it is to undertake the education of the five daughters of Mrs. Dionysius O’Gall of Bitternutt Lodge, Connaught, Ireland” (Brontë 294). Hearing this, Jane attempts to maintain her composure, but “the vehemence of emotion” overwhelms Jane and she begins to sob. It is then that the two profess their love for one another (Brontë 295-6). Again, the scene in the grove carries a strong cosmopolitan flavor. It is not the strongest application of the cosmopolitan nature though.

Some of the most pronounced instances of the cosmopolitan nature appear in dialogue where Rochester attempts to explain his failings to Jane or where he attempts to spoil Jane or in flashes of happenstance; regardless of how they appear, these situations do not only bring out the mix of cultures synonymous with the cosmopolitan nature, they

also bring out the proximity to the literal Continent and the libertine excess that together shape the Continental presence so radiantly. Geographically, these examples come closest to mainland Europe. For instance, Jane discovers and reads a letter addressed to her, from her uncle John Eyre. Aunt Reed keeps the letter from Jane for three years because of its contents. In the letter, the uncle asks for Jane's address so that he may adopt her, have her live with him, and finally grant all of his remaining wealth to Jane, upon his death (Brontë 279). So, the wealth that Jane eventually inherits comes from Madeira, a group of Portuguese islands known to the world for its dealings in the trade of sugar, slaves¹², and wine (Davis 7). Brontë's choice of characterizing John Eyre as a wealthy Madeira man without revealing his specific trade exhibits a studied ambiguity on the part of the author. Brontë artfully blurs Jane's national identity by coloring her character with an ambiguous association with the ill-gotten gains of the Madeira slave trade. In addition, there is the moment in Jane's room, after Rochester reveals Bertha, where he confesses to Jane, "For ten long years I roved about, living first in one capital, then another; sometimes in St. Petersburg; oftener in Paris; occasionally in Rome, Naples, and Florence" (Brontë 362). It initially seems that this list of Continental cities communicates the extent of the cosmopolitan nature in *Jane Eyre*. In reality, it does not. London is missing, and it embodies much of the degenerative elements seen in the stereotypical signs that make up the Continental presence.

During Jane and Rochester's bridal preparations, Brontë forges a subtle and peculiar bond between Rochester and the great city, a bond parasitic in nature. Jane recognizes the bond for what it truly is and then uses her influence over Rochester to

¹² See Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*.

sever it before the spoiling influence of that city has a chance to materialize in her life as well. Overcome with euphoria because of his impending marriage to Jane, Rochester adamantly takes steps to spoil his bride-to-be. With the prospect of “complete happiness with Rochester” swimming in her head, Jane expresses disbelief that such a far-fetched dream can come true (Brontë 302). In response, Rochester boasts that Jane’s impossible dream is one that “I can and will realize. I shall begin to-day. This morning I wrote to my banker in London to send me certain jewels he has in his keeping, heir-looms for ladies of Thornfield. In a day or two I hope to pour them into your lap; for every privilege, every attention, shall be yours” (Brontë 302). Jane, in response, exudes wisdom by pointing out to Rochester the folly of his present course. She shows him how he’s already been down this fruitless path before and how results were disastrous. To Rochester, she replies, “Do you remember what you said of Céline Varens? – of the diamonds, the cashmeres, you gave her? I will not be your English Céline Varens. I shall continue to act as Adèle’s governess; by that, I shall earn my board and lodging, and thirty pounds a year. I’ll furnish my own wardrobe out of that money, and you shall give me nothing, but...your regard” (Brontë 315). By making this demand, Jane liberates Rochester from the bond and from the destructive pattern of his past. Like a fool, Rochester historically rushes into love with great passion and intensity, showering his romantic object with affection and earthly treasures, only to have his furious flame extinguished prematurely. Seeing this in Rochester’s bitter recollections, Jane puts an end to the behavior. Again, Jane gives this demand, because she sees Brontë’s London for what it is. It is a trap, ornamented with and hidden by excess.

Jane first learns of London's hidden trap from her tragic cousin's story. Brontë illustrates to her heroine (through Jane's communication with others), in sobering vividness, that London, despite its geographic inconsistency with the Continent, nevertheless possesses the same cosmopolitan nature and excesses seen in the Continental presence and ultimately claims the life of young John Reed, a first son of England. John's mother, Aunt Reed, summons the now-adult Jane back to Gateshead Hall. Aunt Reed's physical health and her estate are in ill condition, and she wants Jane to set things in order. Upon her return to Gateshead, the severity of her aunt's illness is not the only discovery that Jane makes. Again, she learns that Aunt Reed purposely has withheld from her a letter from her wealthy uncle in Madeira. She also learns from Bessie's husband Robert Leaven that

Mr. John died yesterday was a week, at his chambers, in London...He ruined his health and his estate among the worst men and the worst women. He got into debt and into jail; his mother helped him out twice but as soon as he was free he returned to his old companions and habits. His head was not strong; the knaves he lived among fooled him beyond anything I ever heard. He came down to Gateshead about three weeks ago, and wanted missis to give all to him. Missis refused; her means have long been much reduced by his extravagance; so he went back again, and the next news was that he was dead. How he died, God knows! they say he killed himself (Brontë 260-1).

John's last days assume a classic trajectory. The spoiled, first-born son of a provincial and deteriorating gentry gravitates to Brontë's worldly and dizzying London. The

undisciplined Master Reed becomes intoxicated by the libertine lifestyle and it ends up destroying him. The author writes it to where a first son squanders the fruits of England, which his hands have no part in cultivating.

Interestingly, the author presents Rochester, a second son of England, as an opposite of John Reed, concerning national contribution. Rochester (whose character Brontë surrounds with overtones of the mythic Olympian “outsider,” Hephaestus) is the affirmation of England and her Empire, yet the author’s myth-driven, hyper-Latinate, hyper-alien characterization of this English noble disproves the considerable supposition of England’s cultural sovereignty from the countries of Europe. The strong associations Rochester has with the Continent parallel the real-world associations England has with countries of the Continent, specifically France and Germany. Rochester is, before all things, a lord of England. Brontë grounds him in English soil as the current Lord Rochester of an exhaustive and storied line that reaches back into England’s history. All of this (the magnitude of his family background), Rochester communicates to Jane in a single phrase. He explains that his procession through the many social circles and many societies of Europe went entirely unobstructed, because he had “the passport of an old name” (Brontë 362). But the luxury that his old name provides did not grant him escape from the great toil of his nation. According to Rochester himself, his father was

an avaricious, grasping man...it was his resolution to keep the property together. He could not bear the idea of dividing his estate and leaving me a fair portion; all, he resolved, should go to my brother, Russell. Yet, as little could he endure that a son of his should be a poor man. I must be provided for by a wealthy marriage. He sought me a partner betimes. Mr.

Mason, a West India planter and merchant, was his old acquaintance. He was certain his possessions were real and vast; he made inquiries. Mr. Mason, he found, had a son and daughter; and he learned from him that he could and would give the latter a fortune of thirty thousand pounds; that sufficed. When I left college, I was sent out to Jamaica, to espouse a bride already courted for me. My father said nothing about her money...(Brontë 356).

Under the false pretense of Ms. Mason being an appropriate marital prospect, Rochester's father sends his second son to Jamaica. Young Edward lives and works in the new world, fulfilling primogeniture. The money he generates from working (most likely in an undefined managerial capacity) on Mr. Mason's plantation and the thirty-thousand pound dowry that Edward unexpectedly obtains together fatten the storehouses of the Rochester family and of England (Brontë 356). The actions of the young Rochester, and scores of other second sons like him, prove central to the health and expansion of the empire.

In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester is the affirmation of the British Empire as the Hephaestus of myth is the affirmation of Olympus. Brontë herself compares her English lord to the god of the forge. Ironically, Brontë's ignorance to Hephaestus and the truth surrounding his character, her mythic oversight, is what validates Rochester as the pre-eminent builder of the empire, as a clear Man of England. She writes a jealous, low-feeling Rochester to identify with the god in response to Jane's teasing and gushing description of the long-gone St. John Rivers. He pouts, "Your words have delineated very prettily a graceful Apollo; he is present to your imagination – tall, fair, blue-eyed, and with a Grecian profile. Your eyes dwell on a Vulcan – a real blacksmith, brown, broad-shouldered; and

blind and lame in the bargain” (Brontë 511). This is the only literal reference to the god, and it clearly is a comparison on the basis of physical appearance alone. At this point in the story, Rochester, like the god of the forge, is ugly, disfigured, and handicapped. Clearly, this physical mirroring is all Brontë intends in the comparison, but similarities to Hephaestus, appearing in the form of mythic overtones, punctuate the text and Rochester’s character. Rochester’s work in the colonies generates the empire-shaping wealth. Hephaestus’s work in his forge produces the magical metalwork that makes possible and affirms the various functions of the Olympians, that empowers and defends Olympus, and that provides Olympus with imperial reach throughout the realm (Graves 150). For example, Hephaestus forges Zeus’s lightning bolt which brings life-sustaining rain to the agrarian earth and defends Olympus. In addition, he crafts Hermes’s winged sandals which provide the trickster god with the very ability that defines him, the ability to tread borders, the borders between Olympus and Earth, the border between the land of the living and the Underworld, etc. Similar to old Lord Rochester forcibly sending his son from England, Hera (the mother of Hephaestus) casts the Olympian Hephaestus out of Olympus because of her disgust at his ugliness (Athanasakis 56). In Greek antiquity, the overwhelming perception of the Greek gods, specifically the Olympians, is that they all are physically beautiful, all except Hephaestus. To the Olympians, it does not matter that the work of Hephaestus’s hands is the wellspring from which they derive their power and, more importantly, their identity. On the basis of appearance, he is not one of them. And despite Rochester’s English heritage and his work that is central to England’s prosperity, Jane, as evidenced by her use of exotic and foreign imagery, perceives Rochester as an outsider to England. Additionally, there are more overtones surrounding

Rochester that hint at the blacksmith god. For instance, in Hephaestus's corner of Greek mythology, Dionysius, the god of wine and revelry seeks the fallen Hephaestus's help so that order is restored to Olympus (Seeberg 102-9). In *Jane Eyre*, an Irish noblewoman named Dionysius O'Gall seeks Rochester's help, through Dowager Ingram, so that order and structure may inhabit her house of five unruly daughters, which Brontë symbolically situates in the Irish province famous for the thirteen days¹³ it spent as an independent dominion and its overall inability to maintain order and successfully bring about its own liberation (Brontë 294). The Hephaestus of myth and Brontë's character Rochester both bring definition, influence, and order to their native lands. As Hephaestus fashions Helios's chariot of the sun so that Olympus and the mortal world have sunrise and sunset, Rochester works in a British colony as a second son and his work ensures that the sun never sets on his British Empire.

Similar to the empire but on a smaller scale, the Continental presence of *Jane Eyre* appears to have wide and indefinite reach, but its exact breadth appears in the text. Jane's time with Mary and Diana Rivers establishes that the Continental presence's eastern limit, the eastern edge of its scope, is in Germany. The setting of the novel never turns to the Rhineland, but that country's influence is present nevertheless. For instance, Diana offers to teach Jane the German language upon learning that Jane will be staying with the Rivers siblings. Jane relishes the opportunity, studies alongside the Rivers girls, and grows intimate with the sisters academically and philosophically. The first glimpse of this budding intimacy appears when Rosamond Oliver "rummages" through some of Jane's personal affects. "One evening, while with her usual childlike activity, and thoughtless yet not offensive inquisitiveness, she was rummaging the cupboard and the

¹³ See "Diary of an Expedition: Humbert's Army of Ireland, 1798."

table-drawer of my little kitchen, she discovered first two French books, a volume of Schiller, a German grammar and dictionary” (Brontë 427). Exposing herself to Jane’s personal reading materials, Rosamond excitedly questions Jane on her command of the French and German languages. Not only does Jane immerse herself in the mastery of German, she also immerses herself in Friedrich Schiller’s revolutionary play. She doesn’t just read *The Robbers* and take note of the libertarian German spirit put forth by Schiller in the play, like the Rivers girls do. Jane reads the play and lives out the core of its message, “the individual over the state.” But instead of leading a band of robbers in the attempted overthrow of a noble estate (a state institution), Jane expresses her rebellion in her rejection of the standards set forth by institutional religion, in her rejection of St. John’s proposal and in her decision to return to Thornfield.

These rebellious decisions, on Jane’s part, mirror the message at the heart of *The Robbers* and at the heart of Schiller’s Sturm und Drang movement, “the individual over the state.” Jane’s acceptance of St. John’s proposal presents an interesting counter-actual. A “yes” to St. John represents a commitment to Sarah Stickney-Ellis’s premier brand of English femininity. Jane already immerses herself in Hindostanee and scripture to the point where she can effectively serve as a second linguistic mind and a second conscience to St. John (Brontë 460). Maximizing one’s education and one’s abilities in the domestic sphere for the purpose of optimizing one’s usefulness to their husband and family is a woman’s primary concern, according to Stickney-Ellis. Alternatively, Jane makes a choice without recognizing the full complexity of that choice. In deciding to walk away from the possibility of married life with the missionary in favor of a liminal role beside Rochester, Jane squanders a golden opportunity to fulfill her potential as a

Christian and an English wife. Whether she realizes it or not Jane turns her back on marriage (one of society's most sacred institutions) by deciding to return to Rochester, because she does not know that Bertha has destroyed Thornfield and herself in a fire. Jane simply has a fierce desire to be with Rochester that goes beyond logic and morality. Brontë's use of the supernatural wind-voice illustrates Jane's romantic longing and her unbearable sense of separation from her beloved. The motivation that conjures the wind-voice in Jane's head is the same motivation that conjures the spook of the traditional ghost story, the desperation to close the distance, whether it be the distance between a lovesick Jane and her Rochester or the distance between the quick and the dead¹⁴. Wanting fresh news concerning Rochester's well-being is a makeshift justification Jane devises to protect her moral conscience from the fact that she is on the verge of reuniting with a married man. The rush back to Rochester demonstrates Jane's refusal to treat the institution of marriage as sacred or the church's position on the sanctity of marriage as truth. In her seemingly minor decision to leave Morton in search of Rochester, Jane places the concerns of her heart over those of the church and of English society, the church and society being major components of the English state.

The English state, its ways and its standards, hardly are a critical factor in the philosophical influences of the foreign-minded English nobility, according to Stickney-Ellis. "It is not therefore from the aristocracy of the land that the characteristics of English women should be taken; because the higher the rank, and the greater the facilities of communication with other countries, the more prevalent are foreign manners, and

¹⁴ Armstrong arrives at exactly the same conclusion about the nature of ghost stories: "Thus the Brontës call up the ghosts of the history of sexuality to represent a domain of passion that seems to well up in opposition to the contemporary conventions of courtship and kinship relations" (204).

modes of thinking and acting common to that class of society in other countries” (Stickney-Ellis 13-14). At the exact setting and stage of the novel where Jane discovers she is in fact a blood-member of the upper class (her time in the Rivers household), she starts reading foreign texts full of foreign philosophy (Schiller) and applies that philosophy (the individual over the state) to her life, through her decision-making.

Jane’s period of time in the Rivers household is also the same setting and stage of the novel where the wealth generated in slave-trading Madeira comes into Jane’s possession by way of inheritance; so the operations of Portugal and the philosophy of Germany together carve out a Continental dimension in Jane’s character.

Interestingly, Jane has another character dimension (aside from the Continental presence) in common with Rochester, the first son-second son dynamic, more clearly explained as the dynamic between the heir and the spare. Brontë writes Aunt Reed’s treatment of Jane (more specifically her begrudging and short-lived tolerance for Jane living as a part of the Reed family) and her reaching out to Jane from her deathbed as having the effect of contributing to both Jane’s status as a metaphorical spare to the Reed family and her status as a parallel to Edward Rochester, the spare of the Rochester family. To a degree, the author portrays Rochester as a victim of birth-order. Recall, old Lord Rochester’s actions regarding his youngest son are entirely focused on the acquisition of Bertha’s attractive dowry and the expansion of the family wealth and influence. The actions of Rochester’s father say, “Tradition is to be upheld. The whole of my estate is to go to Russell, the heir of my house. As for Edward, I’ve found him a marital prospect that is of advantage to this family, not to Edward personally. If he’s smart, he’ll find creative ways to live with the inconvenience natural to this arrangement.

All he has to do is look to the deception that is about to be used on him. Mr. Mason and I will hide the mad mother from Edward's view, eliminating any objection the boy might have in marrying Bertha. If Bertha does turn out like her mother, Edward can always hide her away like we plan to hide the mother. Edward will come to understand my actions, even if madness appears in the girl. He will see that what I've done is for the maintenance of this family's high regard in the eye of society." Shaping the features of their families based on class bias and the approval of society is a tendency signature of both old Lord Rochester and Aunt Reed; the actions the patriarch and the matriarch take, regarding their families, are cosmetic in nature. For example, old Lord Rochester gives his entire estate to his eldest son Russell in order to stay in harmony with tradition. He further sustains tradition by attending to the advancement of his family's personal tradition and prominence. He achieves this by knowingly marrying off his oblivious son to a girl with a predisposition to madness, all for her respectable dowry, all for the distant approval of a fickle society half a world away. At Gateshead, Aunt Reed accepts young, orphaned Jane into her home, but only in the physical sense. In her heart, Aunt Reed keeps a class-inspired resentment towards Jane that only grows and grows. It eventually grows to the point where Jane's proximity to her children, Jane's mere presence in her house, becomes unbearable, and then circumstance steps in and provides Aunt Reed with an opening, a logical justification for expelling Jane from her house. This justification is Aunt Reed's feigned concern for Jane's soul, and to address this concern, Aunt Reed seeks out Mr. Brocklehurst, treasurer of Lowood School (Brontë 42). Seeking him out serves Aunt Reed twofold. She rids herself of Jane while also making a show of her family's false piety in front of a religious patron. Aunt Reed further validates Jane as

metaphorical spare by essentially bestowing Jane with the inheritance she once denied her. Her only son John, the heir of her house, is dead, and all Georgiana and Eliza stand to inherit is a bounty of debts and an empty storehouse. In the midst of all this, Aunt Reed gives Jane the letter she had been keeping from her for years, securing Jane's contact with her wealthy uncle and with her eventual inheritance. Speaking through her delirium, a fast-fading Aunt Reed explains her deception: "Because I disliked you too fixedly and thoroughly ever to lend a hand in lifting you to prosperity...for you to be adopted by your uncle, and placed in a state of ease and comfort, was what I could not endure. I wrote to him; I said I was sorry for his disappointment, but Jane Eyre was dead – she had died of Typhus fever at Lowood" (Brontë 280). Again, the author asserts Jane's identity as the Reed family's metaphorical spare and as a parallel to Rochester (the Rochester family's spare) through the details outlined in Aunt Reed's deathbed scene.

The same scene, the bedside reunion of Jane and Aunt Reed, demonstrates how one dimension of Jane's femininity is in agreement with Stickney-Ellis's brand of femininity, the standard of English femininity; Brontë has Jane perform an act of "disinterested kindness" by having her try to establish an eleventh-hour friendship with Aunt Reed, who is obstinate to the end. Jane entreats, "I long earnestly to be reconciled to you now; kiss me, aunt" (Brontë 281). The author goes on to write, "I approached my cheek to her lips; she would not touch it...I covered her ice-cold and clammy head with mine; the feeble fingers shrunk from my touch – the glazing eyes shunned my gaze" (Brontë 281). Moments before Jane expresses her wish for reconciliation and tries physically to connect, a delirious Aunt Reed, unaware of Jane's presence in the room, speaks of Jane in the third person and intimates that she genuinely wishes that Jane did

die when the typhus swept through Lowood. It is after hearing the remorseless venom of Aunt Reed's heart that Jane makes known her desire for connectedness with her aunt. Jane's unearthly reaction to Aunt Reed's verbal abuse unmistakably qualifies as "disinterested kindness." Stickney-Ellis's conviction is that the true Woman of England possesses "a generosity, a disinterestedness and a moral courage" (Stickney-Ellis 94). These three qualities shine brightly through Jane's incomprehensibly affectionate response. The reader must suspend logic to even draw near an understanding of this response. The only speck of clarity in Jane's reaction to her aunt is that there is no sense in it. Jane simply performs a kindness for the sake of kindness.

Instead of Jane's acts confusing the reader solely in terms of common sense, they also confuse the reader in terms of her embodiment of English national identity, but there exists in the text an evidence-based clarity that causes the confusion to dissipate. Brontë's story-long characterization of Jane shows that despite Jane's show of self-restraint and disinterested kindness, the insatiability, which lies at the depths of Jane's spirit and is the source of her transcendent quality, ultimately leaves Jane in discord with the Stickney-Ellis standard of English femininity. For all who read her story, Jane is a bright example of hope and perseverance. Jane, the child, carries with her the weight of abuse and neglect. At Gateshead and at Lowood, she carries it, but it never becomes part of her vision of self. Jane, at all times, through all sorts of abusive circumstance, sees and feels her own value. Jane is vividly aware of her limits as well; she knows she is plain-faced and essentially is Aunt Reed's invalidated bastard-child. Even with her miserable lot, Jane demands much out of life. For example, young Jane fortunately leaves the abusive confines of Gateshead Hall and she is able to survive the disease that

claims much of the life occupying Lowood. Year after year, she develops academically to the point where she, for the first time, gains a source of economic stability by taking a teaching post at the school (Brontë 100). Recall, before becoming a Lowood instructor, Jane has no one beyond the walls of Lowood, no visitor, no benefactor, no family connection. Considering all Jane experiences in her young life up to this point, it is natural to assume that Jane would feel complete satisfaction with her place at Lowood. She does not. “A new servitude! ... Any one may serve; I have served eight years; now all I want is to serve elsewhere. Can I not get so much of my own will (Brontë 102)?” Her desire is eventually fulfilled and she begins serving at Thornfield as governess. Not even a year into her servitude there, she longs for something else. “Anybody may blame me who likes, when I add, further, that, now and then, when I ... reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line; that then I longed for a power of vision which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of, but never seen (Brontë 130).” After saying this, Jane herself acknowledges this insatiability: “Who blames me? Many, no doubt; and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it; the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes” (Brontë 130).

Jane’s insatiability even takes the form of one of the transgressions Stickney-Ellis warns against.

... a splendidly dressed woman entering the parlour of a farm-house, or a tradesman’s drawing-room bursts upon the sight as an astounding and almost monstrous spectacle ... there is a want of fitness and harmony in the whole...a prevalent but most injurious mistake, to suppose that all

women must be splendidly and expensively dressed ... how many ... are literally destitute of comfort both in their hearts, and in their homes (Stickney-Ellis 96-97).

The words of Stickney-Ellis perfectly re-enact the morning after Jane and Rochester become engaged. It is a brilliant June morning. The air is thick with fresh and fragrant breezes. It's as if "all of nature is gladsome" at Jane's newfound happiness, all except Mrs. Fairfax, according to Jane. "Mrs. Fairfax surprised me by looking out of the window with a sad countenance and saying, gravely, "Miss Eyre, will you come to breakfast?" (Brontë 301)." Though Mrs. Fairfax first appears to be the lone contrast in this picturesque circumstance, that distinction actually belongs to Jane. If anything, Jane should wear Mrs. Fairfax's gloomy expression and the clothes to match. Jane sleeps under the same roof as Mrs. Fairfax. She, like Mrs. Fairfax, has ears and can hear the nightly ripple of crazed laughter. Both women have a woman's intuition and both can see that Grace Poole is not the source of the nightly terror, as Rochester would have them believe. On this June morning, Jane (because of her dress) does not maintain "fitness and harmony" with the circumstances of the house (Stickney-Ellis 97). Since Jane's arrival to Thornfield, a cluster of unsettling elements shapes Thornfield as an ungodly settlement where the ungodly happens and is allowed to happen. Despite Richard Mason's mutilated neck, despite an unchecked firebug remaining in the house, despite Rochester's weak lies concerning Grace, despite keen Mrs. Fairfax's sad countenance and grave inflection at the news of Jane's engagement, despite all of this, Jane and her sundress bask in the thin illusion of a paradisiacal circumstance. Some part of Jane is aware of what is going on, just as Mrs. Fairfax does not entirely know but has her well-founded

suspicions. Jane, on this June day, liberates herself from all of her unease and intuition, demanding that she have more, on this day, than a worried mind. Jane demands too much out of life to ever find fulfillment in Stickney-Ellis's prescribed role for the Woman of England.

Neither can she find fulfillment in organized religion. Brontë systematically corrodes Jane's reliance on England's institutional religion by having the insatiable taint in Jane's spirit gnaw at her conscience to the point where she adopts a spiritual path independent of organized religion. Brontë snatches the possibility of life with Rochester away from her Jane and sends her to Morton. There, the author initially sets Jane on England's ideal spiritual path by connecting her with a selfless Anglican missionary. This is all temporary by design. While Jane is there teaching the village girls and reading scripture and learning both Hindostanee and German, the idea of Rochester is ever on her mind. The letter St. John intercepts from Mrs. Fairfax and the letter's lack of information on Rochester's well-being brings Jane's love-obsession back to fresh and overwhelming strength (Brontë 441). With her heart decided, Jane tells St. John that she will either find another road to the religious observance of God or might possibly come back to this road (global evangelism) in the future (Brontë 484). Jane, not satisfied with her current path towards righteousness, contorts her conscience in order to justify taking her first energies away from God and giving them wholeheartedly to Rochester, who she still thinks is married. Jane liberates herself from the sacrifice, the long-suffering, and the seemingly oppressive constraints that are all natural to religious observance.

A contrarian voice might argue that in achieving this liberation from the oppressive order of England's institutional religion, Jane stands in alignment with the

Continental presence and grows more in harmony with the Continental figure, Rochester; however, this compelling theory loses its validity when the reader crosses over the words Brontë attributes to the innkeeper of the “Rochester Arms.” Jane leaves behind a life with St. John in favor of Rochester, the character that the Continental presence is most concentrated around. Rochester is only English in the technical sense. He is an English lord from an old English family. Metaphorically, he is the living, breathing essence of Brontë’s negative stereotype of Continental Europe. So, symbolically, Jane forfeits the narrow path to righteousness and chooses the Continental presence, thereby casting aside her English national identity in exchange for a Continental one. Yes, this line of thought would make for a sound argument if the innkeeper of the Rochester Arms were not in the story and did not entertain Jane’s anxious questioning. Recall, it is Mrs. Fairfax’s written response to Mr. Briggs that sends Jane back to Thornfield to “check” on Rochester and make sure he hasn’t done injury to himself. The fact that Mrs. Fairfax writes the letter in place of Rochester is what sinks Jane’s heart. She states, “I felt cold and dismayed; my worst fears, then, were probably true; he had in all probability left England and rushed in reckless desperation to some former haunt on the continent” (Brontë 441). Upon Jane’s arrival, Thornfield is in ashes, so she goes into town and ends up at the Rochester Arms and ends up in a conversation with the innkeeper who informs her of all that happened in her absence. The innkeeper tells Jane of how Rochester cut ties with the gentry of the area and put Adele in school, as Jane had always wanted for Adèle. In disbelief, Jane realizes that Rochester is still there, still on the isle. Jane pinches herself by putting this question to the innkeeper. “What! did he not leave England (Brontë 495)?” The innkeeper’s answer and the tone enlacing that answer speak to years of intimate

observation of young Edward Rochester. For, this unassuming innkeeper “was the late Mr. Rochester’s butler, . . . the father of Mr. Edward, the present gentleman” (Brontë 492). Spending years in the Thornfield house, this butler sees with an intimate eye the young Edward, and it is with those years of intimate knowledge that he answers Jane’s question. With emphatic laughter that expresses the absurdity of Jane’s question, he answers. “Leave England? no!” (Brontë 495). The innkeeper not only delivers the “yes” or “no” essential to answering the question, he takes the substantial register of personal memories that affirm and reaffirm Rochester as an indelible insider to England and he gives them life in the emphasis with which he tells a dumbstruck Jane, “no!” Though Brontë (through Jane’s eyes) paints Rochester in as a metaphorical Continental figure exhibiting dark skin, a cosmopolitan nature¹⁵, and a past of sexual license, he only satisfies this role in part, and only on a symbolic basis. When one considers the entirety of Rochester’s characterization, it is clear that he is a man who has great association with both England and the Continent. In perception, he is a vivid representative of Brontë’s stereotypical Continent. In reality, he is England’s premier insider regarding station in the country and regarding contribution to the country.

The reality of Rochester, which the innkeeper witnesses for years as the one-time butler of Thornfield, trumps the perception of Rochester, which Brontë’s protagonist pieces together during the few months she spends as governess of Thornfield; and the

¹⁵ Jane knows that Rochester is a solid citizen of England, yet she cannot help but see him as culturally other. This is an involuntary occurrence with Jane. For her, when Rochester comes to mind, thoughts of day breaking over the Pyrenees naturally follow (490). Appiah addresses this popular notion of one’s culture being diluted and ultimately erased because of contact with an outside culture: “When people speak for an ideal of cultural purity, sustaining the authentic culture of the Asante or the American family farm, I find myself drawn to *contamination* as the name for a counter-ideal. . . . Cultural purity is an oxymoron. The odds are that. . . you already live a cosmopolitan life, enriched by literature, art, and film that comes from many places. . . .” (113).

competition that Bronte stages between nationalist reality and nationalist perception serves as the most radiant evidence to the unreality of national identity and more importantly to the fact that the Continent is a major part of England's composition. In her next novel, Brontë again builds a case for the unreality of national identity and the reality of the composite England. It is a case that she lays before the eyes of her conflicted protagonist, who sells to others the very same notion of national identity that she struggles to maintain belief in.

CHAPTER THREE

Villette: The Continental Identity as Deterrent to the Trumpeting of English National Identity

In *Villette* (1853), Charlotte Brontë rhetorically topples the social construct that is national identity with the construction of her own nation, Labassecour. Brontë's protagonist Lucy Snowe ventures to this fictional land and finds herself in an ideological firestorm, struggling to maintain her beliefs. Lucy's nationalist confusion, her struggle to accurately assess whether or not her English ideal is an element of reality, often appears in critical analysis of *Villette*. In "Fantasies of National Identification in *Villette*," Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky argue that Brontë creates a vertigo-like confusion in Lucy by having her encounter a dizzying number of national identities. Lucy meets characters who emanate English, faux English, Celtic, French, Continental/Labassecourien, German, Scottish, and Spanish national identities. As numerous and distinctive as Lawson and Shakinovsky imagine this array of cultures to be, the narrative reality is that the Continental identity, in terms of presence and influence, eclipses the other identities to the point that it subsumes the others under its influence. As described, this Continental identity seems like a natural phenomenon dominating the landscape of the story, but the truth is that Brontë constructs the identity just as real-life individuals commonly construct national identities. Similarly, the construction of national identity is a subject common to *Villette* and critics¹⁶ of the novel. What is not commonly explored is Brontë's singular

¹⁶ See Kent, "Making the Prude" in *Charlotte Brontë's Villette*. Though the title does not quite express it, this piece specifically focuses on the national identity conversation in *Villette*. For more on the subject, see Vranjes, *English Cosmopolitanism and/as Nationalism: The Great Exhibition, the Mid-Victorian Divorce*.

expression of this common-yet-confounding psychological phenomenon, the formation and circulation of a national ideal. In *Villette*, the Continental identity exists as a deeply-entrenched cultural philosophy that prizes the outward observance of societal rules and practices above all internal qualities (like integrity and morality) and as a major deterrent to Lucy's nationalist ambitions. In Lucy's eyes, it is a cultural cancer. She devotes herself to the maximum diminishment of the Continental identity, so that she can replace it with English national identity. Lucy encourages this cultural replacement by cultivating in the heads of her students a romance with the idea of decorum¹⁷, English reserve, earnestness and all potentially alluring attributes of English national identity. She trumpets the idea of Englishness to her students in the hope that they will assign value to the English identity and adopt that standard for their lives. Ironically, while Lucy tries to convince students of the merits of aspiring to the English identity, her belief in that identity falters due to the actions of Dr. John "Graham" Bretton, Lucy's ideal representative of England's national character. Just as Rochester with his strong worldly associations, troubles Jane's conception of his and her own national identity in *Jane Eyre*, Dr. John and M. Paul together trouble Lucy's conception of their national identity as well as her own. Lucy willingly maintains a shaky-yet-faithful belief in the fraudulent Dr. John, especially. She endures a string of disappointments from him because she loves him. Out of this love, Lucy pursues a fruitless path leading to affliction in the form of unrequited love and nationalist disillusion. She initially believes that Dr. John, like

Law Reform, and Brontë's Villette. Also, see Longmuir, *Emigrant Spinsters and the Construction of Englishness in Charlotte Brontë's Villette*.

¹⁷ To Madame Beck (and to the Continental eye in general), decorum is the signature attribute of the English character: "Bon! But let me tell you these are not quiet, decorous English girls you are going to encounter..." (87).

England, is morally and culturally on a higher ground than the denizens of the Continent, and that there exists no alignment and no consistencies between Dr. John and the Continental identity, just as England is completely independent of the Continental identity. Ultimately she realizes that much of Dr. John's character coincides with the Continental identity and that, regarding history and culture, England too is partially Continental in its composition. Lucy soon recovers from her self-diminishing obsession with her faulty ideal of England and gains professional and personal validation, a taste of reciprocated love, an uncompromised sense of self, and a growth in agency that dwarfs the seemingly narrow number of paths she first envisions for herself.

From the deck of the *Vivid*, Lucy looks to the Continental shoreline and concludes at first glance that Labassecour will invite her down two paths: one leading to affliction and one to a bright future. "I saw the continent of Europe... tiniest tracery of clustered town and snow-gleaming tower, of woods deep-massed, of heights serrated, of smooth pasturage and veiny stream, embossed the metal-bright prospect" (Brontë 63). Brontë, in concord with Lucy's slight anxiety, does not present the first glimpse of Labassecour as wholly scenic and inviting. The same idyllic view offers a spot of black, alluding to the storm ahead. Mention of "veiny" brooks and "serrated" summits ushers the imagination into some unsettling territory. Brontë's choice of adjectives conjures up the disturbing sight of human arteries nearing a blade. This bit of suggestive imagery, coupled with the shimmer and brilliance Brontë gives to the rest of the Vilette skyline, reflects the affliction and the bright future Lucy will experience in this land.

Madame Beck, headmistress of the pensionnat de demoiselles (girls' boarding school), serves as the fork on Lucy's metaphorical road, offering young Miss Snowe

passport to both the path leading to affliction and the path leading to a bright future; Dr. John, the false Victorian ideal, proves to be Lucy's affliction and M. Paul, a true equivalent of the Victorian ideal, Lucy's bright future.

Early in the novel, bright seems the prospect of Lucy and Madame Beck's long-term, working relationship precisely because the two women are in agreement that the school needs to trumpet the English national character (of being decorous and earnest in heart and deed, in situations public and private) for students, and also that Dr. John might be the perfect instrument to achieve this end. Brontë brings Lucy and Madame Beck to this mutual, nationalist agreement by first springing calamity on the Beck household in the form of little Fifine's broken arm. Recall, Madame Beck at first tries to summon her regular Continental physician, Dr. Pillule. Upon discovering Pillule is unavailable, Madame Beck finds a suitable substitute, Dr. John. With a skilled hand and a self-possession belying his professional years, young Dr. John turns out a fluid performance in the healing of Fifine's arm, and in the process, wins Madame Beck's trust as a physician and begins to embody Madame Beck's conception of the English ideal. He has the same effect on Lucy. In fact, when the headmistress finally does get her wish and is able to secure Dr. John's presence at the school, Lucy agrees with Madame Beck's unorthodox use of the young doctor. Lucy does not raise a single objection, not even in her narrated ruminations. *Qui tacet consentit*¹⁸, and as evidenced by Lucy's silence in the headmistress's use of Dr. John, she certainly agrees with it (Brontë 107-113). Lucy, like Madame Beck, sees him as a welcomed constant at the school, no matter how bizarre the

¹⁸ "He who is silent is taken to agree."

situation may feel, because from Ms. Snowe's viewpoint, he shows powerful signs of being that elusive true English gentleman.

Not only does Dr. John begin convincing Lucy and Madame Beck that he is the English ideal, he similarly mesmerizes her daughters. Madame Beck believes that he will serve well as a nationalist spark, a nationalist inspiration for the girls of the pensionnat. The headmistress, from just one encounter, keenly observes Dr. John's stimulating effect on her daughters. While re-setting the broken bone, Dr. John hurts Fifine immensely, yet the intensity of the pain does nothing to negatively affect her great admiration for the young, English physician. Lucy cannot help but notice that Fifine engages with Dr. John, emitting "her highest tide of spirits and volubility" (Brontë 108). Fifine cannot resist. Dr. John possesses handsome and relatively exotic features; he bears a pronounced "English complexion, eyes, and form" (Brontë 108). With curious timing, Désirée, Madame Beck's eldest and most difficult daughter, comes down with a mysterious fever, immediately after Fifine's injury. This "extraordinary" transition of illness from the middle Beck daughter to the eldest makes regular and constant Dr. John's visits to the girls' school. Dr. John's first visit to the school is supposed to be a final check-up on the completely mended Fifine, but at this point, Désirée, in loud and dramatic fashion,

declared herself ill. That possessed child had a genius for simulation, and captivated by the attentions and indulgences of a sick-room, she came to the conclusion that an illness would perfectly accommodate her tastes, and took her bed accordingly. She acted well, and her mother still better; for while the whole case was transparent to Madame Beck as the day, she

treated it with an astonishingly well-assured air of gravity and good faith (Brontë 109).

“Her mother still better.” By this, Brontë implies that Madame Beck is in league with Désirée. Whether it is Madame Beck that first encouraged Désirée’s performance or that she just reacts favorably to her daughter’s ruse, it is clear that the headmistress now seeks to crystallize the doctor’s arresting presence at the school. It also becomes clear that the Beck women are far from being his only captives.

Dr. John casts his spell over much of the student body at the pensionnat, as a result of his constant visitation. To encourage this bewitching, Madame Beck

introduced Dr. John to the school-division of the premises...parents wrote letters and paid visits of remonstrance...Blanche and Angélique had the migraine: Dr. John had written a prescription; voila tout!...The parents’ mouths were closed. Blanche and Angélique saved her all remaining trouble by chanting loud duets in their physician’s praise; the other pupils echoed them, unanimously declaring that when they were ill they would have Dr. John and nobody else; and madame laughed, and the parents laughed too (Brontë 113).

The parents’ laughter communicates a sense of relief, brought about by the headmistress’ smooth manipulation. Madame Beck’s laughter, however, communicates the good fortune she feels at having Dr. John elicit the adoration of the student body.

The perceived usefulness and importance Madame Beck places on Dr. John’s charms elicit in the reader a most perturbed expression. Confusion is the only sensation the headmistress’ enigmatic actions, regarding Dr. John, can and do inspire. All of this

begs the question: Why is Madame Beck trying to further imbue the pensionnat with Englishness when she just secured the English post with Lucy Snowe?

The answer to this question reveals itself during Lucy's first days in Villette as the freshest arrival to Madame Beck's pensionnat.

Before she can even put down her luggage, the core details of Brontë and Madame Beck's Continental world bombard Lucy's senses. The protagonist's glimpse into the average Labassecourien life reveals that the Continental identity of *Villette* is the deeply-embedded philosophy that the external adherence to educational, professional, and liturgical responsibilities is more important than the cultivation and maintenance of internal qualities like integrity and morality, and also Madame Beck reveals to Lucy that her nationalist self-loathing is what fuels her system of surveillance. Lucy finds out that the people of the Continent are nothing like the English. In her informed view, the English are decorous in action and in spirit, are reserved in character, and are spiritually earnest. Not one Continental native that Lucy meets displays a moral compass or any recognizable virtue. Everyone in the pensionnat

from the scullion to the directress herself, but was above being ashamed of a lie; they thought nothing of it: to invent might not be precisely a virtue, but it was the most venial of faults. 'J'ai menti plusieurs fois' (I have lied many times.) formed an item of every girl's and woman's monthly confession: the priest heard unshocked, and absolved unreluctant. If they had missed going to mass, or read a chapter of a novel, that was another thing: these were crimes whereof rebuke and penance were the unfailing meed (Brontë 91-2).

Madame Beck shares Lucy's bewilderment regarding the topsy-turvy nature of Labassecour's societal priorities. On a series of nights, before Lucy's ascension from governess of the Beck children to mistress of English, Madame Beck talks with Lucy about her idea of England, and ends up sharing so much more. The most surface observation Lucy makes during these night chats is that "She 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 it" (Brontë 80-1). Ms. Snowe, on a nightly basis, drinks in Madame Beck's continuous gushing "about England and Englishwomen, and the reason for what she was pleased to term their superior intelligence, and more real and reliable probity" (Brontë 81). Along with the praise, the headmistress surprisingly communicates private feelings. "She seemed to know that keeping girls in distrustful restraint...under a surveillance that left them no moment and no corner for retirement, was not the best way to make them grow up honest and modest women; but she averred that ruinous consequences would ensue if any other method were tried with continental children" (Brontë 81). In this confession, the reader detects a sense of nationalist self-loathing within Madame Beck. In concluding that the Continental child is without integrity or moral fiber, she indirectly implies, to an extent, that she also lacks those precious qualities. On many a night, to Lucy, the headmistress speaks to this self-loathing: "she was sick, she would declare, of the means she had to use, but use them she must" (Brontë 81).

Brontë must use everything from the headmistress confiding in Lucy about her nationalist insecurities, to Lucy's own observation of the failings of Continental identity, to sufficiently explain Madame Beck's turn to Dr. John. With Lucy's observation of

stereotypical Continental behavior and the headmistress' intimations of nationalist self-loathing, Brontë lays the motivational bedrock for Madame Beck's peculiar use of Dr. John.

Brontë puts in place the last motivational straw with Madame Beck's lukewarm reaction to Lucy's first performance in the role of English mistress. Lucy fares well. At first, she struggles to establish herself, but by class' end, she has command over the students. The headmistress witnesses all of this from her peep-hole. In evaluation, Madame Beck tacitly offers up two phrases of feedback. 'C'est bien' (That's good.). And 'ça ira' (That will do.) (Brontë 90). She essentially tells Lucy that what she did will suffice. "Sufficient" is an average mark, coming nowhere near excellence.

And excellence, specifically the exudation of national excellence, is what Madame Beck looks for in an English mistress, and also is the answer to the question posed earlier. While Lucy establishes order in that first classroom, she, in the eyes of Madame Beck, does not properly serve as a nationalist inspiration for the students and is not a pure expression of England's national character.

The headmistress describes the impurities in Lucy as "blue," because in her eyes Lucy is too much of a bluestocking¹⁹, she is too lacking in femininity to effectively inspire the girl-students on a national level. In the headmistress' mind, the ideal Englishwoman possesses the qualities of reserve and intellect, but she possesses the proper degree of them, because too much of either quality erodes femininity. Not only is this what the headmistress thinks, this is what she verbalizes to Lucy. "Madame Beck

¹⁹ By "bluestocking," Madame Beck refers to a dry, female intellectual. The term is most associated with Anna Laetitia Barbauld, a once-popular Victorian essayist. See Barbauld, *On Education*.

herself deemed me a regular bas-bleu, and often and solemnly used to warn me not to study too much, lest the blood should all go to my head” (Brontë 265).

Ironically, all that’s in Lucy’s head is the determination to present the girls of the pensionnat with a sterling and contagious representation of the English ideal, so this constant comparison to the bluestockings bothers Lucy’s vision of herself, especially since there is a kernel of truth to the comparison. The pedagogical spectre of the pedantic and stigmatized Barbauld hovers over one particular action of Ms. Snowe’s. Thoroughly impressed with Lucy, Mr. Home, now Count Home de Bassompierre, offers Lucy a position as his daughter Paulina’s personal tutor. “Mr. Home himself offered me a handsome sum – thrice my present salary – if I would accept the office of companion to his daughter. I declined...I could teach; I could give lessons; but to be either a private governess or a companion was unnatural to me” (Brontë 335). This “unnatural” quality Lucy speaks of is completely unrelated to the fact that Dr. John’s heart now belongs with Polly. Lucy feels no hostility towards Polly nor does she view Polly as a romantic rival, because Lucy does not possess the attractiveness of form or spirit to rival Polly. The unnatural quality is something else entirely. Lucy cannot envision herself being devoted to the education of one child. She knows that all she would have to offer in that capacity would be a “factitious education,” where Lucy would “surround” young Polly “with the apparatus of books and systems” (Barbauld 318). And even if Polly proved that she could handle the mountain of study, her father the Count most certainly would be there to impede her studies, just as he did at her last school (Brontë 338). Lucy does not work at Madame Beck’s pensionnat solely because she depends on it for a livelihood. Truthfully, she has ambitions for the pensionnat. She wants the students there to willingly model

themselves after the English ideal that Lucy hopes to embody, alongside Dr. John's already convincing embodiment. She plans to provide an education, nationalist in nature, and she turns down the Count's offer because her educational plans are far more expansive than Mr. Home's offer can satisfy. Lucy's educational plans and her overall definition of education is rather in line with Barbauld's. "Education, it is often observed, is an expensive thing. It is so; but the paying for lessons is the smallest part of the cost. If you would go to the price of having your son a worthy man, you must be so yourself; your friends, your servants, your company must be all of that stamp. Suppose this to be the case, much is done: but there will remain circumstances which perhaps you cannot alter, that will still have their effect" (Barbauld 329).

While Lucy cannot alter or get rid of every detrimental circumstance, she looks to alter what she can and replace the replaceable with a decidedly more English alternative, but her ultimate aim is to cultivate, in the heads of the students, a romance with the English ideal. Brontë first presents this aspiration to the reader when Lucy encounters Mrs. Sweeney. Ms. Snowe sizes her up and decides she is a pitiful excuse for a Briton and the worst possible answer for the English post at the pensionnat. "I need hardly explain to the reader that this lady was in effect a native of Ireland... she spoke a smothered brogue, curiously overlaid with mincing cockney inflections" (Brontë 78). According to Lawson and Shakinovsky, "Lucy's rejection of Mrs. Sweeney directly correlates with her own desperate need to be "placed" (Lawson and Shakinovsky 934). When Madame Beck finally does dismiss Mrs. Sweeney, Lucy drastically changes her description of the suspect headmistress. Recall, a few nights before, the headmistress slips into the bedroom and hovers over a half-asleep Lucy. "I feigned sleep, and she

studied me long...I dare say she sat a quarter of an hour on the edge of my bed, gazing at my face...All this was very un-English: truly I was in a foreign land” (Brontë 76-7).

Lucy does not just think that Madame Beck’s “taste for research” is bizarre and unbecoming (Brontë 76). She implies that this behavior is alien to anything she can imagine. This is a profound and deserved insult, but the internal insults transform into praise and deification when Sweeney leaves the pensionnat. “This brisk little affair of the dismissal was all settled before breakfast...all this, I say, was done between the moment of Madame Beck’s issuing like Aurora²⁰ from her chamber, and that in which she coolly sat down to pour out her first cup of coffee” (Brontë 79). Lucy glorifies Madame Beck’s decision, because it is precisely what she would have done if she was the directress of the pensionnat. In Lucy’s mind, no Continental student needs to draw nationalist influence from such a perverse imitation of Englishness.

Lucy similarly feels that the influence of Zélie St. Pierre, a Parisienne and fellow teacher, is something the girl-students would be far better off without. Brontë designs Zélie as the quintessence of *Villette*’s Continental identity; recognizing the highly-concentrated nature of Zélie’s Continental make-up, Lucy tries unsuccessfully to rid the school of her destructive example. Ms. Snowe is keen enough to see that Zélie is the flesh-and-blood parallel of the hollow Continental liturgy Lucy witnesses during her first days in Villette. She is the nucleus, the most glowing emblem of the Continental attitude. She is “externally refined – at heart, corrupt – without a creed, without a principle, without an affection: having penetrated the outward crust of decorum in this character, you found a slough beneath” (Brontë 141). To Lucy’ mind, the worst thing about Zélie’s

²⁰ The Aurora of Greek myth was goddess of the dawn.

character flaws is that they do not manifest subtly. Unfortunately, they are on loud display and the students cannot help but notice Mademoiselle St. Pierre's delicious indulgences. "This Parisienne was always in debt; her salary being anticipated, not only in dress, but in perfumes, cosmetics, confectionery, and condiments. What a cold, callous epicure she was in all things" (Brontë 142). Madame Beck too notices all of the ugly details and shares with Lucy her personal disapproval of Zélie's character. Spotting an opening, an opportunity to plant a seed in Madame Beck's head that will ultimately bring about Zélie's dismissal, Lucy presses Madame Beck a bit further on the issue. "I asked why she kept her in the establishment" (Brontë 142). The headmistress tells her English mistress that for the purpose of maintaining school-wide surveillance and guaranteeing that the students obey the rules, the Parisienne is "invaluable." Lucy begrudgingly acknowledges this fact and abandons her pursuit (Brontë 142).

Even though Lucy's failed pursuit of Zélie's termination initially is a major hindrance to her ambitions, it ultimately facilitates Lucy's efforts by drawing a clean contrast²¹ between Lucy's Englishness and her rival Continental ideologies, and between Lucy's femininity and that of her Continental rivals. In "Making the Prude' in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*," Julia D. Kent observes that Brontë arranges character dynamics to where the "understanding of British national character," for the reader, best comes about "in relation to France" (Kent 328). Along that same line of reasoning, the students' understanding of Ms. Snowe's Englishness, their having a clear vision of England's ideal

²¹ Kent says that critical focus on English national identity through contrast with French identity in *Villette*, which is a major focus of this chapter, can scarcely be found in current criticism: "Recent criticism has given little attention to the novel's understanding of British national character in relation to France, even though the novel contains several caricatured French figures, such as Mademoiselle St. Pierre and Rosine Matou..." (328). Also see Lescart, *All Women Are Grisettes in Villette*. And see Molloy, 'Ces Anglaises intrépides': *Englishness and the Renegotiation of Gender in Charlotte Brontë's Villette*.

expression of femininity, best comes about when Lucy contrasts Englishness with Mademoiselle St. Pierre and M. Paul. Lucy effectively strikes this contrast by using a pink dress. On a May morning, with M. Paul hosting the students and teachers in a country-outing, Ms. Snowe surprises the irascible professor with her dress. Because of his extreme taste for the understated, M. Paul openly objects to the selection. Lucy counters with proud ownership of her decision and the practicality of it. “It is only cotton and cheaper, and washes better than any other colour” (Brontë 428). Its practicality is not the only reason behind Lucy’s decision. With the students and teachers of the pensionnat as her audience, she establishes herself as the practical medium between Zélie’s Continental garishness and the bluestocking’s lack of femininity. With a single action, Ms. Snowe establishes Englishness as a sensible and inviting form of moderation, sheds the bluestocking stigma that has dogged her to this point, and bucks, in a loud and rather public statement, M. Paul’s attempts at impressing his will on the construction of Lucy’s public image, on her character, and on her femininity.

Of these three aspects of Lucy’s personality, femininity is the one that M. Paul keeps most of his critical focus on. Earlier, Brontë has M. Paul encounter Lucy in an art gallery and, in an admonishing tone, he audaciously tries to edit her femininity, and in using the Spanish-blooded M. Paul in this way, Brontë teases at a world-famous stereotype concerning the man of Spain: *machismo*, or male pride and entitlement. M. Paul is not a Spaniard. He is a Spaniard, in part.

This part, this Spanish male blood, makes the gallery scene crackle with irony and makes Lucy’s surmounting of M. Paul’s feministic, ideological prodding all the more impressive. Brontë’s inclusion of Spanish male blood into a femininity-oriented scene

alters the reader's conception of the scene. The most perceptive reader can deny that the blood has any impact on the scene since Brontë only makes a few passing references to it, but the irony is there to push back against the reader's judgement. It is common knowledge that the pre-eminent stereotype concerning Spaniards is that the man of Spain suffers from a chauvinistic pride. This stereotype serves as the elephant in the art gallery. The reader knows it is there but is undecided on whether he/she should acknowledge the presence and impact of the blood or deny its relevance to the scene. In the scene, M. Paul disturbs Lucy who is browsing an art gallery. The professor notices that Lucy appears interested in a Cleopatra painting. In addressing Lucy, M. Paul dismisses the Cleopatra painting as utter garbage and he orders Lucy to "Turn to the wall and study your four pictures of a woman's life" (Brontë 232). Brontë's use of M. Paul here illuminates the possibility of Spanish male blood trickling a glimmer of superiority into M. Paul's tone, causing M. Paul to speak authoritatively on womanhood and causing him to dictate to Lucy the essence of her own femininity. This blood element makes Lucy's stand against M. Paul (over a pink dress) seem like a more significant feat. Metaphorically, the gender-critical words of a Spanish blooded man penetrates Lucy's breast, dives into the heart, and speaks directly and condescendingly to Lucy's already profound sense of inferiority, most likely reinforcing it. The fact that Lucy overcomes this and ultimately takes a declaratory stand against M. Paul is simply a wonder. Brontë uses this Spanish male blood and the stereotype so firmly attached to it, for the purpose of magnifying the unbelievable strength Lucy shows in confronting and besting the stigmas (Barbauld), the obstacles (Mademoiselle St. Pierre), and the perceived whispers of inadequacy (M. Paul) that have haunted her.

For Lucy, there still lingers another ghost. The pensionnat's nun myth continues to haunt Lucy's ambitions (despite the optical victory she secures with her stand at the May morning breakfast) because the ghost story thoroughly programs into the child's imagination and conscience the signature, cultural attitude of Labassecour: the focusing of an individual's first energies on the external execution of responsibilities, routine, and liturgy. Besides Madame Beck's system of surveillance and Zélie's assistance, it is this ghost story that, on some level, acts as the engine of the school and the culture. "A vague tale went of a black and white nun...the legend went, unconfirmed and unaccredited, but still propagated, that this was the portal of a vault, imprisoning ...the bones of a girl whom a monkish conclave of the drear middle ages had here buried alive for some sin against her vow" (Brontë 119-120). Getting rid of Mrs. Sweeney is one thing. It is infinitely more difficult to unseat this piece of cultural influence. It is a ghost story that imprints the Continental identity onto the heart and the conscience of the child who hears it. It makes certain that the Continental cultural priorities, that the teachers and religious figures stress, are in fact instilled. This story, this nun myth, is Lucy's greatest ideological obstacle at the pensionnat. While the tale is formidable, it has not kept Ms. Snowe from securing major victories. Even with the presence of the tale, Lucy replaces Mrs. Sweeney, increases the students' exposure to Englishness with Dr. John's regular visits, and, with a sartorial statement, showcases Englishness as a practical alternative.

Despite all of these gains in Lucy's public professional life, in her private life, she is on the path of affliction because of the love-obsession she nurses for Dr. John.

While Lucy nurtures her lover's idea of Dr. John as well as her patriot's idea of him, Dr. John (as M. Isidore) violates Lucy's expectations with actions that are more in

line with the Continental identity than the English, and with these actions, the definite Continental thread, the Isidore mantle, that runs through Dr. John's character manifests before the eyes of Lucy and the reader and it parallels the Continental fibers embedded deep within England's composition. At the fête, Ginevra begrudgingly admits that Isidore, the man that has been secretly seeing her and spoiling her with high-end clothing and blinding jewelry, is none other than Dr. John (Brontë 168). The "true young English gentleman," who aided her at the Continental dock and chivalrously chaperoned her through the perilous night-alleys of Vilette, underhandedly pursues Ginevra with a materialistic, ostentatious show of affection (Brontë 70, 99). Instead of being forthcoming with his intentions by seeing Ginevra under the supervision of Mrs. Cholmondeley, instead of penciling himself in on Ginevra's dance card, Dr. John keeps to the shadows, and from there, sends Ginevra fine clothes and jewelry. Privately, the actions of his hand are not English, and thanks to Ginevra, Lucy finally can see that. With the protagonist as her witness, the author deflates the notion of an England that is sovereign and that exists completely outside the cultural influence of the Continent. The author uses Dr. John to illustrate the real-life way in which England presents itself to the world as a culture and a state that is wholly apart from the morally invertebrate ways of the stereotyped Continent, though in reality, England has cultural overlap with the unseemly stereotype. In Lucy's mind, Brontë builds the notion of an England that is culturally independent from the Continent and also builds a seemingly faithful personification of that England in the form of Dr. John, but she ultimately topples it with the Isidore revelation.

With her mind's ideal collapsing, Lucy finds it exceedingly difficult to trumpet a national ideal she struggles mightily to maintain belief in. Publicly, it is difficult. On a metaphorical level, it's as if she is a doctor attending to sick children and she knowingly administers a placebo in place of real medicine. Dr. John is that placebo. He is not who he pretends to be.

Lucy continually tells her heart that Dr. John is not what he represents himself to be, that he is a nationalist fraud, but not even the constant reinforcement of these facts helps lessen the severity of Lucy's obsession with the young doctor. She keeps every letter he writes her. For each of these letters, she delightfully reads them over and over again. It seems that Dr. John's thoughtful letters only encourage Lucy's "attachment" and her tireless curiosity about the "destiny of its (the attachment's) object" (Brontë 286). The letters cause her to studiously revise her response to them. The early drafts are candid and heartfelt. The prospect of sending these love-professing responses sparks an immediate change in attitude. Her heart crosses from summer-fields of idealization into the barren wastelands of reality. "Just at that moment, the doors of my heart would shake, bolt and bar would yield, Reason would leap in, vigorous and revengeful, snatch the full sheets, read, sneer, erase, tear up, re-write, fold, seal, direct, and send a terse, curt missive of a page" (Brontë 286-7). This love-obsession still goes further. She buries the letters as one would bury treasure. For fear that the spying elements of the pensionnat would further intrude into her personal matters, Lucy takes the letters, the written record of her hopeless love, and stuffs them into a deep dark hole, beneath a pear tree (Brontë 333).

Ms. Snowe's love-obsession leads her down a deep dark emotional hole, called the path of affliction. In taking Lucy down this path, Brontë illustrates her protagonist's blindness to the unreality of national identity and to the non-involvement of Destiny in her pursuit of Dr. John, the perceived embodiment of the English national character. At a dinner gathering, at the Hôtel Crécy, Dr. John hurts Lucy terribly by telling her that he barely has any memory of her from his childhood (Brontë 357). Lucy, to Dr. John's eye, is little more than a half-noticed piece of furniture from the rooms of his childhood home. This careless and cutting admission further proves Dr. John's un-gentlemanly nature. "The true gentleman"²² in like manner carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast" (Newman 189). This insult, this profound lack of acknowledgement, strikes squarely at a great irony that Brontë includes in her character. She designs Lucy as a girl without a history who conversely exhibits a strong sense of destiny, especially concerning Dr. John. Lucy ties this sense of destiny to the constellations. She believes that they blaze her trail to a bright future, an invaluable friendship with Dr. John. The first starry element appears after Lucy leaves Miss Marchmont's deathbed. Lucy looks up from a night-time road and beholds the Aurora Borealis. This moment gives Lucy the sensation of boldness and a voice sounds in her ear. "Leave this wilderness" (Brontë 48). Lawson and Shakinovsky characterize this as a "vertiginous moment of awareness" for Lucy and an experience which "makes clear that she does not belong in England, that its richness is not, nor will be, for her" (Lawson and Shakinovsky 933). While interesting, this critical claim does not sufficiently address Lucy's romanticized belief that Destiny directs her to her personified England, Dr. John. Lucy seeks England's richness in Dr. John. Lucy's reaction to the next celestial fixture

²² See Newman, *Idea of a University*.

proves this point. After burying her precious letters in the night-time garden, the north star appears and arrests Lucy's attention. She feels a "reinforced strength" which she reads as divine validation of her decision to treasure the letters and treasure her association with her flawed yet beloved English ideal, Dr. John (Brontë 334). The last celestial body appears only in reference. It is the night when Dr. John surprises Lucy with an invitation to accompany him to the Vashti performance. In talking of how the performer Vashti is now at the peak of her glory, Lucy uses the same words, the same reference to the brightest star in the night, to speak to the peak of her closeness with Dr. John. "Her day – a day of Sirius – stood at its full height, light and fervour" (Brontë 289). In Lucy's mind, on this night, the glory that is Lucy and Dr. John's friendship reaches its height.

Instead of the friendship staying at its height for a time and then receding back down to its normal casual level, some part of Lucy expects for it to plateau directly after its peak and never recede, but this is not realistic. This path of affliction, paved with the fractured but lingering belief in Dr. John's Englishness, leaves Lucy (who all along believed that a friendship with Dr. John would be a life-changing one) fruitless, and this emptiness forces her to confront the unreality of national identity. She expects her and Dr. John's friendship to fulfill its perceived potential, and the same goes for the doctor himself. She expects him (Dr. John the person) to fulfill his potential, because of his initial "true English gentleman" label. Bitterness and unfulfilled potential is all Lucy has now. "As much as she wants to identify Graham with the ideal of England she has constructed, she is finally unable to win him as fact or as idea" (Lawson and Shakinovsky

936). She realizes that this “true English gentleman,” this man untouched by the Continental contagion of empty principle, does not exist as she imagines him.

Amidst all this bitter realization, Lucy does not realize that expectation is at the root of her love for Dr. John and that someone else’s expectation of her is what she needs to feel seen, to feel loved, and to ultimately abandon the path of affliction. Lucy loves Dr. John, but behind this love lies expectation. Dr. John does not love Lucy. That void of love correlates directly to the absence of Dr. John’s expectations of Lucy. Lucy could end this pain by finding a friendship rooted in expectation, but does anyone in her life have expectations of Lucy the person?

M. Paul has had expectations of Lucy all along but has yet to communicate them in a warm-hearted tone. In having expectations of Lucy and voicing those expectations, M. Paul speaks directly to Lucy’s core sense of destiny in a way no one has, and on the night of the Hôtel Cr cy dinner, he clearly communicates the affection from which his expectations originate. At the dinner table, M. Paul, in the form of a whisper, hurls the insult of “coquette” at Lucy for what he sees as the foolish attention she pays to Dr. John (Bront  357). Lucy gets up and follows M. Paul outside in order to passionately confront him. Their argument starts off antagonistic as expected but suddenly evolves into a soft interaction (Bront  360). Lucy sees that behind all the critical venom M. Paul directs at her lies an affectionate softness. “I cannot affirm that I had ever witnessed the smile of pleasure, or content, or kindness round M. Paul’s lips, or in his eyes before” (Bront  361). It is from this affection that M. Paul’s expectations originate, despite the fact that M. Paul takes on a more abrasive tone in the expression of these expectations. Dr. John’s letters, the Cleopatra painting, the pink dress, in each of these situations, M. Paul voices

his disapproval because, in his heart, he genuinely feels that Lucy is better than the way she acted in those situations and he physically cannot stop himself from communicating that she is better than that. Ms. Snowe observes all of this in the professor's soft countenance.

This newfound, soft countenance is not just some mood that temporarily colors Lucy and M. Paul's association. It is an enduring sentiment that bears fruit.

Suddenly awaking to the fruitfulness of his company and the great affection M. Paul feels for her, Lucy changes course by abandoning the path of affliction, her fruitless fixation on the "true English gentleman" construct, in favor of the path to a bright future, the path winding towards M. Paul.

Brontë expresses this change in course, this shift in affection with the watch guard Lucy makes for M. Paul, continuing the pattern of Lucy expressing love through interaction with objects. One day, back at the pensionnat, M. Paul comes across Lucy putting together a watch guard. In reply to the professor's question about who that is intended for, Lucy answers "For a gentleman – one of my friends" (Brontë 365). From the time and attention poured into the crafting of the watch guard, it is clear that M. Paul has given Lucy a realistic hope for love that Ms. Snowe has never known.

On a day that is supposed to be all about him, M. Paul gives Lucy the grandest stage yet for her nationalist message. M. Paul's fête, more specifically the heated exchange Lucy has with M. Paul during his fête, for a moment, allows her to champion English national identity. While addressing his crowd, Lucy, because of an accident, makes a raucous noise that disturbs the professor's oratory rhythm. A worked-up M. Paul spews anti-English daggers Lucy's way. Not amused, Ms. Snowe volleys with

“Vive l’Angleterre, l’Histoire et les Héros! A bas la France, la Fiction et les Faquins!” [Long live England, history and heroes! Down with France, fiction and fops!] (Brontë 386). After the passionate exchange, Lucy leaves the room and begins to laugh hysterically. While this laughter does, to an extent, relate to the silliness of Lucy and M. Paul’s fight, it has more to do with Lucy’s optical victory. For the first time, she verbally champions Englishness in a situation where she has the entire pensionnat, all the students and teachers, as her audience. For a moment, Lucy and her English idealism commands the attention of the pensionnat.

Lucy begins to imagine herself commanding the operation of her own pensionnat, due to a newfound enterprising attitude that M. Paul’s lessons help to bring out. “When I shall have saved one thousand francs, I will take a tenement with one large room, and two or three smaller ones, furnish the first with a few benches and desks, a black tableau, an estrade for myself...begin with taking day-pupils, and so work my way upwards” (Brontë 408). Lucy develops this new enterprising spirit because, through intense work and study, she cultivates substantial belief in herself as an educator and a student. She begins taking rigorous lessons in arithmetic with M. Paul. She struggles at first, but she stays with it and she rounds into form. “But strange grief! When that heavy and overcast dawn began at last to yield to day; when my faculties began to struggle themselves, free, and my time of energy and fulfillment came; when I voluntarily doubled, trebled, quadrupled the tasks he set...” (Brontë 397-8). The arithmetic sessions show Lucy that she has the capacity to topple any academic obstacle placed in front of her.

An academic obstacle eventually comes her way in the form of a M. Paul-sponsored examination. Lucy takes up the mantle of heroine with her subversive yet

brilliant performance in a French examination held by the pre-eminent academic institution in Villette, which is exclusively male. M. Paul, accompanied by two professors from the esteemed Athénée, ambushes Lucy and puts her on the spot, demanding an academic performance from her in the form of an examination. Through much of the exam, the two men call for Lucy to speak on the work of obscure historians and men of letters, like Mérovée (Brontë 452). To the majority of these questions, Ms. Snowe coolly offers “an unchanging ‘Je n’en sais rien’ (I don’t know anything about it.) (Brontë 452). Lucy does not even attempt to mask her irritation and disengagement, because she recognizes these two professors of the Athénée as the two mustachioed men who chased her through the night-time streets of Villette, that first night (Brontë 454). They then make her write an essay over the subject of “human justice” (Brontë 454). Instead of doing something predictable and straight-laced like arguing the essence of human justice, Lucy composes a rather audacious allegory. She writes of a rich but miserly beldame who sits idle in front her fireplace while the disadvantaged appeal for her help. She writes of “her house, the den of confusion; servants called to her for orders or help which she did not give; beggars stood at her door waiting and starving unnoticed; a swarm of children, sick and quarrelsome, crawled round her feet...The honest woman cared for none of these things” (Brontë 454). To complete her portrait of human justice, Lucy goes on to explain that those who were “strong, lively, and violent” stirred the heart of the beldame and were “flung a liberal shower of sugar-plums” (Brontë 454-5). Lucy’s subversive allegory has the effect of denying the ethical and intellectual standing these two hypocrites claim in testing her. Two ambassadors of the prestigious Athénée engage with Lucy in her examination, while Lucy, through a narrative statement,

essentially says “you (and M. Paul also) have no right and your cause is illegitimate.”

Though green and un-established professionally, she is unafraid. Lucy, using a subversive allegory steeped in British cynicism, stands up to and successfully delegitimizes her Continental intellectual superior (M. Paul) and two ambassadors of Continental society’s most highly regarded university. Lucy turns out a heroine’s performance, specifically an English heroine’s performance.

M. Paul rivals Lucy’s with his own heroic performance, two performances actually, one past and one present. Because of his long-held expectations for Lucy, because of his love for her, because of his objective belief in the value of Lucy’s Englishness and Protestantism, because of all this, M. Paul ultimately provides Lucy with her own school (cloaking her and her nationalist message in legitimacy) and, on a personal level, he reinforces for her (in a positive manner) the cultural enlacement of the Continent into England, with him being a Continental embodiment of the Victorian spirit. To reveal the true M. Paul, Madame Beck sends Lucy out to the Rue des Mages where she hears of his heroic deeds from Père Silas (Brontë 436). He recounts of the pupil/son, M. Paul, and the ruinous end to his engagement to Justine Marie. “The pupil’s father – once a rich banker – had failed, died, and left behind him only debts and destitution. The son was then forbidden to think of Marie...Madame Walravens, opposed the match with all the temper which deformity made sometimes demoniac” (Brontë 443). It is revealed that Justine’s family, who obstructed the marriage, themselves fell into destitution and the angel-hearted M. Paul took them in as dependents. They remain his dependents to this day (Brontë 444). In the present-day, before leaving for Guadaloupe, the professor takes Lucy to a brand-new building in the new Faubourg Clotilde area of town (Brontë 541).

Ultimately, he surprises his love with a prospectus reading: “Externat de demoiselles. Numéro 7, Faubourg Clotilde, Directrice, Mademoiselle Lucy Snowe” (Brontë 545). He also leaves her a heartfelt letter in which the Catholic Paul not only accepts but celebrates the Protestant aspect of Lucy’s being. M. Paul, with the school and with the letter, strengthens Lucy’s English presence in Villette, expands her nationalist agency considerably, and validates Lucy’s Englishness and Protestantism, on levels public and personal. Lucy is no longer one of those rootless flowers (given to M. Paul at his fête) (Brontë 381). Because of the newly commissioned school, she will have a history that, down the line, will come to define her and bring further validation to her vision of self. In discovering M. Paul as he is, Lucy receives further evidence, beyond Dr. John, that England is composite in nature and she begins to see the foolishness in expecting representatives of England to not have a single element of the Continent in their character. She learns that the Victorian ideal is far too rare to have qualms with its manifestation in persons outside of the native English population. Lucy now knows that an individual, particularly a man, who is a faithful expression of the Victorian ideal, like M. Paul, is just as rare as M. Paul’s violet eyes (Brontë 542).

With the perceived rarity that is her national ideal, Lucy fights to diminish the impact of the Continental identity, a collective cultural view that the external adherence to societal laws, rules, and practices is far more significant than the fostering of internal qualities, like integrity and morality. Ms. Snowe stumbles when she develops a love-obsession with Dr. John. In her view, he represents all that is right with England, but he is not as represented. Even in discovering him to be fraudulent, Lucy persists with her Dr. John obsession, irrationally persists in a nationalist belief in him, and persists down a

path of affliction. Lucy witnesses Dr. John's two-faced nature, and she sees how his actions as Isidore are just as shifty and inappropriate as the novel's quintessential Continental man, Colonel Alfred de Hamal. Conversely, his public actions often mirror those of the ideal gentleman. This duality in Dr. John's character forces her to confront the cultural duality she now knows forms the essence of England. While Ms. Snowe acknowledges the Continent's place in England's composition, she perseveres in her aim to soften and eventually break the Continental identity's hold on the children of Labassecour. She carries on even after the disappearance of her beloved M. Paul.

Despite the loss, the author's decision to take M. Paul from Lucy carries with it a silver lining of the most choice silver. In ripping M. Paul from Lucy Snowe's life, Brontë makes certain that Lucy will not compromise her Englishness and moral conscience the way Jane does in choosing life with Rochester, no matter the price. On the surface, Jane seems to have the better ending, because the end of Lucy's story appears to be nothing but tragic and unjust. All hope of her reuniting with the angel-hearted M. Paul turn to vapor as Lucy beholds a watery horizon coated with innumerable shipwrecks. "That storm roared frenzied for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks: it did not lull till the deeps had gorged their full sustenance...Peace, be still! Oh! A thousand weepers, praying in agony on waiting shores, listened for that voice, but it was not uttered" (Brontë 555). There is no divine intervention on Lucy's behalf. Rather, she lives her life in Vilette without M. Paul and watches as schemers and leeches live full lives: "Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life; so did Père Silas; Madame Walravens fulfilled her ninetieth year before she died" (Brontë 555). Despite the apparent unfairness of this end, the author ensures

Lucy's happiness by removing M. Paul from her life. Even Lucy herself admits to this. "M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life. Do you scout the paradox?" (Brontë 552). Amazingly, Lucy is not of two hearts about this period of time, which the average person would be. The average person would feel bittersweet, but not Lucy. She achieves her nationalist aim with the opening of her school, while the man she loves spends three years apart from her in the new world. The typical emotional response would be to feel a range of conflicting emotions in such a situation. Jane is happy as Rochester's wife, but she compromises her values, more than once, in order to reconcile with her love. Jane first leaves Thornfield for Morton out of respect for the sanctity of marriage, even with a marriage as perverse as Rochester and Bertha's. Then, after her yearnings get the best of her, she leaves Morton with the intention of rekindling what she had with Rochester, who she still thinks is married. With this single, inconspicuous action, Jane defiles everything good that she ever stood for, but Brontë takes M. Paul away before Lucy can do irrevocable harm to her national identity, precisely because Lucy, in identifying as the English teacher, tries to make the English mistress mantle all that she is because she has nothing else and has no sense of self-worth outside of that post and outside of her preoccupation with her own Englishness. The author designs Jane to where she can feel her self-worth, despite the fact that her appearance acts as a tether to a cold reality. Brontë expels M. Paul, the Continental expression of the English ideal, from her protagonist's life so that he will no longer trouble the only piece of self-esteem Lucy has, a confident and gratifying sense of her English identity.

CONCLUSION

Charlotte Brontë uses the major characters of her novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, as proof that England and its Continent are more culturally intertwined than England would like to admit. For instance, in *Jane Eyre*, the author disseminates throughout the text various signs indicating what Brontë sees as traces of cultural infection originating from a moral and cultural wasteland, the Continent. These signs include sexual immorality, cosmopolitan tendencies, and dark skin thought unnatural to the people of England. These Continental signs appear in each stage of the story and manifest in an array of characters, but they concentrate mostly in the character of Edward Rochester. The presence of Céline Varens (his former mistress in Paris) and her daughter Adèle (his possible daughter) in the story constitutes evidence of his sexual immorality. He also displays a cosmopolitan nature. Following the emotional dissolution of his marriage to Bertha Mason and preceding his time with Jane, Rochester tours the Continent of Europe for nearly ten years as a renewed, enthusiastic bachelor. His time on the Continent imprints onto his character the negative aspects Brontë sees Europe as possessing. To top off Rochester's already considerable ties to the Continent, the author outfits him with a complexion which more so resembles the Latinate people of Continental Europe than the people of England.

Though Rochester's association with the Continent eclipses all other characters, Jane too has considerable ties to the Continent. A generous and unexpected inheritance from her deceased uncle in Madeira, a proximity to the Portuguese trade industries of

wine and slaves, dramatically improves her financial circumstances while also becoming one of the prominent features of her character. In addition to the inheritance, Jane becomes a reader of Friedrich Schiller during her time in the Rivers household. The inspiration she takes away from these readings animates her actions. Prioritization of the individual's interests over those of the state is the central idea expressed in *The Robbers*, Schiller's signature work at that time. She clearly applies this individual-over-the-state stance to her life when she rejects the spiritually inspired proposal of a suitable St. John Rivers in favor of reconciliation with Rochester, whom she thinks is still married. Jane elevates the desires of her heart over the part of her character that wishes to honor the expectations of religion and society.

Lucy Snowe of *Villette* proves decidedly more committed to honoring English society's expectations than Jane. More than that, she eagerly assumes the mantle of standard-bearer to Englishness, while in Labassecour. Lucy works towards the realization of her ultimate aim: to conjure in the heads of her students a romance with English identity (decorum, earnestness, Protestantism) so that they may adopt that identity as their personal standard. At every opportunity, Lucy attempts to brightly display her conception of Englishness for the students, the youth of the Continent, to see. Dr. John "Graham" Bretton, a young English physician, becomes a constant visitor of the pensionnat. Dr. John's sustained presence there initially delights Lucy because she sees him as an exceptionally radiant embodiment of English identity and because she develops a powerful love-obsession with him. The young doctor dispels the magic Lucy sees in him with his ungentlemanly pursuit of Ginevra Fanshawe. Lucy sees that Dr. John presents himself as a flesh-and-blood realization of the Victorian ideal while also doing

what he can to keep the world from knowing about his shadowy gestures to Ginevra. The Dr. John character represents the compromise of a national standard.

Jane also compromises her national identity but is not fully representative of compromise like Dr. John. Jane is a faithful embodiment of English identity for the majority of her story. She exhibits English reserve as a committed and accomplished student (at both Lowood and Morton). She even demonstrates that she has the rare spirit of “disinterested kindness” during her return to Gateshead Hall and during her attempted reconciliation with the ever-abusive Aunt Reed. She withstands the London-tainted jewelry and all other indulgences Rochester tries to shower her with. Even the enticing opportunity to continue being with Rochester as his glorified mistress initially cannot bring Jane to compromise her principles and her Englishness. Initially, this is the case. Ultimately she gives in to her desire after the wind-voice sounds in her yearning heart.

Where Jane succumbs to ideological compromise, Lucy does not. Brontë will not let her, because she details the plot in a way where Lucy compromising her Englishness is not even a possibility. The only point of compromise that threatens Lucy’s nationalist conscience is M. Paul Emanuel. His shadowy gestures compare favorably to the Victorian ideal, but his nationality and stormy, autocratic exterior trouble that comparison. As the novel progresses, the attraction and level of intimacy between Lucy and M. Paul deepens. At novel’s end, the two are on the verge of a romance, but Brontë intervenes and denies M. Paul a safe return to England and Lucy. Such an authorial decision allows Lucy to remain consistent with and faithful to her Englishness-obsessed conscience.

Just as protecting Englishness from possible erosion is the primary concern on Lucy's mind, it most certainly is one of the more dominant themes in both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. Also, in both texts, Englishness is considered vulnerable to the polluting influence of the Continental identity. In *Jane Eyre*, this identity is a seemingly omnipresent residue of degenerative Continental culture. In *Villette*, the identity is an attitude that places great importance on the hollow, physical observance of rules, laws, and liturgy with no regard for the heart. Brontë's pattern involving German study and marriage, featured in both novels, exposes the bittersweet cultural overlap that exists between England and the Continent. More than that, Brontë investigates the Continental identity so that she may ultimately demonstrate that the prideful, nativist, foolhardy concept of English identity ironically has its genesis in the Continental identity.

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