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Godaffiliation¹: Lucy Snowe's Thwarted Development in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*

Benton Jay Komins

Summary

Charlotte Brontë's character Lucy Snowe, the protagonist of *Villette* (1853), ostensibly belongs to the canon of *Bildungsroman* heroes. She narrates her own saga of apprenticeship which includes the tests of poverty, alienation and loneliness, finally finding fulfillment in marriage and professional life. But *Villette* does not always conform to the *Bildungsroman* formula; Lucy's story contains many gaps and frustrating deferrals. From beginning to end, genre "violations" occur. Brontë's novel asks its readers to consider several important questions: Where does Lucy begin? Where does she end? And, on a formal level, how does *Villette* – Lucy Snowe's self-narrated story – violate reader's expectations of the *Bildungsroman* genre? In this essay I discuss *Villette*'s genre "flaws", especially its extraordinary use of ambiguities and cultural clichés; I contend that Brontë's novel may be read as both Lucy Snowe's saga and a Victorian guide to misreading.

Opsomming

Charlotte Brontë se hoofkarakter in *Villette* (1853), Lucy Snowe, behoort tot die *Bildungsroman*-kanon se helde. Sy vertel haar eie sage van die smeltkroes van armoede, vervreemding, eensaamheid en uiteindelijke vervulling in die huwelik en professionele lewe. Maar *Villette* konformeer nie altyd met die *Bildungsroman*-formule nie; Lucy se verhaal bevat vele leemtes en frustrerende afwykings. Van die begin tot die einde is daar genre-"skending". Brontë se roman rig verskeie belangrike vrae aan die leser: Waar begin Lucy? Waar eindig sy? En op 'n formele vlak: Hoe maak *Villette* (Lucy Snowe se selfbeskrywende verhaal) inbreuk op die leser se verwagtings van die *Bildungsroman*-genre? In hierdie artikel noem ek *Villette* se genreleemtes, veral die buitengewone gebruik van dubbelsinnighede en kulturele clichés onder die loep. Ek voer aan dat Brontë se roman gelees kan word as Lucy Snowe se sage, asook as 'n Viktoriaanse gids tot waninterpretasie.

In her critical study of the ideological novel (*le roman à these*), *Authoritarian Fictions*, Susan Rubin Suleiman describes the genre of the development or apprenticeship novel (*Bildungsroman*) as a twofold process, highlighting its "transformative" ideology. According to Suleiman:

We may define a story of apprenticeship (of *Bildung*) as two parallel transformations undergone by the protagonist: first, a transformation from ignorance (of self) to knowledge (of self); second, a transformation from *passivity* to *action*. The hero goes forth into the world to find (knowledge of) himself, and attains such knowledge through a series of “adventures” (actions) that function both as “proofs” and as tests.

(Suleiman 1983: 65)²

In Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Villette* (1853), the protagonist Lucy Snowe narrates her own period of apprenticeship, or story of personal growth, from passive acceptance to active intervention in the world which leads from homelessness to fulfillment. Lucy narrates her own development story in *Villette*, describing her difficult adult adjustment to life in Europe after she was forced, for financial reasons, to leave her English home. Effectively orphaned and subject to the whims of selfish employers and difficult charges, Lucy works as a governess. There are many strange occurrences and threatening people in her tortuous story, yet Lucy prevails; by the end of *Villette*, she is happily married and runs a school for girls. According to the critic Tony Tanner, “Lucy ... habituates herself to all kinds of different social spaces, and concludes with ... being instated in, for the first time, her own house” (Tanner 1985: 12). Like Charlotte Brontë’s own *Jane Eyre* and other famous Victorian heroines, Lucy passes the tests of poverty, alienation, and loneliness. Through all of its twists and annoying byways, *Villette* chronicles one woman’s transformative *voyage*: struggling Lucy finds her meaningful place in the world. Through a careful strategy of using the *Bildung* formula, *Villette* indeed becomes the archetype of this ideological genre. But Brontë’s novel does not always conform to the *Bildung* formula. In “The Law of Genre”, Jacques Derrida notes: “As soon as the word ‘genre’ is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: “‘Do’, ‘Do not’ says ‘genre’, the figure, the voice or the law of genre” (Derrida 1980: 55). While Charlotte Brontë exploits the stereotypes and readerly expectations of the *Bildungsroman* genre, she embeds gaps and annoying deferrals in resourceful Lucy’s story. How can missing links and unreliable narrative ploys fit into the “norms and interdictions” of the *Bildungsroman*? From beginning to end, genre violations abound. The novel begs its readers to consider several questions, namely: Where does Lucy begin? With what crystalline insight does her story end? And, what are the consequences of this *Bildungsroman*’s genre flaws? In this essay, I move beyond the strategies of omission which neatly classify *Villette* as a woman’s *Bildungsroman*. I follow the novel’s agonizing narrative trail from homelessness through nostalgia to fulfillment. *Villette*’s genre flaws – the aspects that lie

beneath the “do’s” and “do nots” of the *Bildungsroman* formula – surface in its inherent bifurcation. Like heroic Lucy, the novel’s implied reader traverses a trail filled with ambiguities and cultural clichés. Through these genre disruptions, I would contend that Brontë’s *Villette* describes (or enacts) Lucy’s personal saga as much as it represents a Victorian guide to misreading.

1 Lucy’s Calculus of Desire or Convenient Acts of Recognition

Between Lucy’s recounting of the genealogy of her own nervous collapse during the chapter “The Long Vacation” (a time of abject misery which includes every horror from attending to the daily ablutions of a wildly grimacing *crétin* to suffering from insomnia), and her joyous convalescence in the chapter “La Terrasse” lies the chapter “Auld Lang Syne”.³ Strangely, Lucy experiences her “good old days long past” at the very point when she experiences mental collapse. Is this merely a coincidence in her otherwise straightforward saga? Does she lapse into a hallucinatory state at this point in the novel? “Auld Lang Syne” opens many interpretive possibilities. “Struck with these things, I explored further. Strange to say, old acquaintance were all about me, and ‘auld lang syne’ smiled out of every nook Of all these things I could have told the peculiarities ... like any *clairvoyante*” (Brontë 1985: 238-239). Lucy regains consciousness in a remembered place; all around her are uncanny mementos which defy her present *Labassecourian* (Belgian) time and geography.⁴ The same frightened young woman who “pitches headlong into an abyss” (p. 236) now has the power of a clairvoyant. Does this consciousness belong to the realm of fact or fantasy? Is Lucy awake or *abysmally* asleep? “Where was I? For all these objects were of past days, and of distant country. Ten years ago I bade them goodbye; since *my fourteenth year* they and I had never met. I gasped *audibly*, “Where am I?” (p. 239). Lucy locates herself immediately. The familiar objects are indeed residue of a specific time in her past. This clairvoyante not only recognizes, she places the objects within a specific historical context. To confirm the certainty of her knowledge, Lucy calls out to the party whom she knows is already present. “My reflections closed in an audibly pronounced word, ‘Graham! Graham!’ echoed a sudden voice at the bedside. ‘Do you want Graham?’” (Brontë 1985: 243).

All of Lucy’s reflections close on the word “Graham”. “Graham” – or, more precisely, Lucy’s enunciation of the word “Graham” – projects the past into the present. When she utters Graham’s name, a network of questions open up for the reader: Why is “Graham” the linguistic adhesive which binds past and

present? How does Lucy know so much? Indeed, Lucy's *Bildung* adventure at "La Terrasse" represents more than one heroine's overcoming the uncanny, defined by Sigmund Freud as "the class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known?" (Freud 1958: 123). Through strategic moments of omission and deferral, Lucy seduces her implied reader into a process of misreading. According to Brenda Silver, "[Lucy] projects her readers into the landscape of the novel, the text, and asks them to use their imaginations in a mutual act of creation which in turn validates her own emerging self" (Silver 1992: 83). With respect to Lucy's development, "Auld Lang Syne" represents a reprieve in her lonely foreign struggle. Graham's presence functions as an auspicious moment in the narrative of the mature Lucy's life. But Lucy herself makes the Graham episode more difficult; aside from being a resurrected character from her British past, Graham Bretton has a real position in her Belgian present. "For, reader, this tall young man – this darling son – this host of mine – this Graham Bretton, was Dr. John: he, and no other; and what is more, I ascertained this identity scarcely with surprise" (Brontë 1985: 247). Brontë's seduced reader is disturbed by Lucy's past blindness. To the inveigled, implied reader, Lucy is so caught up in the struggle of everyday existence that she has no time to reflect upon the uncanny obviousness of her past.

Prior to the recognition scene at "La Terrasse," is Lucy then oblivious to the identity of Dr. John? Does his almost everyday proximity at Madame Beck's pension, where she is a governess, blind her?

Nor would he [Graham] ever have found this out, but that one day, while he sat in the sunshine, and I was observing the coloring of his hair, whiskers, and complexion – the whole being of such a tone as a strong light brings out with somewhat perilous force ... an idea new, sudden, and startling, riveted my attention with an overmastering strength and power of attraction.

(Brontë 1985: 163)

Long before the recognition that occurs in the chapter "Auld Lang Syne", Lucy looks at Dr. John "with force of surprise and conviction" (Brontë 1985: 163). Transfixed before his image, she notes the same fair Celtic complexion and beautiful auburn hair of the youthful Graham of her British past (p. 73). Her moment of identification is never explicitly made; it lies wishfully hidden within her narration. In line with this notion of concealment and wish, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar note: "Lucy never departs from the subjunctive or imperative or interrogative" (Gilbert & Gubar 1992: 43). Desiring meaning and intrigue, Brontë's implied reader is duped by Lucy's mechanisms of deferral. As if it were a ploy to keep the story going, the explicit recognition of Dr. John does not occur until later – when it becomes part of another perplexing scene. While

the rediscovered ambiance of “La Terrasse” triggers fantastic speculation, the obvious presence of the Bretton relation does not.

I only recovered wonted consciousness when I saw that his notice was arrested, and that it had caught my movement in a clear little oval mirror fixed in the side of the window recess – by the aid of which reflector madame often secretly spied persons walking in the garden below. Though of so gay and sanguine a temperament, he was not without a certain sensitiveness which made him ill at ease under a direct inquiring gaze.

(Brontë 1985: 163)

Shortly after Lucy confirms that Dr. John is indeed Graham Bretton, Dr. John notices that she is spying on him. In fact, spying and surveillance punctuate the narrative of *Villette*. Beyond Lucy’s encounter with Dr. John, Sally Shuttleworth has noted: “The text of *Villette* is dominated by the practice of surveillance All characters spy on others, attempting, covertly, to read and interpret the external signs of faces, minds and actions” (Shuttleworth 1992: 142). Madame Beck’s conveniently placed spyglass (mirror) captures the male object of scrutiny at the same time that it indicts the female voyeur. Under the surreptitious gaze of Lucy, Dr. John fidgets with annoyance. Through this mirror, Lucy finds a precious connection to her youth, and Dr. John discovers an inquisitive menace. Much like the contorting power of the mirror itself, the meaning of Lucy’s gaze is completely lost when Dr. John returns it. Her startled recognition becomes his defensive rebuke. He interprets Lucy’s gaze as invasive. Lucy does nothing to respond to Dr. John’s annoyance. Sitting mutely in her spy’s corner, she makes no effort to assuage the sensitive man’s hurt feelings. “What she has actually broken are a series of gender, class and narrative conventions,” writes the critic Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz; “by gazing at Dr. John, she has acted like a man and an equal, not like a woman” (Rabinowitz 1992: 72). Adoring Lucy revels in the discomfort that she causes; with much aplomb, she attributes her mute viciousness to a “perverse mood of mind which is soothed by misconstruction” (Brontë 1985: 64). The immediate desire to visually possess, and perplex, defers the great moment of mutual recognition. Indeed, Lucy possesses Dr. John without sharing him with her seduced reader.

As a mechanism and as a barrier, the mirror is privileged in Lucy’s Dr. John/Graham adventure. I would contend that it brings Brontë’s Lucy into the realm of psychoanalytic inquiry. Following Jacques Lacan’s model of the illusory “I totality”(discussed in the essay “The Mirror Stage”), which precipitates through the infant’s image in the mirror, Lucy’s “perverse mood of mind” illuminates a primal moment of alienation. In Lacan’s model, at the moment when the ego begins to coalesce in front of the mirror – at the point

when the subject breaks out of the chrysalis of inner life to the outside environment – alienation surfaces. The totality of the pre-verbal infant's mirror reflection is nothing more than an illusion; lacking the physiological ability to support itself before the mirror, this self-deceiving infant is bound to the physical support of another person. Even to perceive the "I," another person, typically the child's mother, must be present. Lacan asserts that the ego which forms in front of the mirror is always bound to an outside force. Throughout its life, this ego continually shuttles between exhilaration and alienation; in effect, the self remains ineluctably bound to the support of the *Other*.

The very ambiguous nature of Lucy's visual possession of Dr. John conceptually resembles Lacan's mirror. Graham's reflected image – like the "golden image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up" (Brontë 1985: 163) – catapults Lucy back to the original joy of her own infantile mirror. At her perch by the spyglass, she possesses an illusory position of control. This exhilarated spy lies suspended in a state of mute awe, held by the image of her idealized British past, described in her own earlier words as a state of "basking, [plumpness], and [happiness], stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft" (p. 94). Lucy projects herself back to the days of basking and sunshine, offering her fantasy to her beguiled readers. In almost infantile fashion, she uncritically consumes this past image, seductively capturing the implied reader in the process. To uncritically consume, Lucy cannibalizes someone else's image. Graham is stripped of all of his subjectivity when Lucy projects her fantasy onto his image. Yet, there is more to Graham than coveted visual booty; Graham asserts himself and therein stops Lucy's greedy visual feast. He takes away her illusion of totality through his own subjective assertion; in this sense, he acts as a real *Other* who stops her regressive pleasure. Lucy's defensive "perverse mood of mind" – her denial of Dr. John's subjective rights – highlights her infantile desire to possess the self. Alas, her own desire deceives her. Struggling to possess her illusory self, Lucy temporarily suspends the chance to enjoy the fruits of mutual recognition.

The peculiar dynamics of Lucy's spyglass points to several critical questions about desire, recognition, and belonging in the novel. Does mutual recognition and connection ever exist in Brontë's *Villette*? Does the heroine Lucy Snowe ever recover the "plump happiness" of her mythologized British past? After the reunion of the "Auld Lang Syne" chapter, are Brontë's implied reader and Lucy fulfilled? Implicit to Lucy's calculus of desire is an abysmal encyclopedia of affiliation. In this abyss of affiliation, belonging and exclusion exist simultaneously. Just as the novel grants immediate pleasure and defers long-term satisfaction, its codes of affiliation and belonging perversely open "closed" possibilities.

2 Flawed Affiliation and Separation Anxiety

In the “Law of Genre”, Derrida notes that genre is all about corruption and violation. As soon as genre classifies, it pollutes. According to Derrida:

The law of the law of genre ... is precisely a principle of contamination ... if I may use it at least figuratively, *I would speak of a sort of participation without belonging – a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set.* With the inevitable dividing of the trait that marks membership, the boundary of the set comes to form, by invagination, an internal pocket larger than the whole; and the outcome of this division and of this abounding remains as singular as it is limitless.

(Derrida 1980: 59)

Between her genres or roles of goddaughter and “godsister”, Lucy resides on the abysmal edge of affiliation. In fact, her world contains no natural relationships. In her retrospective writing, she creates the precious family which she does not, and never did, have.

In the “Auld Lang Syne” chapter, godmother is the first relation whom Lucy reveals explicitly. This present godmother utters the decisive “Graham!” of confirmation. According to Lucy, “She was little changed; something sterner, something more robust – but she was my godmother: still the distinct vision of Mrs. Bretton” (Brontë 1985: 244). Unlike the reflective Bretton son, Lucy divulges the identity of her Bretton godmother on contact. While the son is a reflection, the mother is immediately embodied. For a brief moment, Mrs. Bretton belongs to the desirous Lucy. But modes of address shatter this possession. Even in the joyous throes of their reunion, Lucy separates herself from her “benefactress” linguistically and hierarchically; she always addresses her beloved godmother as Mrs. Bretton. In an almost reciprocal response to this formality, Mrs. Bretton “does not make a bustle as she [prefers] to express sentiment in bas-relief” (Brontë 1985: 249). Like the half-formed aspect of a sculpture, the long-lost godmother shows a disciplined happiness at the discovery of her goddaughter. This same “mother in bas-relief” has no problem losing contact with Lucy at a later point. (After the happy family reunion at “La Terrasse”, Lucy returns as an “inmate” to Madame Beck’s pension.) Shortly after the marvellous reunion, the Brettons – that is, mother and son – ignore Lucy for seven weeks. In response to this unfathomable abandonment, the reorphaned Lucy lapses into an utter state of despair: “I suppose animals kept in cages, and so scantily fed as to be always on the verge of famine, await their food as I awaited a letter” (p. 350). When life-saving communication resumes (when Mrs. Bretton sends Lucy a summons to come to her house), Lucy

comments on the difference between herself and her godmother. "Yet, how strange it was to look on Mrs. Bretton's seven weeks and contrast them with my seven weeks!" (p. 356). While the lonely goddaughter spent her exiled time in longing and despair, the haughty godmother occupied herself with fawning after her darling son and re-establishing the socially beneficial connection to the Home-de Bassompierre family. At best, Lucy's "Auld Lang Syne" acts as a nostalgic *divertissement* to this fine transplanted Bretton bourgeoisie. As she had summarily disappeared when diminished finances led her to the fortunes of the continent, she – in quite speedy style – absents herself from Lucy's intimacy when more intriguing guests come to call.

In the "La Terrasse" chapter, Lucy openly merges the identities of Dr. John and Graham; she finally reveals her connection to Dr. John Graham Bretton in the ambiance of her girlhood home. Caught in the whirl of her Bretton family reunion, it seems logical that the dashing young gentleman, who both offered her assistance when she originally disembarked in Belgium, and showed extraordinary kindness to Madame Beck's hypochondriacal daughter, could only be her past loving relation. Yet Graham's identity had long been known to Lucy. Her process of recognizing Graham pivots around an intercepted letter. She becomes an active agent in Dr. John's world through epistolary misunderstanding and ambiguity.

Strolling contemplatively down the *allée* behind the pension, Lucy receives, conveniently intercepts, a billet-doux. "Easy was it to see that the missile was a box ... its loose lid opened in my hands; violets lay within, smothering ... a note, superscribed, 'Pour la robe grise'. I wore indeed a dress of French gray" (Brontë 1985: 177). Believing the *allée* to be something of a private retreat, Lucy fancies herself the letter's addressed *robe grise*; however, this belief shatters when she reads the letter's contents. From its declaration of love to its viciousness, this letter is all about misunderstanding. Indeed, Lucy holds the "confessed" identities of the addressee and addressor in suspension for almost four hundred pages. Only on page 573 does she finally resolve the mystery of the pivotal letter. At this point in the narrative, Lucy receives a confession from Ginevra Fanshawe – by this late point in the novel – La Comtesse de Hamal. Boasting of her new husband's many clever ploys, Ginevra solves the riddle of the intercepted letter. According to the ever-cruel Ginevra, her husband "used to call" Lucy "the dragon" when he visited his nephews who attended the school behind the *allée*. Ginevra proudly asserts that the Comte's many visits to his nephews were merely ruses to deliver love packages to her:

Angel of my dreams! A thousand thousand thanks for the promise kept: scarcely did I venture to hope its fulfilment. I believed you, indeed, to be half in jest; and

then you seemed to think the enterprise beset with such danger – the hour so untimely, the alley so strictly secluded – often you said, haunted by that dragon, the English teacher – une véritable bégueule Britannique à ce que vous dites – espèce de monstre, brusque et rude comme un vieux caporal de grenadiers, et revêche comme une religieuse.

(Brontë 1985: 178)⁵

Not only is this billet-doux not meant for Lucy, she plays the role of antagonist in it. “The reader will excuse my modesty in allowing this flattering sketch of my amiable self to retain the slight veil of the original tongue” (Brontë 1985: 178). Rather than assessing the depth of her humiliation, the “writer” Lucy tries to contain the contamination. The British “prudess” cannot bear the unframed, translated attack on her amiable self. Contained in foreign and epistolary containers, the letter is literarily softened. But, the contamination spreads.

What surrounds the letter is more meaningful than what the letter says. “He wandered down the alley, looking on this side and on that – he was lost in the shrubs, trampling flowers and breaking branches in his search – he penetrated at last the ‘forbidden walk’. There I met him, like some ghost, I suppose” (Brontë 1985: 180). Lucy’s met ghost is none other than Dr. John. Having been rebuffed at the pension door, the love-smitten man coincidentally enters Lucy’s *allée*; this chance, coincidental presence invests the letter with multiple meanings. The exhortation, “Dr. John! it is found!” (p. 180) opens several interpretive doors at one and the same time: Is “it” the letter itself? Is “it” the nagging presence at the pension door? Is “it” both the letter and the presence? Or, finally, is “it” neither the letter nor the presence? As if it were a floating signifier, it equivocally refers to all of these possibilities. What becomes important is not truthful meaning, but rather, the actions which follow possible interpretations. The shared, ambiguous “it” brings Lucy into direct contact with Dr. John. As “duenna” (p. 192) and confidante, she enters Dr. John’s amorous drama. Upon entering, she completely shatters her connections to her former Graham reflection. I would contend that this abysmal “it” opens the chance for reciprocity in the novel.

Losing her Graham reflection, Lucy contends herself with present narrative possibilities. As a duenna and confidante, she confronts the reality of her situation. In the telling space between the drama of the letter and the fantasy of the “Auld Lang Syne” chapter, Lucy comes to recognize the artifice of her affilial connection:

The spectacle seemed somehow suggestive. There was language in Dr. John’s look, though I cannot tell what he said; it animated me: I drew out of it a history; I put my idea into the part I performed; I threw it into the wooing of Ginevra. In

the “Ours”, or sincere lover, I saw Dr. John. Did I pity him, as erst? No, I hardened my heart, rivalled and out-rivalled him. I knew myself a fop, but where *he* was outcast *I* could please.

(Brontë 1985: 210)

In the safety of a fop’s role, Lucy competes with Dr. John. Reading the language of his look, she fictionally pleases his love-object Ginevra. Much like a lens, the *vaudeville de pensionnat* allows Lucy to peer into her “godbrother’s” history. No longer an engaged duenna, she becomes a dramatized threat when she recognizes the impossibility of her connection to Dr. John. During the vaudeville, she hardens herself to this “relation” who severed her from his family history. As if avenging the reality of her exile from the Bretton family, Lucy revels in the chance to succeed where her outcast (perhaps, even outcaste) “godbrother” failed.

At moments of parenthetical insight Lucy Snowe directly addresses the impossibility of her Bretton affiliation. “Lucy, Lucy, my poor little god-sister (if there be such a relationship), here is your letter. Why is it not better worth such tears, and such tenderly exaggerating faith!” (Brontë 1985: 327). Chided by her dear “godbrother’s” sadistic teasing, Lucy explicitly states that their affiliation is impossible. Her coveted Graham letters – like the spyglass image of the recent past – only embody the fantasy of a plump British past. At an eminently symbolic moment, Lucy ceremoniously entombs the now empty letters, recognizing the end of her “godfamily” fantasy. “To be home-sick, one must have a home; which I have not” (p. 452). The fantasy narratively ends – that is, for the implied reader – with Lucy’s admission that she never had a place in the Bretton family.

Lucy’s growth from passive acceptance to active intervention – her *Bildung* move from homelessness to fulfillment – acts as one narrative strand in a circular monstrosity. Lucy Snowe neither belongs to her Bretton “godfamily” nor to the canon of *Bildungsroman* heroines. Her story – Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Villette* – stands at the borders of affiliation, between inclusion and exclusion, where the *voyage* and the genre *Bildungsroman* end in a complete state of suspension. From its first “My godmother” (Brontë 1985: 61) to its last “farewell” (p. 596), Brontë’s novel presents impossibilities – both for generic and familial affiliation.

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Notes

1. Godparent: “a person who sponsors a newborn child and assumes responsibility for its faith; godmother or godfather”. Affiliation: “1. adoption; association, as with organizations, clubs, etc. 2. the assignment of anything to its origin; connection by way of descent” (Webster Unabridged Dictionary).
2. Several recent books have described the “unique” position of women in the classic *Bildungsroman*, especially their place within bourgeois pedagogy, ideology and socialization. While Dorothea von Mücke’s *Virtue and the Veil of Illusion* describes the *Bildungsroman*’s generic innovation and its ideological and gendered consequences (most particularly in the late-eighteenth century and early-nineteenth century German historical context), Susan Fraiman’s *Unbecoming Women* (1993) and Lorna Ellis’s very recent *Appearing to Diminish* (1999) analyze the development narratives of British women, written by British women. Each of these authors highlights the transgressive possibilities coded in the *Bildungsroman* genre.
3. Auld Lang Syne: “the good old days long past” (American Heritage Dictionary); – “literally, old long since: a Scotch phrase referring to the good old days or times – of one’s youth etc.” (Webster Unabridged Dictionary).
4. In her biography of Charlotte Brontë, Rebecca Fraser notes that Charlotte and her sister both spent time in Belgium, at a pension similar to Madame Beck’s establishment in *Villette*. The descriptions of Brussels in Charlotte’s letters resemble the descriptions of Villette – that is, the city – in the novel. Beyond this geographical point, Fraser notes: “[Charlotte] had concealed nothing in *Villette*; it was the history of a woman who had suffered so deeply that she had become almost deranged, and this was revealed in raw, painful detail to the public. But [Charlotte] no longer cared. The toughness permeated her attitude to her friends. She had been assaulted beyond caring by critics and by life, and this time, with the publication of *Villette*, she refused to lie down before her friends’ references to sniping reviews and indeed before the reviewers themselves” (Fraser 1988: 43).
5. “a veritable British ‘prudess’ one would say – a type of monster, abrupt and rude like an old corporal of the grenadiers, and sour-tempered like a nun” (my translation).

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