Chapter III

Women's Aspirations and Struggles for Self- Fulfillment: The Quest Theme in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*

It can be said that in most of her female protagonists, Charlotte Brontë portrays a sense of privation and need, as a consequence of being both orphans and women in a patriarchal society. In the author's second and last novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, the female protagonists, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, in particular, reflect women's privations and needs as they are poor and isolated orphans who barely have any status in society. Both strive to fulfill their economic and emotional needs in an environment which denies women's potential and ignores their needs. The urge for fulfillment leads Jane and Lucy to seek employment in the broader sphere and involves them with love-relationships which become significant to their quests for self-development. As Jane struggles to fulfill her economic and emotional necessities she realizes that the essence of her selfhood lies in her identity, independence and self-esteem. In *Villette*, Lucy strives to support herself with very scarce resources as she seeks to fulfill her desire for love in a society which regards her deficient for both the marriage and work market.

This chapter traces the struggles towards self-fulfilment of Jane and Lucy to reflect the hardships women must undergo as they strive to live independently, to love and to be recognized as an individual. In examining this, female needs, aspirations, loneliness and conflicts are addressed. How the two female protagonists are posed alike and in contrast with the traditional images of women are also observed and analyzed. The chapter divides Jane and Lucy's quest into stages where their development can be examined and thus compared.

Charlotte Brontë began writing *Jane Eyre* in a small lodging house in Manchester while accompanying her father on a visit to a doctor in August 1846. The novel was completed and published the following year and became a successful publication. The author's name, Currer Bell, a pseudonym purposely created to avoid "prejudice" against female writers[1], became well-known among English reading audiences. One of the major themes of *Jane Eyre* involves the development of the female protagonist in her quest to fulfill her economic and emotional necessities and to be recognized as an individual. Her quest is seen through a series of tests and crises which Jane has to overcome, the first of which is introduced at the opening of the novel.

In the first few chapters which lay foundation to Jane's character, Jane is presented as an unhappy and desolate child at the age of ten. She is living with her widowed aunt, Mrs. Reed, and her three spoiled children, Eliza, John and Georgiana. Jane is despised by Mrs. Reed who never wants to keep her since they are not truly related by blood. Besides, when her husband was still alive, Mrs. Reed deplored Jane who, as she considered, took too much share of Mr. Reed's love and attention from his own children. However, the promise she gave to her husband at his death-bed forces her to keep Jane against her own wishes. Mrs. Reed treats Jane harshly and cruelly and the girl frequently falls a victim of ridicule, harassment and unjust punishment. Despite the fact that Jane is ill-treated, she never seeks sympathy, a nature which Mrs. Reed finds detestable and disturbing. With the Reeds, Jane is excluded as if an outcast and as regarded by one of the maids, she is "less than a servant" (*Jane Eyre* 12) and not worthy of her keep.

Growing up in such atmosphere of animosity, Jane, who is a passionate child, learns to be willful and rebellious, characteristics which can only add more to the hatred and exclusion of a child. As young as she is, Jane realizes that she is different and a misfit among the Reeds. She feels her inferiority and sense of privation acutely as she simultaneously experiences a sense of superiority over the Reeds. All these characteristics further contribute into moulding her unique personality– a determined, strong, original, truthful and at times defiant woman.

In the Reed household, Jane often falls victim to brutal harassment by John Reed, who clearly demonstrates his "antipathy" towards her. She relates that he "bullied and punished me: not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near" (*Jane Eyre* 10). She is told to be patient and to submit to his cruelty until the day in which the novel begins, when John's brutality, hurling a book at her, provokes her to fight back for the first time. Her act of rebelliousness reflects her considerable inner strength and capacity to stand up for herself in times of crisis. But Jane's fight for justice ends with a false accusation against her and she is subsequently punished by being locked up in the chilling red room where Mr. Reed died. In there, Jane is traumatized by horror when she imagines that a sudden gliding light appearing in the room is Mr. Reed's spirit and she eventually loses consciousness from "a species of fit" (*Jane Eyre* 18). After the incident, her repression is overcome by anger and rebellion and she will no longer to resume her subjection to the Reeds and is eventually sent to a charity school for orphans at Lowood. The oppression of Jane in the Reed household not only shows how unjustly an unwanted child may be treated but also serves to reflect an attempt to transform an imaginative, natural and independent

individual into a passive and docile girl society considers more acceptable.[2] How girls can be severely oppressed is also seen in the early part of the following section when the school treasurer employs his unsparing principles to train school girls to become "hardy", "patient" and "self-denying"(*Jane Eyre* 63).

The author sees to it, however, that Jane is not to be tamed by the severity of either Mrs. Reed or the school authorities but by love and kindness. In her schooling years at Lowood, Jane learns to repress her anger, passion and rebelliousness and to develop a more acceptable cool and collected demeanor through the influence of her friend, the moral and acquiescent Helen Burns and the kind and congenial superintendent, Miss Temple. The Lowood section underscores the influence of love and kindness, the nourishment of life which Jane has always longed for but lost through her years at Gateshead. It is Miss Temple, in particular, from whom Jane absorbs the "more harmonious thoughts" and the "better regulated feelings" which her pupil admires (*Jane Eyre* 85). At Lowood, Jane also discovers her inclination and thirst for education and she eventually rises to become one of their best students and is given a post as a teacher during her last two years at the institution. Jane feels sufficiently satisfied with her "uniform" life at Lowood because she is not "inactive" and, more importantly, is surrounded by the people she knows and loves particularly Miss Temple. However, the departure of Miss Temple puts an end to this sense of equilibrium and contentedness and provokes her to strongly feel the restraints imposed on her as a teacher at Lowood and as a woman in a society which restricts female experiences to the domestic sphere. Jane craves for freedom and feels, more urgently than ever, the urge to explore the world out of Lowood, to seek variation of life and an outlet for her energy and potentials.

Six years after the publication of *Jane Eyre,* in Charlotte Brontë's last novel, *Villette,* a study of female struggle and development for self-fulfillment emerges, once again, as one of the central concerns in the novel. As with Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe is also an orphaned and solitary figure who is dominated by the same sense of isolation and privation. But Lucy is comparatively a more complex character and her life and struggles reflect a deeper sense of desolation up to the point of despair. As is hinted by the manner of her narration at the opening chapters, Lucy is someone who hides her insecurity, sensitivity and the consciousness of her own deficiency under a calm, cool and steady demeanor. Her inability to reveal her "true self", developed since her childhood, is affirmed by an adult Lucy, in Chapter XII, through a reflection, as her mind wanders to her past: "Oh my childhood! I had feelings: passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days, I could feel" (*Villette* 175). Her self-repression and inability to express herself adequately alienate her from those around her. Her insecurity forces her to adhere to her confined sphere and she must at times be forced by circumstances to forward on with her quest, at which time she reveals her capacity to be a strong character.

As Lucy finds it difficult to confront the reality and anguish of her family loss, she avoids communicating to readers the nature of the disaster which leaves her alone without kin. What she relates comes in the form of an enigmatic metaphor which only provides hints and a measure of the agony she feels. Being left alone intensifies her sense of alienation, of someone who is rejected and not wanted by others. Lucy's embedded fright and her sense of alienation is vividly shown in Chapter XV, "The Long Vacation" as she

suffers a haunting dream while enduring a neurotic fever: "Amidst the horror of that dream," she narrates, "I think the worst lay here. Methought the well-loved dead, who had loved me well in life, met me elsewhere alienated" (*Villette* 231).

Throughout the introductory chapters, both Jane and Lucy are depicted with some distinguishing characteristics which, to a certain extent, divert some of their inclinations. *Jane Eyre* portrays its young female protagonist as passionate and courageous, while in *Villette,* young Lucy who is an introvert and rather insecure character is less heroic. Despite a sense of alienation developed while living with the Reeds, Jane is warm-hearted and she learns to appreciate friendships which become valuable to her self-development. As for Lucy, her cold and stoical demeanor as well as her complexity prevent her from developing meaningful friendships which she desperately needs and she is overwhelmed by an extreme sense of isolation almost throughout the book. Along with her self-development, Jane must learn to control her passions, to act and express them in a more acceptable ways. As for Lucy, it is imperative that she comes to terms with herself before she can attain any sense of fulfillment.

After the childhood scenes, the two protagonists are presented as young women at the verge of entering a broader sphere almost unknown to them. Jane leaves Lowood behind for a governess post at Thornfield-Hall where she becomes entangled in a love-relationship with the master of the house, Mr. Rochester. On the other hand, unexpected circumstances force Lucy into the job market and she is briefly engaged as a nurse of a rheumatic cripple, Maria Marchmont, whose unexpected death leaves Lucy once again unemployed. Unlike Jane who is self-motivated to venture into the world,

Lucy, who describes herself then as being "a little shaken in nerves" (*Villette* 103), feels she is driven by fate to action while she is unprepared. If not for Miss Marchmont's sudden death Lucy "would have crawled on with her for twenty years if for twenty years longer her life of endurance had been protracted" (*Villette* 97). There is revealed in Lucy at this time courage and strength when, being alone with limited experience of life beyond her own neighborhood, Lucy, who can still feel "life at life's sources" (*Villette* 96), makes up her mind to go to London and, then, to Villette, to seek employment and a new beginning in life.

It is noteworthy that as orphans, both Jane and Lucy acquire the freedom middle-class women are generally not endowed with: they are free to decide and act in their own ways (Reynolds and Humble 27). By depicting the female protagonists as orphans, the author can thus avoid making the two women appear unconventional because they can venture on their quests without transcending limitations enforced by the family. Consider, for instance, the orphaned female protagonist of *Shirley*, Caroline Helstone, who is a portrayal of a traditional woman who cannot make her own decisions without the approval of her uncle who is her guardian. When Caroline is extremely depressed from her unrequited love and wishes to keep herself sane by occupying herself with work, her idea is strongly opposed by her uncle as he considers it shameful to have a niece working as a governess while he still can support her. As with most middle-class women in society, Caroline is restricted by conventions and male authority not to make decisions and act in her own way.

Also unlike conventional a female protagonist such as Caroline, it is probably no coincidence that both Jane and Lucy are portrayed as physically unattractive. They are described as small, thin and plain, the kind of appearance which signifies their insignificant position in society. The fact that these heroines are prominently intelligent, strong, honest, and insightful suggests that these remarkable qualities are in fact the real key to true success and fulfillment, which, of course, is not merely being a conventionally successful wife in the domestic sphere. But being both poor and physically insignificant virtually excludes Jane and Lucy from the marriage market which they scorn (Calder 60). This exclusion can frustrate the desire for love which is heightened as a consequence of their privation and isolation and the fact that women are not given opportunities to make fuller use of their abilities. As seen in *Villette,* Lucy feels distressed by her unrequited love for Doctor John who simply overlooks her mainly because she has neither the looks nor the status to attract him.

Arriving at Villette, Lucy is employed as the "nursery-governess" of Madame Beck's children--a post her friend Ginevra regards as "few governesses would have condescended so far" (*Villette* 393). Since work is scarce for women, as explicitly seen in Lucy's case, a governess is not in a position to bargain but has to accept whatever she is fortunate enough to be offered. Madame Beck gradually manages to gain full benefit from Lucy's energy by granting her the post of an English teacher and at times a translator with only half the salary she paid the former English teacher. Although teaching allows Lucy to engage in new experiences which she enjoys, it is not sufficient to fulfill her sense of need because the establishment is Lucy's

whole world in which she is constantly haunted by an overwhelming sense of desolation and alienation. Her condition mirrors a woman's neglect and silent loneliness in a confinement in which she is unable to break through.

Similarly, in *Jane Eyre*, not long after Jane has settled herself at Thornfield, she once again feels frustrated and restless when her new life at Thornfield cannot satisfy her aspirations to acquire broader experience and utilize her abilities and intellect more fully. She realizes early on that the "smooth career"(*Jane Eyre* 109) and tranquil life which Thornfield offers is but another form of confinement in which she must follow a mundane routine life within the enclosure of Thornfield. She feels that there is much more in the world she wants to explore and experience: "I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach" (*Jane Eyre* 110). Jane will end up disappointed if she persists in seeking experiences and variety because work available for middle-class women offer barely nothing beyond a stagnant and routine life such as that which she experienced at Lowood and now at Thornfield. Through Jane and Lucy, Brontë reveals the desolation and void in the lives of single women in Victorian society who have almost no hopeful prospects to look forward to. These conditions make them inclined toward taking on love to fulfill what they feel is lacking in their lives.

Accordingly, Jane's interest soon shifts away from her unfulfilled aspirations towards a love-relationship with the arrival of Rochester. They quickly develop intimacy which is built on a sort of mutual understanding accelerated by a few incidents in which Jane either saves or supports

Rochester. Jane's growing love for Rochester has become a nourishment for her empty and solitary life–"a blank of existence" as she takes it-- which gives her hopeful prospects in life:

> I felt at times, as if he were my relation, rather than my master: yet he was imperious sometimes still; but I did not mind that; I saw it was his way. So happy, so gratified did I become with this new interest added to life, that I ceased to pine after kindred: my thin crescent-destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of existence were filled up; my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength (*Jane Eyre* 147).

This new experience and interest in loving Rochester dominate Jane's life at this stage. Despite his physical unattractiveness, Jane sees him as "more than beautiful" and his face becomes her favorite sight (*Jane Eyre* 147). To her, his looks are full of "interest, an influence that quite mastered me,–that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his" (*Jane Eyre* 177). She sympathizes with him as she senses the misery which hovers over him and strongly wishes that she could alleviate his grief and help him out. Her love gradually allows her to overlook his faults and ultimately forgive all his lies and schemes in his attempt to trap her into loving and belonging to him.

Nevertheless, as they reach a deeper level in the relationship Jane begins to be frustrated by the way Rochester now treats her. She feels offended by his eager attempt to adorn her with precious jewels and costumes. "I will myself put the diamond chain round your neck, and the circlet on your forehead," (*Jane Eyre* 261) he says, only one day after their confession of love. He treats her now in a more romantic manner and addresses her in terms which imply naivety which somewhat makes her

degraded. It fills her with trepidation to realize that the sense of identity she had so prized herself for is being overpowered by the man she loves so overwhelmingly. He has become so vital to her life to the point that she admits, he stands "between me and every thought of religion" (*Jane Eyre* 277). Jane, at this stage, exemplifies what Robert Keefe avers in *Charlotte Brontë's World of Death* that there is peril to the sense of self of all Brontë's heroines who lose themselves in the adoration of their lovers: "all of them love, and the emotion looms as a menace to their sense of self" (Keefe 159).

Jane's conflict between "the sense of self" and "the desire to fulfill her love" is pronounced most vividly on the day before her wedding. She expresses her rejection of "wifehood" which Rochester rushes on her and all the costly dresses he has arranged to become hers:

> Mrs. Rochester! She did not exist: she would not be born till tomorrow...It was enough that in yonder closet, opposite my dressing-table, garments said to be hers had already displaced my black stuff Lowood frock and straw bonnet: for not to me appertained that suit of wedding raiment; the pearl-coloured robe, the vapoury veil, pendent from the usurped portmeanteau. I shut the closet, to conceal the strange, wraith-like apparel it contained; which, at this evening hour—nine o'clock–gave out certainly a most ghostly shimmer through the shadow of my apartment (*Jane Eyre* 278).

The culmination of Rochester's lies and manipulation, which is to marry Jane without her knowing that his wife Bertha is still alive, becomes the very incident which frees Jane from her conflicts with her sense of self. However, she is "wakened out of most glorious dreams" (*Jane Eyre* 301) only to be thrust into another critical moment when Rochester both pleads and forces her to leave Thornfield and spend her life with him as his mistress in the south of

France. Seeing Jane will not yield to his proposal, in his utmost agitation Rochester asks Jane, "Is it better to drive a fellow–creature to despair than to transgress a mere human law–no man being injured by the breach?" (*Jane Eyre* 321) to which Jane replies, "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself" (*Jane Eyre* 321). Jane's answer vividly articulates the significance of "self-respect" which is "the hallmark of Jane Eyre's character" (Weisser 75). Among the unique qualities which attract Rochester, her virtues of morality are those which impress Rochester most and he values them as "the good and bright qualities" (*Jane Eyre* 220) which he has never found elsewhere. To become his mistress only means to be influenced by his immorality, to be more like him. To thus lower her worth means she will one day be scorned, when he is tired of her, like all those mistresses he once had.

While Victorian society regards a woman's essence as lying in her selfless devotion to the peace and happiness of her husband and family, *Jane Eyre* poses a radical question as to what is truly significant and meaningful to female selfhood. By pairing a strong and righteous character such as Jane with Rochester who displays faults and immorality Brontë effectively raises the question of whether it is more vital for Jane to retain her identity and self-esteem than to become the selflessly devoted wife of Rochester. Traditionally, a woman strives to correct herself, as suggested by the numerous conduct books, to subdue her own wishes and desires to please her husband. A wife is seen as the "keeper of the hearth"(Davidoff 19)–one who devotes herself tirelessly to ensure her home is a "temple of purity".[3] But in *Jane Eyre,* the female protagonist is presented as individual whose "sense of self" is vital and one who will deny the role of a devoted wife until her self-identity is recognized and respected by her male counterpart.

It is worth mentioning that, in most of Charlotte Brontë's novels, the female protagonists experience an unfulfilled love in which circumstances they learn to realize, invariably, their own weaknesses and the peril of submerging oneself to love and men. This experience renders them self-growth as it prepares them for a more fulfilling relationship or to be reunited with their male counterparts who have had to endure lessons which hurt their pride. Hence, in *Jane Eyre*, Jane must escape from Rochester whose wife Bertha is still alive. In *Villette,* Lucy has to experience an unrequited love in her relationship with Doctor John or Graham of the childhood scenes. Lucy is attracted to Doctor John who appears an ideal male figure with his respectable profession, a remarkably manly beauty and his gentleman-like kindness. But Lucy and Doctor John's positions in society are markedly different. While Doctor John has opportunities to seek the best woman from the marriage market, Lucy's gender, poverty and plain looks constitute to make her an obscure and insignificant woman in the eyes of those who consider marriage an opportunity to uplift one's status, as does Doctor John. He barely notices Lucy as she is present in the room where he examines and provides medical treatment to Madame Beck's daughters. Alone with him, his neglect of her makes Lucy feels as if she was one of the "unobtrusive articles of furniture"(*Villette* 162). It is only when he realizes that she is acquainted to Ginevra, the young beautiful coquette with whom he has fallen hopelessly in love with that Doctor John begins to notice Lucy.

However, a coincidence which occurs during the school's "Long Vacation" soon brings Lucy closer to Doctor John. As the others are away on vacation, Lucy is left alone at the establishment in charge of a cretin, a deformed and mentally retarded pupil. Lucy's "spirits" which have "long been gradually sinking" (*Villette* 228) are aggravated by the isolation and the

deformity which, to an extent, mirrors Lucy's own life, as a deprived, poor, "unloved" and "unknown" woman. When she is entirely alone, after the aunt has taken the poor pupil away, her condition rapidly gives way to a nervous breakdown. As described by Lucy, her longing for "companionship" is so strong and as desperate as "the cravings of a most deadly famine" (*Villette* 230). Lucy feels she is on the verge of losing her sanity when she decides to make a confession as a way to communicate with others.

Outside the church, Lucy loses her way and ends up collapsing in the storm. She is saved by Doctor John and is taken to "La Terrasse", the chateau where he and his mother live. Lucy finds herself in a completely reversed situation during the rest of the vacation when she is attended to and cared for by Doctor John and his mother, Mrs. Bretton, who is also Lucy's godmother. This stage of Lucy's development sees her involvement with an unrequited love in a relationship with Doctor John. Lucy adores the young doctor with whom she adopts the role of a dependent and subdued woman. She admits that "in a strange and new sense, I grew most selfish, and quite powerless to deny myself the delight of indulging his mood, and being pliant to his will" (*Villette* 267).

When the time comes for her to leave "La Terrasse", Lucy is overwhelmed by a sense of bereavement. Back at her duties and routine at the establishment, Lucy's life and hope now live on Doctor John's kind letters. But her illusive happiness from reading his letters is not long sustained. The re-emergence of Polly of the childhood chapters has ended his correspondence and visits. The seven agonizing weeks as she awaits his letters in vain is lamented by Lucy,

> I underwent in those seven weeks bitter fears and pains, strange inward trials, miserable defections of hope, intolerable encroachments of despair....The letter–the well-beloved letter–would not come; and it was all of sweetness in life I had to look for (*Villette* 350).

The rapidly developed love-relationship between Doctor John and Paulina makes Lucy disillusioned by her vain hope of her one-sided love and the assumed contentedness in the role of a dependent woman. The fact that she is not endowed with either wealth or good looks makes her totally inadequate for Doctor John despite her love and sincerity. The disparity between Lucy and the Brettons and people of their class becomes clearer with the re-emergence of Paulina and her father. As a woman who has to support herself, Lucy can at times be part of their company but she can never truly be one among them. Her nature can never be known or understood by those she identifies as "people of sunshine", who enjoy life at concerts and dinner parties. They tend to lack depth in understanding those who agonize over their desolation and privations which they themselves have never experienced. Learning that Lucy had earlier suffered from "neurotic fever", Mrs. Bretton writes in a letter to Lucy, "I dare say you have been just as busy and happy as ourselves" (*Villette* 354). Paulina is surprised to be told that Lucy teaches for a living for she thinks Lucy, like herself, "was a rich lady, and had rich friends" (*Villette* 369). Doctor John tells Lucy that the eerie sight of the nun which Lucy has just confronted is but an illusion out of her "long-continual mental conflict" and the only cure he can recommend is "to cultivate happiness" (*Villette* 330).

Eventually, when Lucy realizes it is time to move on she decides to bury Doctor John's letters. The ceremonial burial of his letters, as well as her love for him, marks a level of her self-growth. In burying them she also intends to

bury the grief over her unfulfilled love. After the burial at a hole near the root of a giant pear-tree, Lucy has the feeling she had a year ago, on the evening she decided to leave for London: "I felt, not happy, far other wise, but strong with reinforced strength" (*Villette* 381). Despite Lucy's weaknesses, which are prompted by her desire for love, there reside in her remarkable insight and hidden strength which lead her away at times from morbidity and self-destruction and towards a better station in life.

Having thus experienced the pangs of unfulfilled love, Jane and Lucy both realize how weak they can become in attempting to fulfill their desire for love. Yet each of them is soon to enter another male-female relationship with another dominant male figure. While Lucy's attention shift from Doctor John to Paul Emanuel leads to a satisfying relationship, Jane is to enter another crisis when her autonomy is once again threatened by another powerful male figure, St. John River, to submit herself to his authority.

Before Jane encounters St. John, she experiences the most painful and agonizing journey of her life. Her escape from Thornfield leads her to an unknown place where she wanders for two days with no shelter and scarcely any food. The "hunger, faintness, chill" and sheer "desolation" (*Jane Eyre* 334) Jane feels signify the extent to which a woman in a patriarchal society must experience in striving to fulfill her necessities and be recognized (Gilbert and Gubar [1984], 364). This agonizing journey from an unrealized romantic dream renders experience significant to her self-growth, before she can again meet Rochester and finally be rewarded with a happy marriage.

Jane believes life will not spare her much longer as she struggles on the moor towards a light shining from "March End", the cottage belonging to St. John River and his sisters, and whose name could be symbolically interpreted as "the end of her march toward selfhood" (Gilbert and Gubar [1984], 364). It is St. John who finds Jane at his door-step and yet it is also he who also later drives her into another crisis. St. John represents a powerful male figure who devotes his life to religious purposes. He is determined to succeed in his spiritual pursuits by detaching himself from worldly attachments and hopes to ultimately sacrifice his life to his mission to India. Jane has sincere reverence for him but always feels threatened by his dogmatic authority. With him, she feels compelled to deny herself and adopt his standard of virtues which she cannot attain: "He wanted to train me to an elevation I could never reach: it racked me hourly to aspire to the standard he uplifted" (*Jane Eyre* 403). The crisis arrives when he asks her to accompany him to India as his wife. He declares that his proposal is not prompted by love but more so his noble aspirations to serve God. He tells Jane that her assistance as his wife, from whom he can claim total submission, will be "invaluable" for his mission. Jane finds it hard not to comply to his revered authority but dreads the idea of living the life of a dependent wife. As Jane contemplates St. John's proposal, she realizes that she could tolerate the hardship of a missionary life if her "heart and mind would be free"(*Jane Eyre* 412). But she resolves that "as his wife–at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked–forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital–this would be unendurable" (*Jane Eyre* 412). It is essential for Jane to be recognized as herself, to have certain independence and to love, but the role and duties St. John proposes she should take contradict all of this.

Eventually, she offers to accompany him as a sister in which condition she can still claim her autonomy. Jane's choice is strongly objected to by St. John who would rather own the traditional right of a husband to claim Jane's total submission.

In Brontë's portrayal of the two men in Jane's life, St. John is depicted in contrast to Rochester: while St. John is repressive and ambitiously devoted to his religious affairs, Rochester is passionate and has previously been involved in a number of love affairs. Rochester schemes to assure he wins Jane's heart and later thrusts on her a romanticized relationship and prospect of wifehood which threatens Jane's sense of self. St. John wants Jane to marry him and become a submissive wife who assists him devotedly in his religious pursuit. Both are presented as authoritative figures who try to overpower Jane in different ways.

In St. John's final attempt to make Jane comply in Vol. III, Chapter IX, he places his hand on Jane's head, as if hypnotizing her to submit to his will. Jane feels that his authority is almost irresistible and she compares it to that which she once felt under Rochester's power:

> I was almost as hard beset by him now as I had been once before, in a different way, by another. I was a fool both times. To have yielded then would have been an error of principle; to have yielded now would have been an error of judgment (*Jane Eyre* 423).

Jane thinks it is better to be true to herself and her moral sense than to be loved in an illusive paradise with Rochester where she will condemn herself. With St. John, Jane feels she has the right to retain her autonomy no matter how deeply she reveres him. She will devote herself to helping him if she is allowed to retain what she considers essential for herself. As Jane is about to yield to St. John, an inexplicable and rather dramatic phenomenon whereby Jane hears Rochester calling her name, releases her from St. John's power. She becomes herself once again and is free to return to the only man who has claimed her heart.

The novel allows such an extraordinary incident and the reunion of Jane and Rochester only because it is deemed that the two partners are now ready for it. By this time Jane has become an independent woman through a large sum of money she inherited from her uncle. Moreover, Rochester himself is not the same–his pride is hurt by being made blind and crippled from the fire set by his mad wife Bertha (Gilbert and Gubar [1984], 367). They soon marry but no longer are jewels or luxurious clothing necessary, "Never mind fine clothes and jewels, now: all that is not worth a fillip," (*Jane Eyre* 451) Rochester tells Jane. By the end of her quest, as far as the novel is concerned, Jane is rewarded with status and a happy marriage for not succumbing to temptations: she leaves Rochester to pursue her lonely quest which will win her a sense of righteousness and autonomy. Her life is seen as blissful, as she contemplates, ten years after her marriage, that

> I hold myself supremely blest–blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh (*Jane Eyre* 456).

Unlike Jane, in *Villette*, Lucy is not to be rewarded with a happy marriage at the novel's end but her desire for love is fulfilled when she is in love with Paul Emanuel. Although Lucy appeals to Paul early in the novel, their relationship begins to develop only in its second half, after Lucy has given up hope for Doctor John's attention. It is at this stage that Lucy is able to realize that Doctor John is not her match: she disapproves of his shallowness and insensitivity as he cannot see or understand women as they are and therefore can be so calloused as to hurt a woman deeply. It is also at this point that Lucy begins to realize and appreciate Paul's sensitivity and his caring and understanding of her.

Paul is a rather unique male protagonist; he is a curious blend of irritation, nastiness, generosity, conventionality and authority with a certain measure of flexibility. His character is drawn in a number of ways alike and contrary to Lucy who is insecure, sensitive, patient, rational and potentially strong. Their similarities and differences complement and support one another as they constitute a "rapport" from which a mutual love and understanding can be developed. Moreover, both Lucy and Paul see in one another a part of their nature which is imperceptible to others. Lucy sees in Paul saint-like virtues, the capacity to selflessly devote himself to those he loves who are in need of his support despite his potential to be mean to those he unreasonably contradicts. Paul is the only character who sees through Lucy's steadiness her originality,

sensitivity and haunted distress from her emotional needs. Like Lucy, Paul is solitary but his gender and abundant resources enable him to busy himself with various sorts of activities and interests which Lucy is prevented from. As shown in the novel, he is much more contented and balanced than Lucy who is often seen in distress and despair.

Although *Villette* shows the potential for Paul and Lucy's relationship to develop towards companionship through a level of trust and flexibility, the paradigm of male domination and female submission still prevails. Paul is another of Brontë's powerful protagonists who assumes a position of superiority over women, as when he appoints himself the role of Lucy's spiritual guardian aforementioned. Although Lucy shows her capacity to resist Paul's authority, this does not generally occur until Paul proves to be extremely irrational or unjust or when her submission becomes a threat to her identity. Their power relationship gradually develops a pattern of yielding-domination and resisting-compromise: Lucy generally yields to Paul's domination as long as her identity is not dented, but if it is, such as when Paul attempts to alter her religious beliefs, Lucy will resist, which makes Paul more flexible and compromising. Gradually, they develop trust and mutual love and understanding which is described by Lucy in such terms, "The jar was over; the mutual understanding was settling and fixing; feelings of union and hope made themselves profoundly felt in the heart; affection and deep esteem and dawning trust had each fastened its bond" (*Villette* 537).

Interestingly, there is in the character of Paul, more than any other of Brontë's male protagonists, a flexibility to compromise his male power to accept and encourage Lucy to be as she is. In *Villette*, male pride need not be hurt from

an additional incident, as seen in *Jane Eyre,* to make the male protagonist realize his follies and be more ready to recognize her as she is. Regarding their conflicting religious beliefs, for instance, Paul earlier attempted with his "feverish wish" to convert Lucy to Catholicism. He fails to change Lucy's faith and eventually leaves Lucy to believe in what she sees as part of herself: "Remain a Protestant. My little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in you. I own its severe charm. There is something in its ritual I cannot receive myself, but it is the sole creed for 'Lucy'" (*Villette* 595).

Lucy and Paul seem ultimately destined to be separated. Obstacles arise from those who do not want to lose Paul to Lucy. Madame Beck interferes out of her jealousy; his tutor Père Silas objects because of Lucy's religion; and Madame Walravens, the grandmother of his former love Justine Marie opposes because she wants to retain Paul's support by claiming his vow to be faithful to Justine who has long since died. The duty is then placed in Paul's hand to journey to the West Indies to take care of Madame Walravens' estate for three years after which Paul can clear himself from the responsibility and be free to marry Lucy as he wishes.

Before his journey Paul establishes a small school for Lucy which he discloses to her only the day before he sets off his journey. Paul derived the idea of the project from Lucy who told him of her dream to own a small school as a means to earn her living independently. As earlier discussed in chapter II, the fact that women earn small income and lack the necessary connections make it seems rather unlikely for Lucy to embark on the project on her own. But with Paul's effort and connections a house in the Faubourg Clotilde is rented at half of

its usual rate and is modified into a pretty home-school. As the landlord is intimate with Paul, his three daughters and Paul's own god-daughter will be the first pupils to enroll in the school.

What this house in the Faubourg Clotilde represents and offers is the "grail" in Lucy's quest. The house, which is "more symbol than material object", symbolizes Paul's "trust" and "acceptance" of Lucy's "right to independence" (Edwards 164). Paul's love, trust and support enable Lucy to feel secure and accepted, not only by Paul but also by herself. This house also provides an opportunity to make her life productive, occupying herself with independent work which is worthwhile for herself and others. The three years while Paul is away are considered by Lucy the happiest three years of her life. Lucy works hard and her school becomes a success:

> The secret of my success did not lie so much in myself, in any endowment, any power of mine, as in a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart. The spring which moved my energies lay far away beyond seas, in an Indian isle. At parting, I had been left a legacy; such a thought for the present, such a hope for the future, such a motive for a persevering, a laborious, an enterprising, a patient and a brave course–I could not flag. Few things shook me now; few things had importance to vex, intimidate, or depress me: most things pleased–mere trifles had a charm (*Villette* 594).

The hope for the future and an active independent life have altered Lucy and her perspectives. The formerly cold, insecure and solitary woman who often feels "a little shaken in nerves" no longer exists. The new Lucy is a successful

and capable directress who is now stable, hopeful and happy. Lucy who was once obscure is now recognized, loved and given a true home of which she feels part and where she can work independently.[4]

At the closure of *Villette*, Lucy is refused a fairy-tale-like happy marriage. Paul having drowned in a storm on his voyage back to Villette after three years leaves Lucy to live solitarily for the rest of her life, yet not unproductively. Lucy does not reveal to the readers how she lives her life after Paul's death but we perhaps can assume her stability from the fact which cannot be altered that she is well loved and enjoys a sense of belonging. Moreover Lucy has the means to occupy herself with independent and beneficial work, something Caroline in *Shirley* wishes, to save herself from distress, but never has the opportunity.

Brontë's depiction of the orphaned female protagonists in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* reveals effectively the sense of privation and need of women in a patriarchal society. Jane and Lucy reflect women's loneliness and need for love as they are isolated women who feel entrapped within a confinement where they cannot engage themselves in a more substantial way. They also reveal women's urgent need to support themselves with insufficient resources for any respectable work except teachers or governesses. But such careers offer women only other confined spheres of mundane routines which cannot fulfill their sense of desolation and void. While struggling for self-fulfillment without much prospects, Jane and Lucy become involved in relationships vital to their self-growth and fulfillment.

In *Jane Eyre,* Jane thinks that she has found what means to her life by loving Rochester. But loving him teaches her that independence, recognition of her identity, and a sense of self-respect are more important than merely loving and being loved. The significance of retaining one's identity and independence is affirmed through her second test with St. John in which she struggles to free herself from his domination. Jane's reunion with Rochester, which renders Jane a sense of self-fulfillment, is allowed only when they are ready for it: Jane is made independent by the endowment from her uncle while Rochester's pride is mitigated by being made blind and crippled.

In *Villette*, Lucy' extreme sense of isolation leads her to be involved in an unrequited love with Doctor John. As with Jane, the unfulfilled love reveals to her the peril of her own desires, of an urge to blindly depend on love and its illusive satisfaction. This experience, however, renders her a level of self-growth. Her second love with Paul Emanuel is vital to Lucy's self-fulfillment because with his love, trust and support Lucy feels she is accepted and connected. His support also provides her the means to independently earn her living with the dignity she deserves.

The exploration of the female protagonists' quest for independence, love and recognition reveal that both Jane and Lucy need to battle against men's power as well as their own inclination to subjugate themselves to men. These struggles render them the realization that self-identity and independence are essential to female selfhood. Jane and Lucy's urge to retain their self-identity and to acquire a level of independence can be judged as radically unfeminine in a society which extols women's selfless devotion to men. But both of them reveal

their traditional side, by the heroines' capacity to devote themselves to the male-counterparts, perhaps, just as well as an ideal traditional woman could do. The difference lies in the fact that Jane and Lucy are given recognition of their identity and an acceptance of their independence by the male counterparts while traditional females who entirely submerge themselves to male domination scarcely have a sense of their own individual selves.

Notes

1. Charlotte Brontë wrote in the "Biographical Notice" prefix to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* regarding the pseudonyms she and her sisters used that "Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our names under those of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell;...we did not like to declare ourselves women, because—without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called "feminine"—we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery which is not true praise". This is quoted by Inga-Stina Ewbank in *Their Proper Sphere* (London: Edward Arnold, 1966), p. 1.

2. Eva Figes remarks when discussing Jane's early life that "the childhood of Jane Eyre encapsulates the traumatic transformation which society imposes on the girl-child to turn her into an acceptable adult woman" in *Sex and Subterfuge: Women Novelists to 1850*, (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), p. 128.

3. The phrase is used by Françoise Basch in *Relative Creatures* (London: Allen Lane, 1974), p. 7

4. The idea that Lucy has found her true home in the house in the Faubourg Clotilde is suggested by Tony Tanner in his Introduction to *Villette* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 13.