

## Reading Animality in Lucy Snowe: Melancholy, Repression and Emotion in *Villette*

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Lucy Snowe, the heroine of *Villette* (1853), though often been regarded as a quintessential Brontë heroine, is a peculiar one, due to her extremely melancholic nature. As Rachel M Brownstein notes in *Becoming a Heroine: Reading about Women in Novels* (1982), while Lucy is born unloved and only learns how to respond openly at a later stage of her life as all the other Brontë characters do (180), she is also characteristically “obscure, ignored, repressed, yearning, self-obsessed, self-hating, self-tormenting,” because she is always “rejected and baffled” by others (169).

The examination of Lucy’s extremely self-restrictive nature and her “unreliable” narrative has been extensively conducted in feminist criticism. For example, Helen Moglen’s reading of *Villette* as Brontë’s autobiographical novel investigates the interconnection of “Lucy’s indirection, neurotic rationalization, and narrative ‘unreliability’” (196). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also note this fact and argue that the ghost of the nun further intensifies this connection, representing the gloomy image of “the only acceptable life available to single women” (426). Their argument demonstrates that Lucy’s “repression” (401) is linked with her narrative reticence and evasion. According to them, *Villette* is a story of “the Other” (440) in a society which is “cruelly indifferent to women” (401). Mary Jacobus’s psychoanalytical reading which focuses on Lucy’s repressive temperament and the image of the ghost of the nun in *Villette* also shows how Lucy’s self-division contributes to “the duality” of her narrative (58).

New approaches to the Brontës’ writings taken from medical humanities have greatly contributed to the study of *Villette*. As Sally Shuttleworth shows in *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (1996), this critical discipline has made it possible to examine of Lucy’s body in its relation to historical context. Athena Vrettos examines Lucy’s nervous disorder paying attention to cultural restraint. She argues that “a form of [Lucy’s] spiritual expression and repression”

(67) induces her mental illness, and that “Lucy channels both sexual and spiritual desire into disease” (68) through her relation to the uncanny ghost of the nun, the representation of her symptomatic mental state. Another example is Beth Torgerson’s “Hysteria, Female Desire and Self-Control in *Villette*” in *Reading the Brontë Body: Disease, Desire and Constraints of Culture* (2005), which closely examines how Lucy’s self-restrictive character induces physical illness. The study by Anna Krugovoy Silver has also made a valuable contribution to this discipline. In *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (2002), she argues that Lucy’s emotional repression induces anorexia and attributes her physical and mental disorder to the repressive patriarchal culture in Victorian Britain.

As the examples above show, the flourishing interest in literature and science has enhanced the understanding of Lucy’s subjectivity in relation to her body. However, it has not yet exhausted the topic of her repressed emotion. In this essay, I will show that close examination of Lucy’s intense emotion will provide a new viewpoint for a medical humanities approach to her body. By looking at the diagnostic explanations Lucy gives for her unstable mental state, I will consider the complexity of her attitude toward physicality. As the conclusion of this paper will demonstrate, this argument will present an important link between the medical humanities and an ecocritical approach in the study of Charlotte Brontë.

It has been argued that both Charlotte and Emily show interest in natural history in a different way. The established view is that Emily Brontë retained deep affection for wildness in the natural environment in Haworth while Charlotte and Anne did not. For example, clearly distinguishing Emily from Anne and Charlotte, Lisa Surridge notes that the works of the latter two authors depict human relationships which are supported by “the fundamentally anthropomorphic idea that the treatment of animals served to predict social responsibility in human relationships” (161). Butler Wood makes the case for Charlotte’s passion for nature, but only applies this to *Jane Eyre* (1847) (87). In order to develop these arguments, in this paper, by closely investigating Lucy’s emotional fluctuation which is clearly related to her mental illness, I will show that, in *Villette*, Brontë depicts a sense of physicality which drives the self to the natural world.

In the first section, I will look at how Lucy’s intense emotion induces her melancholy. In the second section, I will argue that its automatic affective

function is described as animalistic by Brontë. The discussion in the last section will then show that this animalistic character retains an affinity with the natural world.

## 1. Repression and Intensification: Lucy Snowe's Melancholic Emotion

In this section, I will show that Lucy's depressive condition is induced by her extremely emotional character and it causes a serious conflict with the Victorian andro-centric medical discourse. Firstly, however, I should explain the terms characters use to designate the depressive mental state in *Villette*, because some of them are slightly different from those we are familiar with nowadays. *Villette* applies the terms "melancholy," "depression" and even "hypochondria" almost interchangeably. Although the nineteenth century faced the revival of the concept of melancholy used in relation to Romanticism, this was more likely to be applied to men than women (Radden 15). *Villette* reflects a culture in which these three terms were used to describe the same condition in the Victorian period in Britain (Caldwell, "Mental Health" 344).

It is also important to note that Lucy's melancholy corresponds to the definition of "illness" by Arthur Kleinman. *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition* (1988), clearly distinguishes "illness" from "disease" and "sickness." Akiko Kawasaki points out that poor health conditions depicted in all the Brontë novels including works written by Emily and Anne present "illness" in this meaning (8). Kleinman argues as follows:

Illness is the lived experience of monitoring bodily processes such as respiratory wheezes, abdominal cramps, stuffed sinuses, or painful joints. Illness involves the appraisal of those processes as expectable, serious, or requiring treatment. The illness experience includes categorizing and explaining, in common-sense ways accessible to all lay persons in the social group, the forms of distress caused by those pathological processes. And when we speak of illness, we must include the patient's judgements about how best to cope with the distress and with the practical problems in daily living it creates. (3-4)

On the other hand, according to Kleinman, disease is a term which is used to

treat the patient's condition "as narrow technical issues, disease problems" (5) and sickness is "the understanding of a disorder in its generic senses across a population in relation to macrosocial (economic, political, institutional) forces" (6). According to this argument, Lucy's melancholia is classified as illness. After she is diagnosed as a patient suffering from depression by a doctor, she tries to cope well with her symptoms by using her self-analytical skills.<sup>1</sup>

Shuttleworth points out that *Villette* was written under the strong influence of Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, a French psychiatrist. Esquirol argues that women were physically more susceptible to mental illness because their excessive sexual desire can induce hallucinations, the typical symptom of insanity (quoted in Shuttleworth, 229-30). Noting that Dr. John Graham tells Lucy to administer emotional control and self-restraint to prevent her hypochondria from causing more hallucinations, Shuttleworth argues that medical notions spread by Esquirol appear to be the predominant medical discourse which Lucy and Dr. John adhere to in *Villette* (242).

The influence of Esquirol's theory on Brontë must have been strong. Elaine Showalter notes that *Villette* was written at the period of the introduction of "the moral management" of a new medical system which insisted on human rights for mentally disabled patients (69). Importantly, she argues that its enforcement dangerously blurred the boundary between sanity and insanity (69). Taking account of this historical background, Lucy's anxiety about her depression can be attributed to her fear of insanity. She considers that the ghost of the nun is an illusion invented by her melancholy (250), because at this time, it was believed that depression can induce insanity (Radden 16).

Furthermore, *Villette* shows how the oppressive force of patriarchal medical discourse is further intensified by the famously notorious image of "the angel of the house," an ideal model of women as perfectly immune to sexual desire. In this period, this image constantly functioned to enforce the struggle between "Reason" and "Feeling," which in Lucy's mind becomes a quintessential Victorian woman's mental conflict. In one scene, Lucy resorts to her "Reason" to prohibit herself from writing a letter to Dr. John fearing that it might release her passionate feeling. In this scene, she makes her Reason answer to her question, "But if I feel, may I never express?" by saying, "Never" (229)!

However, it is important to note that the repression she frequently applies reveals the fact that she is also a very passionate woman. This becomes clear

after the point in which Lucy tries to endure the stormy night at the empty school where she works as a teacher. During a long holiday, Lucy is left alone at school to look after a cretin student. She feels lonely because this girl is not able to communicate with her. The empty days increase Lucy's sense of isolation and make her both physically ill and depressive. She says, "... a day and night of peculiarly agonizing depression were succeeded by physical illness" (159) and finally determines to go out and make a confession at a Catholic church. Her illogical behavior shows her weakened rationality. She says "a want of companionship maintained in [her] soul the cravings of a most deadly famine" (158). It is clear that Lucy's distress overwhelms her. Her words, "my mind has suffered somewhat too much" (159) and "How shall I keep well?" (159) show her despair of controlling her intense emotion.

After Lucy is welcomed at Dr. John's home, to readers' eyes, it turns out that the person Lucy really wished to have interaction with is actually not a Catholic pastor but Dr. John himself. After she talks with the minister, on her way home, Lucy faints and is rescued by this very doctor; and recalling her old affectionate feeling for him in her dream, she impulsively calls out his name and wakes up at the house of Bretton. Importantly, this is the moment at which her narrative turns out to be unreliable, because this scene shows she knows that he is actually identical to John Graham Bretton. When she wakes up, she reveals this fact to him. She secretly wishes that John would find old Lucy among Labasscoreans but this does not happen until she tells this truth to him by herself. As Lucy's narrative turns out to be unreliable, an important fact is revealed to readers; it was actually the experience of repressing passion that leads her to depression during the vacation. Lucy's affectionate feeling toward Dr. John is so strong that it can make her distress almost intolerable, eventually making her mentally ill.

Shuttleworth points out that Lucy often uses Victorian medical terminologies (229) in order to describe the mysterious function of her emotion. One of these examples can be seen in the scene where Lucy tries to explain to herself what is happening to her mental state during the long holiday:

Three weeks of the vacation were hot, fair, and dry, but the fourth and fifth were tempestuous and wet. I do not know why that change in the atmosphere made a cruel impression on me, why the raging storm and beating rain crushed me with a deadlier paralysis than I had experienced

while the air remained serene: but so it was; and *my nervous system could hardly support what it had for many days and nights to undergo in that huge, empty house.* (Villette 157; emphasis added)

I really believe my nerves are getting over-stretched: my mind has suffered somewhat too much; a malady is growing upon it – what shall I do? How can I keep well? ... At last a day and night of peculiarly agonizing *depression* were succeeded by physical illness. (Villette 159; emphasis added)

Lucy regards the knowledge of Victorian medicine as useful and reliable. Later again, when she is diagnosed by Dr. John for “hypochondria,” she consents to his advice to avoid being alone as much as possible and to “take plenty of exercise” (183). The scene in which Lucy sees the ghost of the nun in the attic and accepts Dr. John’s judgement that what she saw was actually an illusion further confirms this fact. Using his words, “a case of spectral illusion” (249), Lucy asks him for his medical advice by saying, “Oh, Doctor John – I shudder at the thought of being liable to such an illusion! It seemed so real. Is there no cure – no preventive” (250)? Believing in the necessity of rational control, she is so seriously upset by his diagnosis that she sees a hallucination.

However, Lucy does not always approve of Victorian medical notions. She shows a skeptical attitude to Dr. John’s medical advice. In the following conversation in the same scene, when he recommends her to show emotional control in order to prevent more delusions, she declines to “cultivate happiness” and to make efforts to always possess “a cheerful mind” (250). Lucy does not believe Dr. John who states that he “does not give in to melancholy” and boldly says that he will never be “move[d]” even by any beautiful girl (250). In another scene too, when she is asked to describe how she fell into depression during the long holiday by this doctor, she casts doubts upon the effectiveness of medicine:

“What did Madame Beck mean by leaving you (Lucy) alone?”

“Madame Beck could not foresee that I should fall ill.”

“*Your nervous system bore a good share of the suffering?*”

“*I am not sure what my nervous system is, but I was dreadfully-low spirited.*” (Villette 183; emphasis added)

While Lucy believes Dr. John's notion that physical health is sustained by self-controlling skills, she also casts doubt upon this assumption. How should we interpret Lucy's contradictory attitude toward medical knowledge?

The cause of Lucy's inconsistency might be ascribed to her intense emotion. Lucy perceives what Dr. John says about her mental condition to be plausible, but considers that the implementation of self-control is not an effective cure for melancholy. This is not because she does not wish to comply but because she knows that she believes that she is not able to do so. While Lucy tries to acknowledge the effectiveness of clinical diagnosis, she also feels that perfect self-control is impossible. As we have seen in the stormy night during the vacation, her emotion sometimes becomes uncontrollable, functioning as if it is a living animal. She knows that not only loss of self-control but also failure to respect the autonomous function of emotion can result in mental disorder. Lucy is not only an obedient female character who tries to behave in the way men expect women to; she is also a woman who questions the patriarchal medical knowledge whose value is sustained by a practice of a self-management skill.

Shuttleworth attributes Lucy's "morbidty" (229) to a "Victorian social code which stressed that women retained their necessary 'innocence' only if they remained ignorant of sexual desire" (228). Torgerson argues that Brontë depicts "the social forces behind mental illness" (61) and regards the cause of Lucy's "hysterical episodes" as "[her] conflicting needs of self-control and expression" (60-61). Both of them argue that Lucy's repressive character causes depression and their views seem to be equally valid. However, I argue we should note another important fact: *Villette* shows that Lucy's melancholia is also induced by an intense emotion which is only peculiar to her.

In *Villette*, the relation between Lucy and her emotion not only makes her an eccentric and transgressive character but also presents her as a privileged person. At the concert scene, it is only Lucy who can see through into the melancholy which distresses the king of Labasscour. Even the professional medical man, Dr. John cannot interpret his symptoms. According to Vrettos, Lucy instantly notices the king's illness because she "interprets through sensibility rather than reason" (66). This event is later recollected by Lucy as follows:

Well do I recall that King – a man of fifty, a little bowed, a little gray: there

was no face in all that assembly which resembled his. I had never read, never been told anything of his nature or his habits; and at first the strong hieroglyphics graven as with iron stylet on his brow, round his eyes, beside his mouth, puzzled and baffled instinct. Ere long, however, if I did not *know*, at least I *felt*, the meaning of those characters written without hand. There sat a silent sufferer – a melancholy man. Those eyes had looked on the visits of certain ghost – had long waited the comings and goings of that strangest spectre, Hypochondria. (*Villette* 213)

Because Lucy's feeling is not actually placed in an inferior position to rational power, it is possible for her to see things with her inner eyes. She has a strong conviction that "doctors are so self-opinionated, so immovable in their dry, materialist views" (257). Lucy more firmly strengthens this thought when she meets Vashti, a singer whose performance impresses her, but fails to move Dr. John's heart.

The first half of *Villette* shows that Lucy's intense emotion induces melancholic condition and it provides her with a revolutionary point of view toward Victorian andro-centric medical discourse.<sup>2</sup> Lucy appears to accept medical knowledge which encourages regulation of her mind but she also holds the view that it can be counter-productive. Her attitude toward her emotional movement arouses an ambiguous attitude toward Victorian medicine in her; the educational lesson which she gains from depression is not the benefit of rational control but rather the necessity of abandonment of such an attitude.

## 2. Repression and Release: The Function of Lucy Snowe's Emotion

Lucy's conviction of the uncontrollability of emotion is strengthened later in the second half of the novel, when the reunion of Lucy and Dr. John increases her mental affliction until her encounter with M. Paul Emanuel, a French teacher who works at a school where Lucy teaches. Although this person makes her feel less lonely, he makes her mental states more uncontrollable and problematic. Lucy burns with yearning for him and this makes her an even more passionate person.

The ending of the former half of the story shows that Dr. John's medical diagnosis brings a result which he does not expect. Against his will, his kind

advice for Lucy becomes the cruelest remedy for her. Her depressive feeling which he tries to cure is what was originally induced by repression administered by Lucy herself in response to the affection which she felt for this very doctor. The reunion with Paulina Home further increases Lucy's emotional distress, because, as soon as they meet again in Villette, the now grown-up little Polly of Bretton starts attracting Dr. John. Importantly, the daughter of Mr. Home "who own[s] manly self-control" (14), Paulina is portrayed as a figure who is adept at controlling her emotion ever since she was a small child. On the night when small Paulina is left by Mr. Home at the family of Bretton, Lucy is surprised and says, "The little creature, thus left unharassed, did for herself what none other could do – contended with an intolerable feeling; and, ere long, in some degree, repressed it. That day she would accept solace from none; nor the next day: she grew more passive afterwards" (22). Lucy is surprised to find that little Paulina already possesses the skill of self-control required for Victorian women. Although she is merely a six-year-old girl, Paulina knows how to behave as a lady. Lucy further stresses this fact by noting that little Paulina's favourite routine was to serve at table when Graham has a meal or some tea.

One day, to Lucy, Paulina reports that she did something which Lucy was eager to do but was never able to: Paulina tells Lucy that she received a letter from John and wrote a response which does not contain any affectionate feeling to him. Paulina is a very clever and mature woman. She says that she did that because she knew that "Graham's tastes are so fastidious" (375). This episode shows that she knows how she should behave in order to attain John's love and that what Paulina fears the most is her failure to conform to the social norm. In this conversation, Paulina says to Lucy, "... you know you would despise me if I failed in self-control ...." (373). Lucy is disappointed in her love for Dr. John and this is because she cannot be like Paulina. In chapter 26, titled as "A Burial," lamenting "indeed, long pain had made patience a habit" (294), "in melancholic moods" (295), Lucy goes out and buys "a metal box" (295) to bury letters written by Dr. John to her (295).<sup>3</sup> Showing her self-controlling management, she uses a material object to completely throw away her affection toward him. However, the ostentatious manner of this ritual rather reveals her complicated character. Her melodramatic behavior shows she actually gives way to her feelings.

After this painful event, Lucy and Paul become closer. While Lucy learns

the necessity of self-control from Dr. John, she takes a completely opposite lesson from Paul. This is the stage where she becomes the most passionate person since secretive Lucy recognizes that this French teacher provokes intense feeling in her mind. When she misunderstands that Paul has a fiancée, she says, “I think I never felt *jealousy* till now. This is not like enduring the endearments of Dr. John and Paulina, against which while I sealed my eyes and my ears, while I withdrew thence my thoughts, my sense of harmony still acknowledged in a charm” (*Villette* 468; emphasis added). It is important that Lucy’s words here suggest that she is trying to place her attachment to Paul higher than that she used to hold for Dr. John. The more passionate Lucy becomes, the truer and more intense her affection. When Madame Beck tries to take away the last chance allowed for Paul and Lucy to exchange words, Lucy’s rational force yields to her emotion and makes her confess her feeling to him, directly expressing her emotional affliction for the first time: “Pierced deeper than I could endure, *made now to feel what defied suppression*, I cried – “My heart will break!” What I felt seemed literal heart-break ...” (*Villette* 481; emphasis added).

Lucy clearly also differentiates her emotional movement from those of Paulina and this doctor. Her narrative clearly shows that she regards their feelings as inferior to her own. Her narrative clearly shows that she regards their feelings as inferior to that of her. Even though she gives her own blessing to Paulina and Dr. John, she cannot help noting the lack of life in their relationship:

Graham had a wealth of mirth by nature; Paulina possessed no such inherent flow of *animal spirits* – unstimulated, she inclined to be thoughtful and pensive – but now she seemed merry as a lark; in her lover’s general presence, she glowed like some soft glad light. (*Villette* 423; emphasis added)

Lucy states that the affectionate feeling which is shared by Dr. John and Paulina is devoid of ‘*animal spirits*,’ showing that she is well aware that her emotion is more untamable and problematic. In fact, Lucy self-consciously knows it can function as if it is an untamable animal. In chapter 24, when she is waiting for John’s letter, Lucy depicts her feeling as follows: “I suppose *animals* kept in cages, and so scantily fed as to be always upon the verge of famine, await their food as I awaited a letter” (*Villette* 268; emphasis added). Her words show that

she understands the nature of her uncontrollable emotional function.

The adjective “animal” is a term not only relating to or characteristic of living creatures but also relating to sensation and basic feelings of people. According to the *OED*, the latter meaning, “designating the functions of the brain and nerves” is established as early as 1400 and still used until today. Yet, the way Lucy uses the term, animal, is neither of the two. Because she applies this term to describe the desire deriving from her strong sense of lack of affectionate feeling in Dr. John, Lucy uses “animal spirits” as “animalistic spirit” in an almost interchangeable way. In *Villette*, Lucy’s emotional function is depicted as peculiar and strange because it is associated with animals and because it serves as an outlet for the physicality of her “*animalistic spirit*.” Although Paulina too actually once likens her affection toward Dr. John to “an animal athirst” (375), the characteristic of her emotional movement is rather grounded on her self-controlling skill. This is the reason why Lucy adds a slight spiteful nuance in her blessing on Dr. John and Paulina by making a reference to a living emotional function which is described as “animal spirits.” Because the main plot of this story depicts Lucy’s failure to achieve happiness, it can be also said that the structure of *Villette* also encourages readers to value the quality of her emotional turbulence more highly than that of the passive conformity of Dr. John and Paulina.

The depiction of Lucy’s intense emotion might be attributed to Charlotte Brontë’s own experience as a patient of depression. As it is well known, *Villette* was actually written during a period when Brontë suffered from a severe sense of solitude which was brought by the successive deaths of her beloved sisters, Anne and Emily (Juliet Barker 827). Furthermore, because Brontë often unexpectedly turned ill, she frequently talked about the difficulty of maintaining mental and physical stability in her letters. For example, to one of her friends, she confides: “I soon found that the constant demand on my stock of my animal spirits reduced them to the lowest state of exhaustion; at times I felt – and, I suppose, seemed – depressed” (quoted in Elizabeth Gaskell 138). These episodes show that Brontë was adept at describing her melancholy from an objective point of view to others (Todd and Hewhurst 215). Lucy’s uncontrollable irrational aspect which induces depression and its animalistic feature could be ascribed to the difficulty of maintaining health which was experienced by the author herself.<sup>4</sup>

One female figure in particular functions to show the superiority given to

Lucy's hyper-sensitive temperament. This is Ginevra Fanshawe, an English girl who sails to Villette on the same ship with Lucy. At first, Dr. John is attracted by this beautiful girl, but she cruelly turns down his affection. Ginevra hates his paternalistic "extreme kindness" in which he idealizes her as a "delicate" female figure (148), because she does not wish to present herself as a regulated woman, the type represented by Paulina. As she boldly states, "[m]y present business is to enjoy youth, and not to think of fettering myself, by promise or vow, to this man or that" (92), she rather loves freedom and enjoys emotional release. Lucy says that she often finds Ginevra's frank attitude somehow eases her sensitive mind and she somehow cannot dislike this openly free-spirited girl. Lucy's narrative shows that the emotional function which overwhelms rational force presented in the association with animals is actually the expression of natural physicality. While Lucy can release it to Paul, she cannot help trying to repress it in front of John and Paulina who believe in the value of self-restraint. Her intense emotion is the Other to Victorian medical and scientific discourses. The imagery Lucy uses to depict this sense of physicality shows that she considers the autonomous affective function as an element which should be rather described as animality in human.

### 3. The Animalistic Nature of Lucy Snowe's Emotion

As we have seen, it seems that, in *Villette*, the image of an animal is effectively used to show Lucy's acute sensibility. However, this requires a close examination, because Lucy actually applies this metaphor to describe some other people's inferiority as well as her own transgressive passion.

In *Villette*, the association between automatic affective function and an animal is also used to impair human dignity. Lucy intentionally resorts to the negatively sounding image of physicality to describe another character's inferiority in the above mentioned long holiday in which she had to stay alone with a student with a disability. In order to recount her sense of discomfort of being left with a crétin, Lucy declares that "[I]t was more like being prisoned with a strange tameless animal, than associating with a human being" (*Villette* 157). Because all this girl asks, "food," "sunshine," and "fire" are things desired by her somatic impulses, Lucy views her almost sub-human. Keenly feeling the necessity of self-regulation, she regards a body which cannot enforce rational

control with apparent disdain. Should we consider that her reference to animality is made by her carelessness or capriciousness?

In *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*, Anna Krugovoy Silver examines an important link between the emotional-management skill and the necessity of placing appetite under control in Victorian Britain. Silver argues that it is extremely important for women in this period to show the “incorporeality” of their bodies and to present themselves as free from “physicality including sexuality” (9). In her examination of *Villette*, Silver notes that Lucy is a conventional heroine in terms of her self-management. She points out that Lucy possesses a slender body which symbolizes the “lovelessness of her emotionally repressed life” (Silver 100). However, Silver also points out Lucy’s unconventional aspect in her relation to these principles. She argues that Lucy finally overcomes this cultural restriction when her feeling of voidness and distress at repression is finally healed by Paul’s affection and they celebrate their union by having a “paradisaical supper” together (104). Silver demonstrates that Lucy effectively uses a negatively sounding image of physicality, that of a starved animal, to describe the intensity of her passionate emotion. It is so irresistible that Lucy associates it with an inferior entity such as uncontrollable physical desire. However, she eventually overcomes its negative connotation at the point where her emotional character distinguishes her from others and unites Lucy with Paul. In the ending of *Villette*, Lucy’s animalistic spirit is incorporated in the physicality of the self and contributes to strengthen the body of the subject.

The interrelation of appetite and feeling in Lucy’s peculiarly passionate character can also be the key to understand some critical comments on *Villette* during Brontë’s period. Matthew Arnold shows a strong dislike for this work, and so does Harriet Martineau. The former harshly criticizes *Villette*, commenting that Brontë’s mind contains “nothing but hunger, rebellion and rage” (quoted in Allott 201). Martineau also notes that, in *Villette*, “all the female characters, in all their thoughts and lives, are full of one thought – love” (254). Brontë’s response to these criticisms suggests that she believes that the value of her work resides in the very things which the two authors found extremely disagreeable. She refuses Martineau’s comment, noting as follows: “I know what love is as I understand it – & if man or woman should feel ashamed of feeling such love – then is there nothing right, noble, faithful, truthful, unselfish on this earth as I comprehend

rectitude, nobleness, fidelity, truth, & disinterestedness.” (Smith 118)

That said, however, it is also highly likely that Lucy’s emotion is intensified to a level which even the author may not have expected. As frequently noted, Brontë often applies her phrenological knowledge in her fictions and *Villette* is not an exception. Lucy criticizes the lazy and ignorant nature of her Catholic students and Rosine, Madame Beck’s maid and even Madame Beck by applying terminologies such as “Philoprogenitive” (101) and observing the form of their skulls. Lucy’s desire to rise in the world also shows that she considers this quasi-scientific knowledge as effective and applicable. In nineteenth-century England, this discipline which had been well assimilated into Protestant culture both promoted and ascertained man’s progress achieved by the repression of inferior propensities associated with animals. In *The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects* (1828), George Comb, a pioneering professional phrenologist, argues for the importance of this knowledge for the formation of character as follows:

According to the phrenological theory of human nature, the faculties are divided into Propensities common to man with the lower animals, Sentiments common to man with the lower animals, Sentiments proper to man, and Intellect. ... The faculties, in themselves, are mere instincts; the moral sentiments and intellect are higher instincts than the animal propensities. Every faculty is good in itself, but all are liable to abuse. Their manifestations are right only when directed by enlightened *intellect* and moral sentiment. (28-29)

Comb considers that “animal propensities” should be placed under rational forces. Therefore, it can be said that Lucy’s affirmative attitude toward the animality of affective function is seriously contradicted by her way of viewing others.

Furthermore, the (seemingly) tragic ending can also appear to testify to this fact. The violent storm and Lucy’s final silence implies the death of Paul and this shows that the happiness achieved through her emotional release is eventually nullified as she reverts back into a repressive and secretive figure. Whether Brontë depicted Lucy’s regression from the need to compromise with Victorian readers or not is actually unclear.

Yet, even so, I would argue that it is possible to admire the image of Lucy's self which is released from emotional restraint. Compared with Jane Eyre, the other female narrator-character in Charlotte Brontë's fiction, Lucy's affirmative attitude toward her inferior aspect which is associated with the image of a wild animal can be interpreted as the protagonist's great achievement. In *Jane Eyre*, as Gilbert and Gubar argue, the death of Bertha Mason who was Jane's alter ego was brought about by Jane's symbolical rejection (362), and, as Gayatri Spivak severely criticized, this was done by presenting Bertha as "not-yet-human Other" (247). Jane's recognition of Bertha as an animal-like figure and the fact that Jane's violent nature is described as "an animal" (239), shows that her own spiritual-growth is done on a smaller scale than that of Lucy.<sup>5</sup>

I would also like to note the benefit of the recognition of a self whose physicality derives from somatic sensations. This is making a significant contribution to the conceptualization of the happy ending presented in *Villette* by associating the subject with the natural world. The image of the life at Faubourg Clotilde where Lucy and Paul have a feast to celebrate their future anticipates both physical and mental wholesomeness for the two. Although the image of marriage life presented here might seem to merely embody the conventional end of a fairy tale, the uniformity achieved at the end of *Villette* is significantly different from Brontë's other novels whose protagonists are female characters.

*Jane Eyre* ends with the description of Jane and Mr. Rochester in Ferndean, a manor house located in the deep wood. Jane tells her readers that Rochester's health improved and she became a mother of a boy. Yet, from her narrative, the passionate tone is carefully removed. As Jane says "[a] quiet wedding we had" (448), she stresses the virtue of restraint of excitement and represses that part of her physicality. The ending of *Shirley* (1849) is also for some reason ruined by a somewhat reproachful tone of the third-person narrative voice deploring the change of Fieldhead Hollow: "A lonesome spot it was – and a bonny spot – full of oak trees and nut trees (542)." Caroline Helstone, a meek and slender feminine heroine in this novel, attains Robert Moore's love after he suffers and survives his illness which temporarily makes him feminized at a physical level (Silver 98). However, the last conversation between the two implies that there exists a slight difference in the image of the ideal nurturing life between them. Robert's plan to transform a copse which produces "blue hill-country air" (540) into firewood and to pour waters from a valley bewilders Caroline. *Shirley*

reflects the environmental issue of land preservation which was an important concern during the period (Gates 257). The industrialization promoted by masculine capitalistic power in this novel implies the difficulty of establishing symbiotic relation between humans and nature.

On the other hand, Faubourg Clotilde as it is prepared for Lucy and Paul offers a realized image of ideal human life.

This balcony was in the rear of the house, the gardens of the faubourg were round us, fields extended beyond. The air was still, mild, and fresh. Above the polars, the laurels, the cypresses, and the roses, looked up a moon so lovely and so halcyon, the heart trembled under her smile; a star shone subject beside her, with the unemulous ray of pure love. In a large garden near us, a jet rose from a well, and a pale stature leaned over the play of waters. (488)

The humble but healthy meal – “the chocolate, the rolls, the plate of fresh summer fruit, cherries and strawberries bedded in green leaves” (488) – which Paul and Lucy enjoy together here corresponds to his letters from West Indies which function as “real food that nourished, living water that refreshed” (494). Lucy’s conjugal life anticipates physical wholesomeness and this is the image which can be achieved by the subjects whose animalistic spirit functions as physicality, or, in other words, as animality in human being. The trees in the garden of their house, and the plentiful supply of fruits and fields expanding beyond their house, show the happy life which ensures Lucy and Paul’s physical wholesomeness requires the harmony of culture and nature.<sup>6</sup>

*Villette* and Brontë’s other two novels show the difficulty of the acquisition of the sense of natural physicality which women faced in Victorian Britain. At this period, the ideal of health as acquired by a control of emotional function promoted the negative image of physicality. From *Villette*, we can see that medical and scientific discourses and an andro-centric political discourse made it difficult for women to pursue mental and physical wholesomeness which is established upon the harmonic relation between humans and the world of nature. We might be able to say that the metaphor of an animal which represents physicality as inferior entity in this fiction, functions as the anthropological machine, a term which Giorgio Agamben presents in *The Open* (2002), which

denotes a political discourse which “functions by excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from itself, that is, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human” (37) in a society. Through Lucy’s emotional fluctuation and skeptical attitude toward nineteenth-century medical discourse, Brontë reaches a standpoint which allows her to reassess the term “animalistic.” She seems to have considered that the apparent inferiority of physicality could make both a human inhuman and transform a human into something better..

\*This is a revised version of the paper read at the annual conference of the Brontë society of Japan held at Chuo University, 14th October 2017.

### Notes

1 Another possible reading Lucy’s emotional state is to apply Sigmund Freud’s and Melanie Klein’s notion of melancholy and mourning. In *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, Kate Flint notes that both of these concepts are found in Lucy’s condition (190).

2 This viewpoint Lucy Snowe attains through introspection enables the patient to resist the cultural meaning given to his or her own condition, as expounded by Susan Sontag in *Illness as Metaphor* (3). Shuttleworth similarly argues, “The construct of ‘Lucy’ is not a unified mental entity, located within a physiological frame, but rather a continuous process which extends beyond the confines of the flesh.” (240)

3 Vrettos notes that “Lucy seeks containers – boxes, bottles, drawers, desks – to express her conflicting sense of restriction and release. Embodying systematic acts of sexual, emotional, and physical repression, Lucy’s spaces allow her to organize and corporealize her psyche when it is threatened by nervous disorder.” (61-62)

4 In another letter which was written on the 28th of July in 1852, the period when she was working on *Villette*, she also uses “animal spirits” to designate a physical system which works outside of her control: “The warm weather and a visit to the sea have done me much good physically; but as yet I have recovered neither elasticity of animal spirits, nor flow of the power of composition” (quoted in Gaskell 409).

5 The examination of the motif of *bildungsroman* in Charlotte Brontë’s novels has been extensively conducted. The image of the inner conflict between reason and emotion appears in all of her fictions.

6 Surridge argues that Victorian middle-class people started to promote “the prohibition the cruel treatment of animals” (Harriet Ritvo 131) in order to show their morally respectable character to others (161). Lucy’s affirmative attitude toward her

animalistic spirit in human nature might anticipate this “critical anthropomorphism” (Keri Weil).

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