

**“I Have an Inward Treasure Born with Me:” Positive and
Negative Aspects of Being a Strong Female Figure in
Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and *Villette***

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this present paper is to examine how, despite facing several challenges and struggles during their respective narratives, the two female protagonists of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853) are able to develop into autonomous female figures and find their narrative voice, while also experiencing the power of sisterhood. The primary theoretical background of the thesis will be provided by Feminist Studies and Psychoanalytic Studies. In the analytical chapters, I will use the method of close reading and comparative analysis.

In the first chapter, I will provide a theoretical framework for the analysis of the two novels and their heroines. I will cover in detail the main concepts of Victorian morality, the position of the governess in the Victorian household, and the emergence and significance of female authors of the period, including Charlotte Brontë.

In the second chapter, I will provide an in-depth analysis of the characters of Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, including their contrasting developments into autonomous female protagonists, the differences in their narrative voices, and how they both reach personal fulfillment and empowerment by the end of their respective narratives.

In the third chapter of the thesis, I will analyze the importance of the two heroines' female educator identities in their character developments.

Finally, in the fourth and last chapter of this paper, I will analyze the role of different female figures in the lives of Jane and Lucy, as well as the power of sisterhood the protagonists experience through their relationships with these characters.

The thesis will conclude with pointing out that the various perspectives I examine provide a more nuanced understanding of Jane's and Lucy's character, including their position as strong female figures. In short, I will state that their respective journeys reflect women's enduring search for agency and self-fulfillment.

I ESTABLISHING CONTEXT

This chapter provides information regarding the creation of the two novels, as well as a theoretical framework for their analysis. Therefore, I will devote space to the exploration of Victorian morality and the concept of the “Angel in the House,” the role of the governess in nineteenth-century British society, and Charlotte Brontë’s position within the canon of English literature.

I.1 GENDER NORMS IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN

The Victorian era, spanning from 1837 to 1901, was characterized by profound social, economic, and political transformations that reshaped British society and laid the groundwork for modernity. One of the most significant developments of this period was the rise of the middle class, a burgeoning social class composed of professionals, entrepreneurs, and industrialists who rose to prominence amid the rapid industrialization and urbanization that characterized the era.

The rise of the middle class brought about a lot of changes within Victorian society, fundamentally altering the social hierarchy and power dynamics of the time. “Generally, with the rapid increase of wealth generated by the industrial revolution, status was fluid and increasingly dependent on the manipulation of social signs” (Langland 293). Members of the middle class gained access to education, career, and political participation, which was previously reserved for the aristocracy and the landed gentry.

During this era, morality and social norms played a central role in shaping the behavior of members of society, particularly concerning appropriate gender roles. Rooted in the prevailing ideologies of the time, nineteenth-century society imposed rigid standards upon men and women, defining their roles within the domestic sphere and the broader social hierarchy. Middle-class values of propriety, sobriety, and domesticity became increasingly influential, shaping cultural norms and expectations surrounding family life, gender roles, and public behavior. The middle-class home became a symbol of status and aspiration, characterized by cleanliness, orderliness, and respectability.

Central to Victorian notions of domesticity and femininity was the concept of the “Angel in the House,” popularized by Coventry Patmore’s poem of the same title from 1854. This notion involved an idealized image, according to which women were selfless, nurturing, and submissive beings whose primary purpose was to fulfill the needs and desires of their husbands and families. Therefore, the Angel was characterized by her purity, piety, and domestic virtues, embodying the Victorian ideal of feminine perfection.

However, one can argue that the Angel's submissive role within the household was extended beyond mere symbolism to encompass crucial political functions. As Elizabeth Langland claims, the concept of the Angel obscures the significant economic and political roles performed by women within the household, as the wife played a substantial function by managing finances, contributing to her husband's business endeavors, and maintaining the family's social and political status (290-291). While her contributions to the household economy were often overlooked or undervalued, the Victorian woman's ability to stretch limited resources and budget effectively, and ensure the smooth running of the household was significant in maintaining the family's financial stability and social standing.

At the same time, while it is important to point out that the Angel was, by and large, her own mistress in the home where she was tasked with managing the household and the servants, I would argue that this assumed power only perpetuated restrictive gender roles and social expectations. For many middle-class women, particularly for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds or without substantial familial support, marriage did not guarantee financial security or personal fulfillment. Consequently, contrary to the customary narrative of domestic bliss, numerous women were compelled to seek employment outside the home due to economic necessity or lack of suitable marriage prospects. Additionally, some women actively rejected the limits of domesticity and sought fulfillment and independence beyond the traditional roles prescribed to them by society. Among others, Elaine Showalter sheds light on this particular aspect of the Angel's overvalued image: "[t]he Angel in the House commands that their existence should be avoided, denied, or suppressed" (210).

Thus, while the myth of the "Angel in the House" may have epitomized the idealized Victorian wife, it is essential to recognize the limitations of this image and the diverse realities of women's lives during the nineteenth century. Many women faced economic, social, and personal challenges that precluded them from conforming to traditional gender roles, while others actively went against social expectations and pursued alternative paths to fulfillment and autonomy. Therefore, understanding the complexities of women's experiences in Victorian society is necessary for appreciating the diversity of female agency and women's aspirations.

1.2 STRUGGLES OF THE GOVERNESS AS REPRESENTED IN LITERATURE

The concept of the governess figure appears in the works of Charlotte Brontë, reflecting both her own experience and the social realities of Victorian England. As the educated daughter of a clergyman, Brontë was intimately familiar with the struggles and challenges faced by governesses, as her sisters Emily and Anne also experienced periods of employment while

assuming this role. Charlotte Brontë's own brief period as a governess further deepened her understanding of the peculiarities of this position, providing inspiration for her novels.

The rise of the Victorian governess went parallel with the changing dynamics of Victorian society, including shifts in education, gender roles, and social mobility. With the rise of the middle-class and the increasing importance placed on education, more and more families sought educated governesses to provide their children with a well-rounded education. Tasked with the education and supervision of the children of the household, the educated governesses provided instruction in a wide range of subjects, including foreign languages, literature, music, and proper social manners.

However, governesses occupied a precarious position within the household hierarchy, neither fully members of the family nor considered equal to the servants. Nora Gilbert describes this ambiguous position as one that encouraged isolation, with a nod also to Virginia Woolf's famous text, *A Room of One's Own*: "[b]ecause she found herself in a social standing abyss, 'inferior' to the family she worked for but 'superior' to her employer's housemaids, cooks, footmen, et al., the governess's free time was not uncommonly spent on her own – even, more specifically, in a room of her own" (456).

This ambiguous status often led to feelings of alienation and vulnerability among governesses, who also faced low wages, long working hours, and limited opportunities for further advancement. Gilbert connects this sense of isolation to the practice of writing, and she claims that governesses, primarily reliant on letter writing for external communication, turned to various literary forms, such as journals, poems, and even novels to express their perspectives; and, as public interest in the governess figure expanded, some of these works were published, which increasingly influenced how governesses were perceived by Victorian society (456). However, the literary endeavors of the governesses also had a largely unwanted and rather problematic result, as "[i]t was felt to be threatening on a local level, by the families that sensed they were being observed by an educated outsider who spent the majority of her free time cordoned off with a pen and paper" (Gilbert 479).

As a governess, Charlotte Brontë experienced many of the hardships and inequalities employed women had to face in Victorian society, which prompted her to write. Brontë and her younger sister, Anne, began their careers as resident governesses in 1839, but neither had any affection for the position, as Charlotte expressed her own disdain openly in her private correspondence (Gilbert 461). Later, both sisters drew inspiration from their years as governesses, which they channeled into *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *Jane Eyre* (1847). To some extent, *Jane Eyre* reflects Charlotte's own experiences and observations as a governess, offering

another nuanced portrayal of the challenges faced by governesses and women in general in Victorian society.

For nineteenth-century women, particularly for those being employed as governesses, writing offered a sanctuary from their everyday lives. Based on her research, Showalter suggests that these women, lacking experience by definition available and granted to men, often found limited opportunities for self-expression, which elevated writing as a crucial creative outlet for them (213). Governed by strict social expectations and often marginalized within the households where they worked, writing offered them to rise above these limitations, offering a space where they could assert their agency, voice their perspectives, and explore their thoughts and emotions.

I.4 CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S PROTO-FEMINIST LITERARY IMPACT

Charlotte Brontë, a prominent nineteenth-century English novelist, occupies a central position in the history of English literature due to her profound exploration of women's experiences in Victorian England. Her work reflects the concerns of several of her contemporary female novelists, including the depiction of complex social norms, female agency, and the pursuit of independence. Brontë's literary contributions, along with those of her sisters Emily and Anne, challenged the norms of the era and provided a platform for the emergence of female novelists as significant voices in the literary landscape of the time.

The rise of female novelists like the Brontë sisters was of revolutionary importance. These authors addressed issues of class, gender, and sexuality that had long been underrepresented in mainstream literature. Charlotte Brontë's novels, in particular *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, stand out as prime examples of her ability to explore the psychological and emotional dimensions of her female protagonists, providing a nuanced understanding of their struggles and desires. *Jane Eyre*, published in 1847 under the pseudonym Currer Bell, is a seminal work that epitomizes Brontë's feminist consciousness. I agree with Dutta who claims that with the character of Jane, "a strong minded [sic!] heroine emerged as an assertive and individualist personality – one who could move the plot along and dramatise the main concerns of the novel" (2312). No wonder that *Jane Eyre* was considered to challenge traditional gender roles through presenting a narrative in which a woman's voice is integral to the plot.

Villette, published in 1853, further solidified Brontë's position as a pioneer in women's literature. I share the view of Robert A. Colby, who points out that the significance of *Villette* lies in its ability to allow one not only to trace the trajectory of Brontë's literary evolution to its culmination (410) but to also illustrate the progression of the nineteenth-century novel by

connecting the elements of Romanticism and the Gothic with Victorian realism (417). Among other features, the novel is notable for its exploration of psychological complexity in the portrayal of its heroine, Lucy Snowe, who grapples with issues of identity and possibilities of independence while navigating a foreign culture. Brontë's representation of Lucy as an individual striving for self-determination in the face of social norms underscores the author's commitment to exploring the complex experiences of women in the nineteenth century.

II THE PERSONALITIES OF JANE EYRE AND LUCY SNOWE

Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe stand as emblematic figures in Victorian literature, as both of them represent the struggles and triumphs that one associates with the era's female protagonists. At first glance, their narratives appear intertwined by a thread of commonality; yet, beyond the shared experiences lie profound distinctions in their characters and journeys. In what follows, I will explore Jane's and Lucy's characters: I will highlight the parallels, but most importantly, the contrasts between their respective personalities and narrative voices.

One of the most striking similarities between Jane and Lucy lies in their shared experience as orphans, a circumstance that serves as the genesis of their respective journeys. In fact, their status as orphans, bereft of fortune or favorable prospects, propels them towards seeking employment in order to become self-sufficient and to survive. As Philip Momberger claims, "the world gives the Brontë hero nothing; [she] is defined – and becomes aware of [herself] – in terms of what [she] lacks" (354). Accordingly, Jane begins her journey towards self-awareness with her role as a teacher at Lowood following her education there, while Lucy serves as the nurse-companion to the wealthy and unmarried Miss Marchmont¹ after the assumed death of her family. However, at this point, their fates take distinct paths due to their disparate motivations and circumstances: while Jane is inspired by the example of Miss Temple's marriage to seek new challenges and opportunities elsewhere, Lucy is compelled to find alternative employment following Miss Marchmont's passing. As Colby points out the distinction between the various inspirations present behind the two protagonists' actions, "[l]ike Jane Eyre, Lucy is removed from a passive, secure, sheltered existence into the active arena of moral conflict, but whereas Jane voluntarily takes up the challenge of a new life, Lucy is forced to" (413-414). This initiates the first distinction between Jane and Lucy I will examine, that is, the difference in their willingness to be active participants in their own lives, while I will also mention some of the underlying motivations driving their actions.

Jane, both in her childhood and adulthood, emerges as a strong-minded and resolute female character, who, as Showalter mentions, is "the heroine of fulfillment" (112). From her tumultuous upbringing at the Reed household on, Jane displays an unwavering strength of mind and soul, refusing to succumb to the oppressive forces that seek to subdue her. One finds references to this aspect of her personality already at the beginning of the novel, when Jane

¹ Miss Marchmont is a paralyzed and affluent lady living in the same street as Lucy and her late family. As Miss Marchmont is bound to her sickroom, she offers a position to Lucy as her caretaker. The night before her death, she confesses to Lucy that her love, a man named Frank, died tragically before they could marry; therefore, she never married another.

describes her emotions in great detail and establishes her character as that of a passionate and courageous child. For instance, the scene in which she first voices her problems and stands up for herself in front of the tyrannical Mrs. Reed, her aunt by marriage, is a perfect example of how important righteousness is for Jane. As Showalter points out, “[h]er adolescence is marked first by her sudden and unprecedented revolt against the Reeds, a self-assertiveness that incurs severe punishment and ostracism, but also wins her freedom from the family” (113-114). In fact, despite her earnest efforts to assimilate into the Reed family and win their affection, Jane is repeatedly met with unrelenting rejection and judgment, and this is the alienation that drives her to stand up for herself to the family. In the scene I have mentioned, the young Jane “wins her freedom” by vehemently denying the accusations of Mrs. Reed, who has portrayed her as a liar and a deceitful child in front of Mr. Brocklehurst, the headmaster of the Lowood Institution. Furthermore, Jane also seems adamant in revealing her resentment in connection with the Reed family, and vows to reveal the mistreatment she has endured by them to anyone she might encounter (Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 36-37).² However, at the end of this scene, Jane also voices her primary source of distress and misery: “[y]ou think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so” (Brontë, *JE* 37). Through this, Jane expresses not only her ability to assert her worth and autonomy in the face of oppression but also her need for emotional connection, and for affection. Therefore, I share the view of John Hagan, who argues that “Jane is deprived of that love without which her freedom cannot be attained” (354), and the declaration that she “cannot live” without “one bit of love or kindness” further underscores the significance of emotions and validation in her life.

After leaving Gateshead, Jane’s pursuit of connection and affection remains an essential part of her character, guiding her decisions and shaping her relationships. Although she eventually learns to discipline her fiery temper due to the influence of Helen Burns and Miss Temple in Lowood, Jane’s feelings continue to serve as potent catalysts for her actions on numerous occasions throughout the narrative. For instance, in the scene when Rochester reveals the history of his ill-fated marriage to Bertha Mason, he offers Jane the “opportunity” to become his mistress. For a moment, Jane is tempted to accept this illicit proposal under the influence of Rochester’s passionate reasoning, but she is soon able to refuse his offer as once again, she experiences the sense of inner strength and conviction that frequently guides her decisions. As Jane says, “I felt an inward power; a sense of influence, which supported me” (Brontë, *JE* 364). As this example also illustrates, in moments of uncertainty or adversity, Jane’s “inward power,”

² From now on, in the case of in-text citations I will refer to *Jane Eyre* as *JE*.

meaning her intuition and emotions, serves as a reliable source of inspiration of her actions. Therefore, I argue that Jane's reliance on her emotions serves not only as a testament to her deeply felt humanity, but also as the main guiding force in her quest for belonging and fulfillment.

In contrast to Jane as a "heroine of fulfillment," Colby argues that "Lucy Snowe's story is permeated by a sense of loss" (412), as she embarks on a much more complex and challenging journey of self-discovery. Lucy suffers greatly from the loss of her family, although she reveals little about this aspect of her past, leaving readers in doubt concerning her origins and the circumstances that lead to her orphanhood and her mysterious abandonment by the Bretton family. Furthermore, since she is bereft of familial support and financial security, she is forced to find an employment in order to survive. Thus, one finds that her choices are driven by necessity rather than a need for fulfillment or a sense of purpose. Lucy, therefore, "is an 'outsider' without parents and home, without beauty, wealth or confidence" (Dutta 2315). Additionally, in the first half of *Villette*, Lucy's character appears to lack the level of determination and trust in her "inward power" that Jane demonstrates. In fact, following the death of her employer, Miss Marchmont, Lucy's decision to leave for London, and then for the Continent, is motivated by "a new, resolute, and daring – perhaps desperate" (Brontë, *Villette* 55)³ consideration. I find it important to mention that as she embarks on this journey, Lucy's inner turmoil and sense of aimlessness persist, casting a shadow over her subsequent decisions concerning her future. Later, when she arrives in the fictional French-speaking kingdom of Labassecour,⁴ she finds Madame Beck and her boarding school for girls, Rue Fossette. Soon, Madame Beck offers Lucy the position of governess for her three children, which Lucy, who is "[t]ame and still by habit, disciplined by destiny" (Brontë, *V* 41), accepts, since it fits her preference for living a secluded life. As she says, "I shrunk into my sloth like a snail into its shell, and alleged incapacity and impracticability as a pretext to escape action [...]. Inadventurous, unstirred by impulses of practical ambition, I was capable of sitting twenty years teaching infants the hornbook, turning silk dresses and making children's frocks" (Brontë, *V* 87). As this quotation indicates, eventually, Lucy's new role lets her withdraw into a state of passivity, akin to a snail retreating into its shell, while the simile highlights her gradual disengagement and withdrawal from her surroundings into a troubled inner life. In fact, Lucy deliberately places herself in this state, which Colby describes as the "apotheosis of

³ From now on, in the case of in-text citations I will refer to *Villette* as *V*.

⁴ The description of the country and the city of Villette contains evident autobiographical references to Charlotte Brontë's experience as a teacher in Belgium and in Brussels, its capital.

deprivation" (412), in order to avoid participating actively in her own life. Therefore, "the dimness and depression" (Brontë, V 353) that characterizes Lucy's life shows that she accepts her present dreary circumstances.

Considering all these aspects, one can assume that Lucy's initial characteristic of hesitance worsens because of her mental sufferings as a governess of Madame Beck's children, leading to a devolution that seems to be diametrically opposed to Jane's inherent determination towards assertiveness and agency. Already at the beginning of the novel, Lucy experiences a profound sense of duality in her existence, as she perceives herself as someone inhabiting two distinct lives: the realm of her imagination and her mundane everyday reality. As she says, "I seemed to hold two lives – the life of thought, and that of reality; and, provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter" (Brontë, V 88). As this quotation illustrates, "the life of thought" symbolizes Lucy's rich inner world, which serves as a sanctuary, offering solace from the banalities and hardships of the reality that surrounds her. In contrast, the life "of reality" represents the pragmatic aim of survival: the pursuit of sustenance through labor, and the obtainment of the basic necessities of existence.

According to Colby, as "life shocks Lucy Snowe out of her reveries, necromantic fancies, and illusions," Lucy "learns to bring these dissociated halves of her life into some kind of fusion" (413). That is, during her life in Villette as an English teacher, she evolves from a hesitant and passive orphan girl living two different lives into a strong female character who is capable of asserting her agency and making decisions that align with her inner desires and ambitions. Additionally, Lucy's character development reflects Jane's inherent determination and courage: Jane, from the beginning on, dares to act, guided by her intuition and emotions. For instance, this is what happens when she decides to run away from Thornfield Hall after learning about the existence of Rochester's mad wife. At this point, although Jane suffers from the thought of parting with her beloved, her belief in her strength urges her to act according to her principles: "a voice within me averred that I could do it and foretold that I should do it" (Brontë, *JE* 358). Therefore, with leaving Rochester, "she acts out of the instinct of self-preservation [...]. For Jane Eyre, action is a step toward independence; even if it begins as escape, it is ultimately directed toward a new goal" (Showalter 124).

Moreover, Jane also finds a sense of usefulness in being active, for instance in the scene of her first encounter with Rochester while walking back to Thornfield one evening. In this scene, Rochester accidentally falls off his horse, after which he asks for Jane's aid. As Jane reflects on this scene later, "[m]y help had been needed and claimed; I had given it: I was

pleased to have done something; trivial, transitory though the deed was, it was yet an active thing, and I was weary of an existence all passive” (Brontë, *JE* 136). As this quotation indicates, despite the seemingly trivial nature of her action, Jane perceives offering help as a departure from her usual, passive existence, which she has grown weary of. Therefore, this moment marks a significant shift in the narrative, as Jane, who has previously felt constrained by the limitations of her circumstances as Adèle’s governess in the secluded world of Thornfield, is now able to leave behind the life of passivity imposed upon her and engage in a romantic relationship.

At the same time, while Jane actively seeks ways to break free from her passive existence, Lucy willingly embraces her role as an observer from the beginning on, thus shying away from assertiveness and risk. However, as the narrative progresses, she undergoes a profound transformation and “becomes a heroine in spite of herself” (Colby 413). This transformation takes place when Madame Beck offers her the role of the English teacher at Rue Fossette, which she, although reluctantly, accepts.⁵ Thus, through her experiences and encounters in Villette, Lucy learns to dare to be more active, shedding her initial reluctance and embracing growth and autonomy. Consequently, she starts to feel “[a] strong, vague persuasion, that it was better to go forward than backward, and that [she] could go forward – that a way, however, narrow and difficult, would in time open – predominated over other feelings” (Brontë, *V* 51). Therefore, although initially hesitant and reserved, Lucy eventually learns how to navigate the challenges of her circumstances and assert her voice; accordingly, she gradually acquires the confidence to stand her ground and make decisions that prioritize her purpose. In doing so, she mirrors Jane’s unwavering tenacity to carve out her own path in life, finding empowerment and liberation in the process. Overall, both Jane and Lucy demonstrate the power of finding and embracing one’s voice.

Another significant difference between Jane and Lucy lies in the level of openness exhibited by their respective characters. Jane’s narrative voice offers an intimate portrayal of her innermost thoughts and emotions, allowing readers to connect with her experiences and struggles. This is present, for instance, in the scenes when Jane complains about her existence as a suppressed woman in the early Victorian society: both before leaving Lowood (Brontë, *JE* 98-99) and before meeting Rochester in Thornfield (Brontë, *JE* 128-129), Jane silently formulates her thoughts about the problematic aspects of leading a passive life. As opposed to these scenes, in which she opens up only to the reader, Jane also vocalizes her experiences to other characters, which provides an additional sense of authenticity.

⁵ I will provide further analysis of this scene in the chapters to come.

Jane's seemingly transparent presence to both the reader and the characters within the novel is a defining aspect of her character. Throughout the narrative, Jane frequently addresses the reader directly, inviting one into her innermost thoughts and emotions, establishing moments of vulnerability and confession. This is what happens, for instance, when Jane is travelling to Thornfield to become Adèle's governess. Before her arrival, she expresses her nervousness in the following way: "[r]eader, though I look comfortably accommodated, I am not very tranquil in my mind" (Brontë, *JE* 109). Another notable moment when she directly addresses the reader is when she announces her wedding with Rochester at the end of the novel: "[r]eader, I married him" (Brontë, *JE* 544). This direct engagement fosters a sense of intimacy and connection between Jane and the reader, which allows one to empathize with her experiences. Furthermore, Jane's fearlessness in speaking her mind becomes evident also in her interactions with other characters, regardless of their social status. Whether confronting her oppressive aunt, Mrs. Reed, or challenging the domineering Rochester, Jane consistently asserts her opinions and beliefs with unwavering conviction. For instance, she stands her ground in the face of Rochester on multiple occasions when, not much after their first encounter, they spend evenings with talking in the drawing room of Thornfield, telling him outright that she does not think that he has "a right to command [her], merely because [he is] older than [her]" (Brontë, *JE* 158). In the same scene, she states that his "claim to superiority depends on the use [he has] made of [his] time and experience" (Brontë, *JE* 158). In fact, her refusal to be bent to anybody's will and to "talk for the mere sake of talking and showing off" (Brontë, *JE* 157) demonstrates her strength of character and commitment to authenticity even at moments of emotional involvement. Thus, Jane's openness both to the reader and the characters within the novel serves as a testament not only to her indomitable spirit but also to her vulnerability in expressing herself.

Moreover, Jane's openness extends beyond mere verbal communication; it permeates her narrative style, characterized by a confessional tone. Although some scholars claim that Jane is an unreliable narrator, others, for instance Kreilkamp, argue for Jane's authenticity, highlighting that her desire to express herself signals her determination to assert her identity and voice: "[t]here is no denying that Jane, having declared her desire to 'speak' in a context where her speech seems to be either ignored or forcibly repressed, continues to seek the opportunity to exercise her voice throughout the novel" (333). Therefore, one can argue that this desire for vocal agency serves as a driving force in Jane's character development while she experiences various challenges and tribulations. At the same time, by narrating her story retrospectively, Jane invites the reader into "the depth of [her] heart" (Brontë, *JE* 80), thereby

allowing one to witness her innermost feelings and thoughts. This narrative approach, however, not only serves as a means of reclaiming her voice and asserting her presence in a world that often seeks to silence her, but also underscores Jane's commitment to accept and express her vulnerability, which should not be mistaken as weakness, but rather as strength. Consequently, Jane's relentless pursuit of self-expression emerges as a central theme in the novel, epitomizing her determination to share her perspective regarding the obstacles she faces.

In contrast, Lucy adopts a more guarded and enigmatic demeanor, concealing parts of her identity both from the reader and the characters around her. She strategically omits details from her narrative, leaving gaps for the reader to speculate on the events of her life, for instance when she keeps her past in secret. Through this, she seeks to maintain the mysterious and reserved persona in front of the others, and, to a certain extent, also in front of herself. Furthermore, Lucy's tendency to perform different personas, which I will analyze later, deepens the sense of ambiguity and mystery surrounding her inner feelings. Evidently, this deliberate veil of secrecy she maintains throughout the novel contrasts sharply with Jane's relative vulnerability expressed at various points of her narrative. In fact, Lucy remains guarded and enigmatic, withholding crucial details about her past, her character, and also about the plot. Particularly notable is Lucy's reluctance to reveal the circumstances surrounding the loss of her family, opting instead for the image of a storm, an often-used symbol of turmoil to describe her difficult past and tragic upbringing:

[p]icture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft. However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen overboard, or that there must have been wreck at last [...]. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished. (Brontë, V 38)

As this quotation shows, Lucy's refusal to provide a definite explanation creates an aura of mystery surrounding her character all through the narrative, leaving the reader speculating about the actual extent of her suffering and resilience.

Emphasizing the importance of this narrative stance, she extends the ambiguity that surrounds her to the conclusion of the narrative. At the end of the novel, Lucy deliberately leaves the fate of her lover, the stern M. Paul Emmanuel uncertain: after three years, he is about to return from the West Indies to be united with Lucy again, but his ship is caught in a storm.

Lucy prays that the ship is watched over by God; however, it is implied that M. Paul dies on the stormy sea:

[h]ere pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life. (Brontë, V 586)

By hinting at M. Paul's possible demise on his return journey to Villette, Lucy leaves the resolution of this plot thread open for interpretation, allowing the reader to create an ending according to their own imagination and preference. At the same time, the presence of the storm as a reference to unclear or vague situations and events both at the beginning and at the end of the narrative underlies the importance of withholding information for Lucy as a narrator.

This narrative preference goes parallel with what Robyn Warhol points out regarding the development of Lucy's narrative skills. As Warhol says, "Brontë assigns wisdom to the narrator, emphasizing the development of her character over time" (836), and similarly, I argue that Lucy exploits this wisdom by strategically omitting details from the narrative. Therefore, Lucy demonstrates her intelligent understanding of the power of storytelling by reinforcing the veil of mystery that envelopes her character. In this sense, Lucy uses her role as a first-person narrator to employ a narrative style that highlights her tendency as a character to hide behind various personae.

Ultimately, I argue that albeit through different paths, both Jane and Lucy achieve a sense of self-discovery, which results in their independence. On the one hand, Jane, now a wealthy gentlewoman, finds happiness by marrying the widowed and injured Rochester. On the other hand, Lucy becomes the headmistress of her own boarding school, where she attains economic independence as an unmarried woman. Therefore, while Jane's fulfillment comes through marriage and companionship, Lucy's lies in her professional achievements and self-sufficiency.

As for how the differences present in their characters affect their narratives, one should note that emotion plays a pivotal role in shaping Jane's fate, particularly her reunion and subsequent marriage to Rochester: "[n]ow maimed and blinded, his mad wife dead, Jane can enter into marriage with him on an equal, if not a superior footing" (Dutta 2315). Thus, despite the obstacles they face, Jane's deep emotional connection to Rochester ultimately guides her conscious decision to return to him so that they can bind their lives together as equals. As Hagan points out, "[e]motion is therefore essential to [Jane]; instead of sacrificing it to duty, she lives in the desire that the two be reconciled" (374). This desire reflects Jane's need for emotional

fulfillment, but not without a sense of independence. This claim is also supported by Momberger, who highlights that Jane finds a sense of belonging and validation as Rochester's wife, thus fulfilling her emotional needs while also maintaining a crucial measure of autonomy: "Jane has achieved an identifying connection with the life outside herself; she has attained the security and recognition she craves through love for another person – at the same time maintaining the measure of autonomy necessary to all the Brontë protagonists" (369).

Therefore, by choosing Rochester, Jane finds a way to reconcile the seemingly conflicting desires of affection and autonomy within marriage. In fact, this is what Jane achieves when, despite the social conventions and moral dilemmas that hinder the fruition of their relationship, she follows her heart and embraces her feelings, allowing herself to experience love and passion without forsaking her sense of duty or freedom. In the last chapter, Jane declares that "[t]o be together is for [them] to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company" (Brontë, *JE* 546). Here, Jane expresses the unique freedom and joy she experiences while being in her husband's company. Furthermore, this suggests that marrying Rochester does not put a limitation to Jane's autonomy, nor does it silence her; rather, their union satisfies her aspirations and enables her to lead the fulfilled life she has always yearned for.

Conversely, Lucy's journey culminates in a resolution that is radically different from Jane's. As Lundberg argues, "Brontë does not subject Lucy Snowe to the same fate as her other female characters" (308), instead she makes Lucy find purpose in her professional career rather than in sharing a life with someone else. In fact, throughout the narrative, Lucy fights her powerlessness and anxiety, which she has to overcome in order to find success and happiness as the headmistress of her own school. In addition to this, M. Paul plays a significant role in her character development with his harsh remarks and challenging demands, which inspire Lucy and fuel her determination. Moreover, he also contributes to Lucy's professional growth by helping her start her own school.⁶ However, I find that M. Paul's implied death at sea before their reunion is necessary for Lucy's personal fulfillment, all the more so, since unlike Jane, Lucy's narrative doesn't culminate in marriage or conventional romance: "I shall share no man's or woman's life in this world" (Brontë, *V* 505). Instead, similar to her late employer, Miss Marchmont, she finds serenity in the knowledge of being loved and experiencing love, even in the absence of a traditional union. As Dutta highlights, *Villette* "is not a simple endorsement of work and rising – but [...] a rejection of confining images of patriarchal society" (2316). As a result, Lucy's pursuit of autonomy and fulfillment through her career challenges

⁶ Before his forced departure to Guadalupe, M. Paul reveals to Lucy that he has bought a building in Faubourg Clotilde, a new district of Villette, for her to use it as a new school for girls.

the nineteenth-century notion that a woman's worth is solely defined by her adherence to domestic roles.

Finally, the contrasting personalities and journeys of Jane and Lucy serve as compelling narratives of personal growth and empowerment. Despite their shared experiences as orphans and their struggles against social expectations, Jane and Lucy exhibit contrasting personalities and navigate unique paths towards self-discovery. In addition to this, the differences present in their personalities contribute to their individual character development, highlighting the complexity of personal fulfillment and the diverse paths one may take to achieve it.

III THE FEMALE EDUCATOR IDENTITIES OF JANE AND LUCY

In the lives of Jane and Lucy, their educationalist identities hold profound significance, both adding to the complexity of their characters and shaping their experience within the confines of Victorian society. In what follows, I will provide detailed analyses of the two protagonists' educator identities to show that their roles serve as transformative experiences that profoundly shape their lives and personalities.

Governesses, situated between their upper-class employers and the lower-class servants, are often considered to symbolize the complexity of the Victorian social landscape fraught with contradictions. As Gilbert points out, while employed to care for and educate the children of the household, the governess occupied a liminal space, neither fully belonging to the family nor accepted among the servants:

[t]he governess was threatening because her station in life was complicated, malleable, and unclear. On one hand, she represented that which was anathema to the British middle classes – the possibility of downward social mobility. She had to be a woman of a high enough caste to qualify as a well-bred role model for the children in her charge, but she had to be poor enough to need to work for a living. (458)

In *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, the situation of the governess is presented accordingly. In these novels, Brontë masterfully captures the challenges of the governess's paradoxical position through the experience of her protagonists. As Dutta remarks, "[e]ach novel is a story of a quest, of entry into the world of education and employment" (2312). I agree with Alexandra Mullen, who points out that "[i]n various degrees, all of Charlotte's heroines give voice to this irrepressible questing for meaning and self-determination" (435). As governesses and teachers, both Jane and Lucy occupy a unique position of authority and influence, allowing them to challenge traditional power dynamics and assert their independence. Thus, these positions serve as a crucial tool for them in their quests for self-improvement and empowerment, making them able to transcend the limitations imposed upon them.

However, despite their shared dedication to education, Jane's and Lucy's experiences largely differ in their approaches to pursuing careers in teaching. For Jane, education serves as a catalyst for empowerment and autonomy, enabling her to assert her agency. In contrast, Lucy's experiences as a teacher are marked by ambiguity and uncertainty while she grapples with existential questions and struggles to find her place.

For Jane, the role of a governess goes beyond mere employment; it becomes a vehicle for personal growth. She approaches the topic of education as more than just a passive acquisition of knowledge; rather, she views it as a transformative process that empowers individuals to shape their own destinies. From her early years as a pupil at Lowood to her later role as a teacher, Jane demonstrates a fervent commitment to active engagement and personal growth within the realm of education: “[i]n time I rose to be the first girl of the first class; then I was invested with the office of teacher; which I discharged with zeal for two years” (Brontë, *JE* 97).

During her time as a pupil at Lowood, Jane’s thirst for knowledge and intellectual curiosity drive her to actively participate in her studies and seek opportunities for social and moral self-improvement. She describes her time at the boarding school as a period of educational, as well as psychological empowerment:

[d]uring these eight years my life was uniform: but not unhappy, because it was not inactive. I had the means of an excellent education placed within my reach; a fondness for some of my studies, and a desire to excel in all, together with a great delight in pleasing my teachers, especially such as I loved, urged me on: I availed myself fully of the advantages offered me. (Brontë, *JE* 97)

As this quotation indicates, despite the harsh conditions and disciplinary measures imposed by the school, Jane refuses to succumb to passivity or resignation; instead, she channels her energies into her educational pursuits. Her determination to excel at school reflects both her belief in the transformative power of education, and her emotional need of personal connections as a motivating force. Later, as she matures into a young woman, Jane embraces her role as a teacher, and then a governess, viewing it as an opportunity to impart knowledge and instill values in the next generation of students. Furthermore, Jane’s approach to education reflects her broader philosophy of life which is characterized by a desire for autonomy and self-determination. According to Gilbert, Jane’s decision to pursue a career in education is “a decision that is born, more than anything, out of her yearning for emotional and intellectual freedom” (479). Therefore, education represents not only a path towards financial independence for Jane, but also a gateway to intellectual stimulation and personal independence: throughout her journey, Jane seeks shape her own fate, refusing to be defined or constrained by the expectations and limitations established by society. Consequently, education serves as a means of empowerment throughout Jane’s life, as she recognizes it as a means of transcending the limitations imposed by her social and economic circumstances.

However, it is when Jane embarks on her journey as a governess that she needs to face the challenges present in her position and within the Victorian social hierarchy. Positioned

above the household servants, yet subordinate to her employer, Jane navigates a precarious space characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty. Therefore, her employment at Thornfield under the enigmatic Mr. Rochester exposes her to previously unrepresented complexities of class and gender dynamics while she struggles to assert her agency in a world defined by rigid social norms.

The ambiguous position of governesses becomes particularly evident in Jane's interactions with those superior to her in terms of class. While Rochester treats Jane with a degree of respect and equality, considering her to be a companion rather than a mere subordinate, Rochester's acquaintances exhibit prejudice and condescension towards Jane and governesses in general. Jane, for instance, has to encounter the disdainful glance of Miss Blanche Ingram, whose aristocratic upbringing and social status lead her to view Jane with condescension and contempt. In fact, Miss Ingram expresses her negative feelings towards governesses on multiple occasions while being a guest at Thornfield, and describes them as "danger of bad example to innocence of childhood" (Brontë, *JE* 211). She even makes fun of their character, encouraging her relatives and the other guests to join in the mockery, and they all describe the role of the governess as a menial occupation unworthy of respect or admiration (Brontë, *JE* 209-211). As Gilbert argues, the distaste of Rochester's guests towards governesses reflect the general feelings of the upper classes: the unmarried and educated governess, "as a spinster who left her patriarchal household and actually worked for a living, [was seen as a] menacing symbol of unencumbered femininity" (460). Therefore, Jane's status as an educated and well-mannered woman is met with the suspicion and mistrust of the higher class, reflecting the pervasive class prejudices of Victorian society.

At the same time, Miss Ingram's hostility towards Jane becomes evident not only in her direct interactions with her but also in her treatment of Adèle, Jane's young pupil. Through her disparaging remarks and dismissive attitude towards Adèle, Miss Ingram subtly expresses her disgust for Jane's work as a governess, casting aspersions on Jane's abilities and undermining her authority: "'How provoking!' exclaimed Miss Ingram: 'you tiresome monkey!' (apostrophising Adèle), 'who perched you up in the window to give false intelligence?' and she cast on me an angry glance, as if I were in fault" (Brontë, *JE* 226). Miss Ingram's derogatory remarks and disdainful behavior both towards Jane and Adèle exemplify her contempt for those below her either in terms of age or of social status. By belittling Adèle's accomplishments, ridiculing her manners and appearance, and expressing her disrespect towards Adèle's French origin, Miss Ingram seeks to undermine Jane's authority as Adèle's governess, as well as assert her own superiority within the household. Furthermore, by demeaning Adèle and calling her a

“tiresome monkey,” Miss Ingram not only reinforces her higher status but also diminishes the worth and dignity of those beneath her. Consequently, Miss Ingram extends her disdain to Jane, whom she views as the person responsible for Adèle’s perceived shortcomings. No wonder that, as the governess tasked with the little girl’s education, Jane becomes a convenient target for Miss Ingram’s “angry glance.”

However, during her time as a governess, Jane’s approach is characterized by a dedication to her work and a belief in the transformative potential of education. Despite the struggles, uncertainties, and misjudgments she faces, Jane remains steadfast in her commitment to nurturing the intellectual and moral development of her students, viewing her role not merely as a means of employment but also as a vocation imbued with purpose and meaning. Momberger also highlights this aspect of Jane’s character: “however indifferent or hostile its surroundings, this unique individuality called ‘Jane’ can exist and value itself” (356). This attitude characterizes her time as a governess as well: despite the difficulties of her position, Jane refuses to compromise her principles or sacrifice her self-worth, finding contentment and fulfillment in her position. Thus, Jane’s resilience and unwavering trust in the power of education enable her to navigate the challenges of her role as a governess with dignity and self-respect, ultimately finding fulfillment and contentment in her pursuit of knowledge and personal growth.

As for Lucy, her journey as a governess and later as an English teacher offers yet another opportunity for a profound exploration of the complexities inherently present in the lives of female educators in the nineteenth-century. Although Lucy’s experience echoes the plight of Jane, for instance, both of them are grappling with the social constraints and the limited opportunities of being an orphan, as I have already mentioned in the previous chapter, one still finds some notable differences. Unlike Jane, Lucy is less determined, has less self-confidence, is more anxious, and drifts with the current instead of navigating it. At the same time, she finds solace and a sense of independence through her education-related professions.

In *Villette*, the female experience within the context of education forms an essential part of the protagonist’s journey and identity. After the loss of her family, Lucy decides to travel to the Continent to find employment there. Soon after her arrival at the fictitious Belgian town of Villette, she gets employed as a governess by the strong-minded headmistress of Rue Fossette, Madame Beck. Lucy struggles with feelings of displacement and isolation in this a foreign environment. According to Laura Schwartz, similarly to many middle-class women lacking proper opportunities of training and employment, Lucy finds herself compelled to accept the low-paid role of a governess, and later that of a teacher despite considering herself inadequate

for these positions (Brontë, V 673). When assuming the role of governess, Lucy soon becomes acutely aware of her social invisibility as an unmarried, unremarkable, and undereducated woman, who has been relegated to the margins of domestic life. Unlike Madame Beck and her associates, whose presence is highly conspicuous, Lucy occupies a peripheral position within the household hierarchy, her contributions and aspirations being overshadowed by more influential figures. This sense of invisibility exacerbates Lucy's feelings of insignificance and powerlessness, reinforcing her status as a marginalized and disenfranchised woman.

However, her transition to the role of an English teacher at Rue Fossette, and then a mistress of her own school marks a significant shift in her professional and personal journey. As Litvak claims,

[i]f there is nothing inherently liberating about Lucy's progression from governess to teacher to schoolmistress, a certain feminist complication may still be elicited not only from the rifts within the teacherly role, but also from the gap between governess and teacher, where the narrowing sameness of this apparent continuum gives way to a saving difference. (478)

This view is shared by Emily W. Heady, according to whom Lucy, despite the initial inadequacy of her education and dissatisfaction with her role as a governess, harbors a belief in her ability to transform into a content and accomplished individual through earnest efforts at self-improvement (343). When Lucy reflects on her duties as the governess of Madame Beck's three girls, she expresses her dissatisfaction with her position as "my work had neither charm for my taste, nor hold on my interest" (Brontë, V 87-88); nevertheless, she accepts it driven by a pragmatic desire to avoid the anxieties associated with assuming greater responsibilities: "the negation of severe suffering was the nearest approach to happiness I expected to know" (Brontë, V 88). Still, when the Madame offers her the role of an English teacher at Rue Fossette, Lucy seizes the opportunity to secure the new role, understanding it as a chance for personal growth and development. This pivotal shift in her career serves as a catalyst for her journey towards self-reflection and -fulfillment. Therefore, through her dedication to her teaching duties and steadfast commitment to self-improvement, Lucy endeavors to transcend her humble beginnings and to carve out a brighter future for herself, driven by a belief in her own potential for success and, eventually, happiness.

Thus, taking the role of a teacher proves to be a transformative experience for Lucy, not only in her journey towards her own progress, because it also empowers her with a newfound sense of confidence and purpose of life: "with teaching others and studying closely myself, I had hardly a spare moment. It was pleasant. I felt I was getting on; not lying the stagnant prey

of mould and rust, but polishing my faculties and whetting them to a keen edge with constant use. Experience of a certain kind lay before me, on no narrow scale” (Brontë, V 94). Therefore, Lucy gradually discovers a profound sense of fulfillment and belonging that eclipse her previous feelings of invisibility and inadequacy. Referring to the beginning of the narrative, Colby describes Lucy as “a passive observer of life lived mainly by indirection” (414), that is, as someone who tends to avoid situations that could potentially evoke anxiety. Consequently, Lucy’s acceptance of Madame Beck’s offer marks a turning point in her understanding of herself and her aspirations, through which she transitions from a mere outsider into a more active participant in her own life. Due to this transformation, she comes to understand that while fleeing from responsibilities may afford her a semblance of tranquility, it also makes her a “stagnant prey” of inactivity, which ultimately denies her the chance to pursue happiness, fulfillment, and success. Thus, embracing the challenges and uncertainties inherent in her role as a teacher, and also “polishing [her] faculties [...] with constant use,” Lucy learns to confront her fears head-on, thereby unlocking a path towards personal growth, empowerment, and a more authentic sense of self.

In this sense, Lucy’s journey from governess to English teacher, and eventually to becoming the head of her own school with the help of M. Paul, encapsulates a profound transformation that shapes her into a more self-assured and purposeful individual. Portrayed as an anxious and isolated orphan girl, who, out of desperation, travels to a foreign country at the beginning of the novel, Lucy’s evolution mirrors her ascent from the margins of Victorian society to a position of authority and fulfillment:

[a]t 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 labourous, 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. (Brontë, V 584)

Consequently, one finds that for both Jane and Lucy, assuming the roles of governess and teacher serve as integral components of their identities and personal journeys, despite their disparate beginnings and experiences within these professions. In fact, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, Jane has been a strong-minded character all along, while Lucy finds her strength with the help of her position as a teacher. Therefore, their female educator identities unquestionably contribute to their journeys towards autonomy, even though both of them face the difficulties of their roles with determination. The reason why these difficulties arise is not unrelated to the fact that they need to assert their autonomy in a world which oppresses women.

According to Litvak, one may assume that “the gray uniform of the governess/schoolmistress is as close as [they] will get to putting on the patriarchal trousers” (477). Interestingly, it is Jane who finds fulfillment as the wife and caregiver of the injured Rochester, while Lucy establishes herself as the mistress of her own boarding school. Still, their shared commitment to education remains a defining aspect of their personalities, as both of them view their respective experience in education as formative and enriching.

IV THE IMPACT OF OTHER FEMALE CHARACTERS ON THE HEROINES

Finally, in this chapter, I will discuss the impact of different female figures in the lives of Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe. First, I will highlight the role of Helen Burns' wisdom and the Rivers sisters' warmth in the development of Jane. Then, I will analyze how the characters of Paulina Home, Ginevra Fanshawe, and Madame Maria Beck contribute to Lucy's journey towards being an autonomous female protagonist.

IV.1 JANE'S EVOLUTION THROUGH FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS

In *Jane Eyre*, the titular heroine's journey toward independence and self-discovery is also influenced by the power of sisterhood that shapes Jane's resilience and fortitude. From her childhood years, marked by the profound influence of Helen Burns, to her later encounters as an adult with Diana and Mary Rivers, Jane's relationships with women serve as crucial pillars in her development.⁷ Furthermore, as she navigates a world often hostile to her gender and social standing, Jane finds solace and strength in the bonds she forges with fellow women.

The character of Helen Burns stands as "the emblem [...] of a Christ-like love and forgiveness" (Franklin 465). The young and quick-tempered Jane's first encounter with Helen occurs at the Lowood Institution, where she is sent by her spiteful guardian, Mrs. Reed. Helen, characterized by her serene nature and unwavering faith in God, sets a radical change into motion in Jane's personality. Despite Jane's initial resentment towards Mrs. Reed and her desire for revenge, Helen's influence gradually teaches her the power of forgiveness and self-control. Therefore, their friendship sets the stage for Jane's transformative journey, laying the foundation for themes of forgiveness, redemption, and the search for inner peace.

The first lesson Helen gives to Jane is about resilience and acceptance. In the scene where Jane attempts to get to know Helen better, she also expresses disbelief at how Helen can endure unjust forms of punishment from the teachers at Lowood. However, Helen responds with a perspective rooted in duty and acceptance of fate:

'[...] and you are such a great girl: I am far younger than you, and I could not bear it.'

'Yet it would be your duty to bear it, if you could not avoid it: it is weak and silly to say you cannot bear what it is your fate to be required to bear.' (Brontë, *JE* 61)

As an answer to Jane's assertion that she could never endure such treatment, Helen calmly emphasizes that bearing hardships, even if seemingly unjust, is a duty that cannot be avoided

⁷ One should also mention Miss Temple, one of Jane's teachers at Lowood, who serves as a model and a surrogate mother figure for Jane during her time there.

and also something one can learn from. Additionally, Helen's response reflects her deep understanding of the necessity of facing consequences for one's actions and the strength required to endure them. Thus, Helen challenges Jane's initial rebellion and fiery temper, suggesting that it is "weak and silly" to fight what fate demands one to bear so that one can reframe their mistakes and shortcomings as opportunities to develop. This scene not only highlights Helen's wisdom and maturity beyond her years but also helps Jane learn how to accept life's challenges with grace and resilience.

Moreover, in the same scene, Helen also speaks of the importance of forgiveness which resonates deeply with Jane, who is still hurt by the injustices she faced in the Reed household. When Jane confesses to Helen that "[she] must dislike those who, whatever [she does] to please them, persist in disliking [her]; [she] must resist those who punish [her] unjustly" (Brontë, *JE* 63), Helen gently redirects her focus towards the teachings of Christ about loving one's enemies. As Maria Lamonaca points out, "[i]t is Helen who advises Jane to study the New Testament and follow Christ's *example* [...], – a counsel that clearly influences the forgiveness Jane grants the dying Mrs. Reed" (253). In the scene, Helen's response is a crucial reminder to Jane that harboring hate and seeking revenge will not bring her peace and satisfaction; instead, she encourages Jane to emulate the divine example of love and forgiveness, urging her to let go of hatred and grievances. Correspondingly, Helen articulates that forgiveness is not only a moral imperative but also a pathway to inner peace and fulfillment: as she says, "[w]ould you not be happier if you tried to forget her severity, together with the passionate emotions it excited? Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity or registering wrongs" (Brontë, *JE* 64). Therefore, Helen's influence and faith become key sources of inspiration for Jane, shaping her understanding of forgiveness and also of religion. Later in the novel, the adult Jane returns to Gateshead to forgive the weak and dying Mrs. Reed, and during her time there, she finds herself reflecting on her late friend's wisdom: "[i]n pondering the great mystery, I thought of Helen Burns, recalled her dying words – her faith" (Brontë, *JE* 283). The mention of Helen in a time of forgiveness evokes a sense of reverence and spiritual connection, suggesting that her memory serves as guidance for Jane in moments of moral reflection. Furthermore, Jane's ability to forgive Mrs. Reed in her final moments, despite the pain she inflicted, demonstrates not only Helen's influence but also the depth of Jane's emotional growth. This highlights that Helen's words continue to have a deep impact on her personality and life, reminding her of the healing power of forgiveness in her own journey towards self-discovery and self-fulfillment.

Hence, it is evident that Helen emerges as an essential figure during the youth and then the whole life of Jane. However, I argue that Helen's influence extends beyond mere moral guidance; she introduces Jane to a deeper understanding of love, faith, and compassion. I agree with J. Jeffrey Franklin, who claims that the significance of Helen's friendship is encapsulated in the poignant realization that "it is through Helen [...] that Jane has her first taste of the combined intellectual and emotional 'communion' with women [...] for which she will hunger until she finds Diana and Mary Rivers" (465).

Consequently, the introduction of the Rivers sisters into the life of Jane also marks an important moment for her. As Lamonaca argues, "[a]fter Helen Burns, it is Diana and Mary who serve as models of divinely inspired womanhood for Jane" (254). After learning about the existence of Bertha Mason, Mr. Rochester's wife locked in the attic, the heartbroken Jane flees Thornfield Hall and eventually finds shelter at Moor House where St. John, Diana, and Mary's late parents lived. The Rivers siblings take the weak and ill Jane in, and Diana and Mary immediately rush to her side to take care of her:

Diana [...] broke some bread, dipped it in milk, and put it to my lips. Her face was near mine: I saw there was pity in it, and I felt sympathy in her hurried breathing. In her simple words, too, the same balm-like emotion spoke, 'Try to eat.'

'Yes – try,' repeated Mary gently; and Mary's hand removed my sodden bonnet and lifted my head. (Brontë, *JE* 405)

As this scene suggests, Diana and Mary's concern for Jane during her time of weakness reflects their compassionate and nurturing nature. Despite Jane's vulnerable state, the sisters treat her with respect and kindness, therefore embodying the virtues of empathy and generosity. However, their actions not only demonstrate their innate goodness but also already foster a sense of trust and kinship between them and Jane. Even after her recovery, the sisters stand by Jane against their brother, the cold and reserved St. John Rivers, and Diana expresses her sympathetic feelings towards Jane: "[t]o speak truth, St. John, my heart rather warms to the poor little soul. I wish we may be able to benefit her permanently" (Brontë, *JE* 409).

Indeed, as Showalter points out, "[t]here is sporadic sisterhood and kindness between the women in this world, and Jane finds it ultimately at Marsh End with Diana and Mary Rivers" (117). After Jane recovers, her friendship with the sisters deepens as they evolve into cherished companions. In fact, their mutual respect and shared interests lay the foundation for a bond of sisterly love and understanding: "I could join with Diana and Mary in all their occupations; converse with them as much as they wished, and aid them when and where they would allow me. There was a reviving pleasure in this intercourse, of a kind now tasted by me for the first

time – the pleasure arising from perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles” (Brontë, *JE* 422). In their interactions, the trio exchanges ideas, passions, and interests, which highlights the admiration and intellectual companionship that define their dynamic. As Jane says,

[t]hey were both more accomplished and better read than I was; but with eagerness I followed in the path of knowledge they had trodden before me. I devoured the books they lent me: then it was full satisfaction to discuss with them in the evening what I had perused during the day. Thought fitted thought; opinion met opinion: we coincided, in short, perfectly. (Brontë, *JE* 423)

Through their shared passion for learning, the trio frequently engages in stimulating discussions, exchanging thoughts and opinions that enrich their understanding of the world, in which Jane finds satisfaction and pleasure. Also, in addition to their shared intellectual pursuits, the relationship between Jane and the Rivers sisters is characterized by a genuine interest and appreciation for each other’s talents and abilities. One notable example of this is the sisters’ admiration for Jane’s artistic skills: in the scene where Jane unveils her talent, the sisters are genuinely amazed by her artworks, and they even encourage Jane to give them lessons to help them improve their own abilities (Brontë, *JE* 423). Accordingly, the sisters’ interest in Jane’s talents reflects their commitment to supporting each other’s growth and development. By encouraging Jane to pursue her passion for art and providing a receptive audience for her work, Diana and Mary create a supportive environment where Jane feels validated and appreciated.

As the narrative progresses and Jane’s real identity is revealed, it is also unveiled that Jane and the Rivers siblings are cousins: Jane feels like “[she] had found a brother [...] and two sisters, whose qualities were such, that, when [she] knew them but as mere strangers, they had inspired [her] with genuine affection and admiration” (Brontë, *JE* 465). Through their deep-rooted support, affection, and respect, Diana and Mary become integral figures in Jane’s life. Moreover, the bond between Jane and the Rivers sisters transcends mere friendship, as it evolves into a deep sense of sisterhood characterized not only by affection and understanding but also by familial connection. Under their influence, Jane not only grows intellectually but also experiences the profound joy of belonging to a supportive and caring family.

Considering all these, one can claim that like Helen Burns, Diana and Mary provide Jane with the companionship and understanding she craves, filling the void left by her turbulent past and offering her a sense of belonging and acceptance. Through her connections with these three women, Jane finds strength and a sense of belonging that shape her identity and ultimately contribute to her growth as a resilient and empowered woman.

IV.2 THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN LUCY'S JOURNEY

In contrast to Jane's narrative, Lucy's journey has a more complex landscape of sisterhood: Lucy's connections with other women are characterized by their ambiguity, serving as mirrors that reflect her own quest for identity. Consequently, as Dutta argues, Lucy utilizes her relationships throughout the novel with various female characters as tools for self-discovery:

The configuration of characters around Lucy is expressive of her quest for identity and of her self estrangement [sic!] [...]. Madame Beck, Paulina, the flirtatious Ginevra [...] – are the images of women through whom Lucy both defines and fails to recognise herself. These alternative modes of female self definition [sic!] give Lucy the means of assessing and establishing her own selfhood. (2315)

This quotation highlights the nuanced nature of female self-definition portrayed in the novel. The characters of Paulina Home de Bassompierre, Ginevra Fanshawe, and Madame Beck serve as mirrors through which Lucy attempts to see and understand herself, yet these attempts are not always successful. Instead, her relationships with these women offer both alternative modes of self-definition and different aspects of female relationships that ultimately contribute to Lucy's ongoing process of self-discovery and self-establishment.

Paulina and Ginevra stand as contrasting figures in Lucy's life, each offering unique and diverse perspectives on femininity and companionship. Paulina, characterized by her seriousness and serenity, embodies a sense of stability and harmony that contrasts sharply with the shallow and self-absorbed nature of Ginevra. However, both of them have a profound influence on Lucy's narrative: Ginevra's allure and flirtatiousness offer Lucy a glimpse into a world of superficiality and self-indulgence, presenting a stark contrast to Paulina's earnestness and delicate nature. As a result, through her interactions with these young women, Lucy is exposed to different aspects of femininity and friendship, each contributing to her ongoing exploration of identity and female connections.

Lucy meets the six-year-old Paulina at the beginning of the novel at her godmother, Mrs. Bretton's house in England, when the little Polly is to stay with them while her widowed father, Mr. Home, has to travel abroad to improve his health and make arrangement for their future. From the beginning on, Polly is presented as a serious, neat, and stubborn child who does not seem to like Lucy, with whom she has to share a bedroom at the Bretton house. In fact, early in the novel, she subtly expresses her dislike towards Lucy on multiple occasions, for instance, in the scene when Polly realizes that she is to share a bedroom with her, Polly wishes goodnight to Mrs. Bretton only:

Missy did not leave her seat, but I saw her eyes seek me. After some minutes' silent scrutiny, she emerged from her corner.

'I wish you, ma'am, good night,' said she to Mrs. Bretton; but she passed me mute. 'Good-night, Polly,' I said.

'No need to say good-night, since we sleep in the same chamber,' was the reply, with which she vanished from the drawing-room. (Brontë, V 8)

Furthermore, Polly's reluctance to open towards Lucy suggests a sense of aloofness, which is only dissolved by the arrival of Mrs. Bretton's lively teenage son, Graham. In fact, Polly and Graham's growing (in a seemingly one-sided direction) friendship occupies the little girl to the point when she becomes even more disinterested in the other inhabitants of the house, especially Lucy.

At the same time, the surprising progress in Lucy's relationship with Polly is marked by moments of vulnerability and emotional connection. Casting aside her initial reserve, Polly gradually "[gets] into the habit of occasionally chatting with [Lucy] when [they are] alone in [their] room at night" (Brontë, V 29), and begins to open up to Lucy, especially during times when Graham neglects her. Consequently, Polly turns to Lucy for comfort, for instance, in the scene when Polly's approaching departure for Europe with her beloved father weighs on her heart. Despite the fierce love between father and daughter, Polly is saddened by the prospect of leaving behind her dear friend, Graham. Therefore, in the little "Missy's" moment of distress, Lucy becomes a source of quiet comfort for her:

I saw the little thing shiver. 'Come to me,' I said, wishing, yet scarcely hoping, that she would comply: for she was a most strange, capricious, little creature, and especially whimsical with me. She came, however, instantly, like a small ghost gliding over the carpet. I took her in. She was chill: I warmed her in my arms. She trembled nervously; I soothed her. Thus tranquillized and cherished she at last slumbered. (Brontë, V 36-37)

As Polly leaves the Bretton house the next morning and moves abroad with her father, the deepening relationship between her and Lucy is put on pause, as their paths diverge and they are separated by distance and circumstance for many years. However, they are given the chance to reunite in Villette after years apart. After a fire breaks out in the theatre where Lucy and Dr. John are watching a play, Dr. John helps a young English lady who was injured by the panicking crowd, and they leave for the hotel, Rue Cr  cy, where the lady and his father reside. At the hotel, Lucy helps Dr. John treat the lady's hurt shoulder, but they leave once she is comfortable and tended to (Bront  , V 309-313). Weeks after this incident, Lucy discovers that

the young lady's father is Mr. Home, who has inherited the noble de Bassompierre title recently, and the lady is the now adult Polly. The count and his daughter soon invite the Brettons and Lucy to the Rue Cr cy for the upcoming holiday, and Lucy is finally able to observe with surprise and admiration that Polly, now known as Paulina, has blossomed into an intelligent, delicate, and beautiful young woman. In fact, this revelation surprises Lucy, who had not anticipated such growth and maturity from the formerly sensitive and peculiar Polly. As Lucy admits,

I was not accustomed to find in women or girls any power of self-control, or strength of self-denial. As far as I knew them, the chance of a gossip about their usually trivial secrets, their often very washy and paltry feelings, was a treat not to be readily foregone.

The little Countess promised an exception: she sewed till she was tired of sewing, and then she took a book. (Bront , V 342)

As this quotation suggests, Paulina's dedication to simple but meaningful tasks, such as sewing or reading a book, signifies a newfound depth and discipline that surprises Lucy, whose previous perceptions of other women, including the child Paulina, completely differ from the behavior of "the little Countess." As Colby points out, Paulina "possesses mind, manners, morals, and personal appearance" (416), and Lucy is drawn to her for these inner qualities of hers. As Lucy later admits, "[i]ntimate intercourse, close inspection, disclosed in Paulina only what was delicate, intelligent, and sincere; therefore my regard for her lay deep. An admiration more superficial might have been more demonstrative; mine, however, was quiet" (Bront , V 443). Therefore, Paulina's "delicate, intelligent, and sincere" nature makes her an intriguing and admirable figure in Lucy's eyes, which leads to a deep-rooted friendship between the two.

Consequently, as they spend more time in each other's company, Lucy and Paulina develop an intimate connection marked by mutual trust, respect, and active support. This is present in the scene, for instance, in which Paulina opens her heart to Lucy about her developing feelings for Dr. John, and they share a moment of vulnerability. In this scene, Paulina confesses that she does not wish for Lucy to see her as coquettish and careless as her cousin, Ginevra is, for her affections. However, Lucy's response is marked by empathy and understanding: "[i]t is true I little respect women or girls who are loquacious either in boasting the triumphs, or bemoaning the mortifications, of feelings. But as to you, Paulina, speak, for I earnestly wish to hear you. Tell me all it will give you pleasure or relief to tell: I ask no more" (Bront , V 445). As this quotation indicates, Lucy reassures Paulina of her respect and support, affirming her willingness to listen without judgment. Moreover, Colby claims that Lucy's evolution from an

observer of her own life to its active protagonist is also connected to her “machinations to unite Dr. John and [Paulina]” (414). Colby’s argument highlights that Lucy, by recognizing the potential in the loving relationship *between* Dr. John and Paulina, demonstrates a shift in perspective. Therefore, as I have mentioned in a previous chapter, Lucy becomes the heroine of her own life, and Paulina’s character and friendship play crucial roles in this evolution.

Overall, one can consider the friendship between Lucy and Paulina as a bond that not only challenges Lucy’s preconceived notions of female connections and femininity but also contributes to her journey towards being the protagonist in her own life. Additionally, Lucy, whose character is surrounded by a sense of mystery in front of the reader and other characters in the novel, confesses that “[i]f any one knew me it was little Paulina Mary” (Brontë, V 357). In the presence of Paulina, Lucy is finally able to present a more authentic self of hers. This is the result of Paulina’s nature and their intimate and intelligent encounters, through which “the little Paulina Mary” introduces Lucy to a world of empathy and mutual respect.

At the same time, the unusual friendship between Lucy and Ginevra contrasts with the one she shares with Paulina, although Ginevra has a similarly profound impact on Lucy’s life. As John Maynard points out, there is a “regular fascination with Lucy Snowe’s theatrical with her rascally friend, Ginevra” (252) among both the reader and the scholar community. At the beginning of the narrative, after the Homes’ departure from the country, the mysterious fate of Lucy’s family, and her employer, Miss Marchmont’s death, the adult Lucy finds herself on a ship called *The Vivid* sailing towards the Continent, and there she encounters Ginevra for the first time. In the scene, Ginevra approaches Lucy on board out of boredom, and their first conversation already offers a glimpse into the contrasting personalities of the two young women. As Colby claims, Ginevra, characterized by her coquettish and vain nature, “is depicted as a creature dominated by emotion and appetite” (416) from her very first appearance in the novel, and compared to Paulina’s “mind, manners, morals, and personal appearance,” “[her] beauty [...] is insubstantial – without intellectual or spiritual dimension” (416). Moreover, she is driven by the need to place herself in the center of attention and to impress others. As Ginevra says to Lucy, “[o]h the number of foreign schools I have been at in my life! And yet I am quite an ignoramus. I know nothing – nothing in the world – I assure you; except that I play and dance beautifully” (Brontë, V 60). Lucy listens to Ginevra’s shallow rambling with a mixture of amusement and curiosity, recognizing the superficiality beneath Ginevra’s outward charm and carelessness. Later in the chapter, as they prepare for the night on the ship, Ginevra continues to “[torment Lucy] with an unsparing selfishness” (Brontë, V 64), and Lucy, already setting the stage for their later complex dynamic, responds to her behavior the following way:

“[i]ndignant at last with her teasing peevishness, I curtly requested her ‘to hold her tongue.’ The rebuff did her good, and it was observable that she liked me no worse for it” (Brontë, V 64). Consequently, this initial encounter between Lucy and Ginevra lays the foundation of their intriguing friendship.

As Lucy decides to go to Villette as well, where Ginevra’s new boarding school, Rue Fossette, is located, she is successfully employed as the governess of headmistress Madame Beck’s three children. When they reunite a few days later in Rue Fossette, Ginevra is not surprised to see Lucy again; in fact, “she would forthwith have made of [Lucy] a sort of friend and confidant” (Brontë, V 98). Moreover, Ginevra soon makes a habit of seeking out Lucy and complaining to her about her classmates and teachers, or the food served in the school. As a result, Lucy reaches the limits of her patience and adopts a more assertive stance once again: “I bore with her [...] with some patience for a time; but at last, wearied by iteration, I turned crusty, and put her to rights: a thing I ought to have done in the very beginning, for a salutary setting down always agreed with her” (Brontë, V 98). The particularly fascinating aspect of their dynamic is the effectiveness of Lucy’s scolding of Ginevra. Despite Ginevra’s exaggerated worldliness and self-assuredness, Lucy’s admonitions seem to have an impact on her to some extent.

As Lucy later takes the role of the English teacher at the boarding school, she becomes Ginevra’s new teacher, but their dynamic remains the same; in fact, Ginevra’s attitude towards Lucy becomes even more forward and impudent, provoking Lucy to respond in a rebuking or scornful manner. As Lucy herself declares, “I could be passionate, too; especially with my present fair but faulty associate, who never failed to stir the worst dregs of me” (Brontë, V 380). This indicates that Ginevra’s character and behavior stimulate a strong emotional response in Lucy, prompting her to express her thoughts and opinions with greater intensity than she usually does. Therefore, this suggests a complex relationship between Lucy and Ginevra characterized by both admiration and reservation. As Auerbach claims, Lucy recognizes that the core of Ginevra’s fabricated personality “[lies] in this abusive, non-piano-playing, couch-monopolizing self which the men’s entrance banishes” (99). However, despite recognizing Ginevra’s faults and frequently scolding her for them, Lucy is drawn to her vivaciousness and audacity, finding a certain allure in her company despite the tumultuous emotions it stirs within her. Moreover, aside from Ginevra, the only other character who is capable of eliciting this passionate side of Lucy is M. Paul: both Ginevra and M. Paul possess qualities that complement and challenge Lucy’s temperament, igniting a dynamic interaction that brings out the most intense aspects of her character. Moreover, Ginevra is aware of her impact on Lucy, and she

also knows Lucy more than one would assume. In the ball scene after the stage play for Madame Beck's *fête*, Ginevra approaches Lucy, and during their conversation, she begins to compare themselves to each other. Lucy attempts to disregard Ginevra's remarks, and tells her that she would not give "a bad sixpence – strange as it may sound" to be in Ginevra's position, and adds that she thinks Ginevra to be a poor creature. (Brontë, V 169). However, Ginevra responds confidently, seeing through Lucy's dismissive behavior: "[y]ou don't think so in your heart" (Brontë, V 169). Thus, Ginevra demonstrates an understanding of Lucy's personality, indicating a unique level of intimacy and connection between them that transcends differences of character.

Therefore, I argue that while Paulina shows Lucy a new form of female connection and helps her bring forth a more active side of herself, Ginevra represents an intelligently calculated and externally superficial side of femininity which prompts Lucy to bring forth her fervent and self-assertive side. Also, Colby points out that Lucy, with her depth and her complex character development, represents a more complete embodiment of womanhood compared to Ginevra and Polly: "Ginevra Fanshawe, who flits over the surface of life, and Polly Home de Bassompierre, who is sheltered from its troubles and vicissitudes, really set off Lucy Snowe, who becomes the most deeply and intensely engages of the three. [Thus,] Lucy is intended to represent a fuller and completer woman" (412).

Madame Beck's influence on Lucy can be characterized by an even more complex and ambiguous dynamic that sets it apart from Lucy's already contrasting friendships with Paulina and Ginevra. Throughout her time at Rue Fossette, Lucy learns valuable lessons from Madame Beck as she inspires Lucy to take control over her life, albeit through a relationship marked by precision and indirect guidance rather than compliments or assistance. As Auerbach suggests, "[t]his tribute to the dignity of an unwomanly life, in which the training of children is [...] 'a real business,' carrying one from emotion's humiliations to the male 'art of ruling,' defines a silent alliance between Lucy and Madame Beck which continues to the end of the novel" (103).

These two women begin their "silent alliance" when Madame Beck offers Lucy the position of the English teacher at the *pensionnat*, which Lucy accepts. At this point in the narrative, Lucy is working as the foreign governess of the Madame's children, and as I have mentioned in previous chapters, she finds only dissatisfaction in her role. However, in a scene where Madame Beck calls Lucy out of the children's room, she offers Lucy to be the new English teacher instead. As Madame Beck is aware that Lucy, at least in the beginning of the narrative, is characterized by a sense of reluctance, she asks her "do you really feel too weak?" (Brontë, V 88), and whether she wants to go backward, back to the dwelling-house, or forward,

to the schoolrooms (Brontë, V 89). Madame Beck's latter question also serves as a metaphor for the choices and opportunities that lie before Lucy in her life. Accordingly, Madame Beck challenges Lucy to consider the trajectory of her life and the choices she must make in order to move forward and not backward; additionally, she also prompts Lucy to reflect on her desires, aspirations, and the potential consequences of her decisions:

I might have [...] gone back to nursery obscurity, and there, perhaps, mouldered for the rest of my life; but looking up at Madame, I saw in her countenance a something that made me think twice ere I decided [...]. Power of a particular kind strongly limned itself in all her traits, and that power was not my kind of power: neither sympathy, nor congeniality, nor submission, were the emotions it awakened. I stood – not soothed, nor won, nor overwhelmed. It seemed as if a challenge of strength between opposing gifts was given, and I suddenly felt all the dishonour of my diffidence – all the pusillanimity of my slackness to aspire. (Brontë, V 89)

As this quoted passage suggests, Lucy recognizes that Madame Beck's character possesses a form of power that contrasts with her own inclinations. Thus, this realization prompts Lucy to reassess her own hesitations and insecurities in a moment of decision-making, feeling a sense of dishonor and inadequacy in comparison to the Madame's strength and determination. Consequently, as "[i]t is [Madame Beck] who snatches Lucy out of the 'nursery obscurity' of a woman's sphere and makes her look in the face of power" (Auerbach 110), she becomes a figure in Lucy's life who, in her own peculiar way, inspires Lucy to embrace the challenge of going forward.

Lucy acknowledges that "Madame Beck and [her], without assimilating, understood each other well" (Brontë, V 353). This indicates that their dynamic, although not intimate or friendly in the sense that her relationships with Paulina and Ginevra are, is built not only on mutual respect but on understanding as well. I would argue that there is also a resemblance between the two women, which leads to a deeper understanding between them. In fact, both Lucy and Madame Beck possess keen observational skills, allowing them to perceive subtleties that others tend to ignore. As May points out, "the fourteen-year-old Lucy [...] was already skilled in the art of scrutiny. Just as the young Lucy has used this talent to her advantage at Bretton, so does she at Rue Fossette, where her gaze penetrates the perpetual mask worn by the harsh matron, Madame Beck" (57). Therefore, Lucy is not intimidated by Madame Beck's spying her and on the other residents of Rue Fossette, as she "soon learns to appreciate Madame Beck's formidable administrative skills regarding purloined information" (May 57). Furthermore, as Lucy evolves under Madame Beck, she gains crucial knowledge on "the art of ruling"

(Auerbach 110). At the end of *Villette*, when Lucy assumes the role of headmistress of her own boarding school, she draws upon the knowledge she learned from Madame Beck's methods of controlling an institution. As a result, Lucy becomes an equal of Madame Beck, but also her rival.

At the end of the novel, Madame Beck, among others,⁸ does everything in her power to prevent Lucy remove M. Paul from her influence by marrying him, and eventually, she succeeds by sending M. Paul to a family-owned plantation in Guadeloupe for years. This is the moment in which Lucy finally sees the Madame for who she is behind her mask of control. In the scene when M. Paul comes to the Rue Fossette to say goodbye to the students, Madame Beck consciously keeps Lucy out of M. Paul's sight in fear that he might change his mind: "she eclipsed me; I was hid" (Brontë, V 527). At this moment, Lucy is aware that she is overshadowed by her, and that "[Madame Beck knows her] weakness and deficiency; [the Madame] could calculate the degree of moral paralysis – the total default of self-assertion – with which, in a crisis, [Lucy] could be struck" (Brontë, V 528-529). However, in a later scene, Lucy overcomes her "weakness and deficiency," and stands up for herself in front of Madame Beck: "[l]et me alone. Keep your hand off me, and my life, and my troubles. Oh, Madame! in your hand there is both chill and poison. You envenom and you paralyze" (Brontë, V 531). In this major scene, Lucy finally realizes the real nature of Madame Beck and the newfound sense of power this realization gives her:

[d]eep into some of Madame's secrets I had entered [...]. Two minutes I stood over Madame, feeling that the whole woman was in my power, because in some moods, such as the present [...] her habitual disguise, her mask and her domino, were to me a mere network reticulated with holes; and I saw underneath a being heartless, self-indulgent, and ignoble. (Brontë, V 531)

As this quotation suggests, Lucy perceives the Madame's habitual disguise as a mere illusion, recognizing the underlying traits of heartlessness, self-indulgence, and ignobility. Thus, Lucy seeing through the façade and recognizing the real self of Madame Beck grants her a sense of empowerment, which profoundly changes their power dynamic. This shift enables Lucy to rise to an equal footing with the Madame since both of them are now aware of the other's real character, masked by either dominance or by hesitance.

⁸ Madame Beck conspires with a Catholic priest called Père Silas, to whom Lucy once confessed in her period of mental distress, and Madame Walvarens, the old grandmother of M. Paul's long-dead fiancée, to keep Lucy and M. Paul apart.

In conclusion, one can claim that the influences of Paulina, Ginevra, and Madame Beck lead to a complex journey of character development and self-discovery for Lucy. With Paulina, Lucy finds a new aspect of femininity and companionship, discovering a sense of acceptance that transcends the first impressions of the past. Ginevra, with her audacious nature, challenges Lucy to confront her own passions, igniting a fiery side of her character. Finally, Madame Beck serves as an ambiguous mentor figure by conveying knowledge of leadership and power that inspire Lucy to assert her authority. Furthermore, while she may not conform to the models of Paulina, Ginevra, or Madame Beck, Lucy ultimately finds herself through their impact on her life, embracing the complexity of her own identity.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have proven that, despite the major differences present in their characters, both Jane and Lucy are able to use their positive and negative experiences to reach personal fulfillment and independence by the end of their narratives. I have shown this through analyzing the several challenges in their lives and development, as well as the fundamental differences between their narrative voices. Moreover, I have also pointed out the negative influence of several male, and the positive impact of various female characters on their respective journeys.

On the basis of my analysis, I argue that despite the differences between their personalities, both Jane and Lucy end up as strong and autonomous female figures, which proves their uniqueness in the British literary landscape of the nineteenth century.

Further research could include Miss Temple's and Mrs. Bretton's respective influences on Jane and Lucy, as these female figures also play crucial roles in the protagonists' journeys. Additionally, it would also be worth exploring Brontë's other novels, for instance *Shirley*, and its two main characters, Caroline Helstone and the titular Shirley Keeldar, through the lens of the themes used in this present thesis.

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